



Hansard No. 2

of the

18th Parliament

Tuesday, 21st January 2025



MONTERRAT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

ORDER OF THE DAY

**Meeting No. 2 of the 18th Parliament
Tuesday, 21st January 2025, 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room, Cultural Centre, Little Bay**

1. PRAYERS

2. OATHS

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

- (i) Minutes No. 3 of 2024 dated Friday, April 26, 2024, and Tuesday, April 30, 2024;
- (ii) Minutes No. 4 of 2024 dated Tuesday, June 25, 2024;
- (iii) Minutes No. 5 of 2024 dated Tuesday, July 23, 2024, and Wednesday, July 24, 2024;
- (iv) Minutes No. 6 of 2024 dated Friday, November 8, 2024.

4. PAPERS TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE

(a) Financial Secretary

- (i) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2017;

- (ii) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2018;
- (iii) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2019;
- (iv) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2020;
- (v) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2021;
- (vi) Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31, 2022;
- (vii) The Golden Years Foundation for the Care of the Elderly Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2022;
- (viii) The Golden Years Foundation for the Care of the Elderly Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2023;
- (ix) Schedule of Virement #1 of April – March 2024/2025;
- (x) BNTF Basic Needs Trust Fund Accounts for the Financial Period Ended April 2019 – March 2020;
- (xi) Report of the Auditor General on the Audit of the Public Accounts of Montserrat, West Indies, and other selected activities for the Fiscal Year ended 31 March 2023;
- (xii) Performance Audit of the Government of Montserrat's U.K. Office: Governance, Efficiency, Effectiveness & Quality of Service, Office of the Auditor General September 2024;
- (xiii) Montserrat Volcano Observatory Financial Statements for the Year ending 31 March 2016;

- (xiv) Montserrat Volcano Observatory Financial Statements for the Year ending 31 March 2017;
- (xv) Montserrat Civil Service Association Financial Statements for the Year ended September 30, 2017;
- (xvi) Montserrat Civil Service Association Financial Statements for the Year ended September 30, 2018;
- (xvii) Montserrat Land Development Authority, Government of Montserrat Housing Stock, Financial Statements for the Year ended March 31, 2023;
- (xviii) S R & O No. 45 of 2024 Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Vernon Farrell) (Exemption) Order 2024;
- (xii) S R & O No. 46 of 2024 Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Lyandra Hobson) (Exemption) Order 2024;
- (xiii) S R & O No. 50 of 2024 Cruise Ships Tax (Exemption) (No. 2) Regulations 2024;
- (xiv) S R & O No. 1 of 2025 Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Ducketts Montserrat Ltd.) (Exemption) Order 2025;
- (xv) S R & O No. 2 of 2025 Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (James Christopher Gerald) (Exemption) Order 2025.

(b) Attorney General

- (i) S R & O No. 30 of 2024 Proclamation Dissolving the Legislative Assembly;
- (ii) S R & O No. 31 of 2024 Proclamation Appointing a Date for General Elections;

- (iii) S R & O No. 35 of 2024 Proclamation Bringing into Force the Revised List of Voters;
- (iv) S R & O No. 42 of 2024 Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- (v) S R & O No. 43 of 2024 Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- (vi) S R & O No. 44 of 2024 Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- (vii) S R & O No. 47 of 2024 Interpretation Act (Publication of Subordinate Legislation) Order 2024;
- (viii) S R & O No. 48 of 2024 Proclamation Declaring Block 12 Parcel 1/170 to be a Prison (Repeal) Order 2024;
- (ix) S R & O No. 49 of 2024 Revised Edition (Penal Code) (Rectification) Order 2024;
- (x) S R & O No. 51 of 2024 Child Justice Act 2024 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2024.

5. MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

6. GOVERNMENT NOTICES

7. UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

8. QUESTIONS

9. MOTIONS

The Premier and Minister of Finance and Economic Management to move:

The Introduction, First, Second & Third Reading of the Bill:

‘Supplementary Appropriation (2024) (No. 2) Bill 2025’

10. OTHER BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

ooOoo

MONTSERRAT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEETING

Minutes No. 2 of the 18th Parliament
Held on Tuesday, January 21, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room, Montserrat Cultural Centre, Little Bay

PRESENT:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Honourable Marjorie Smith | Speaker of the Legislative Assembly |
| Honourable Reuben Meade | Premier/Minister of Finance & Economic Management |
| Honourable Veronica Dorsette-Hector | Deputy Premier & Minister of Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour, Transportation, Energy, & Ecclesiastic Affairs |
| Honourable Ingrid Buffonge | Minister for Education, Health, & Social Services |
| Honourable John P Osborne | Minister for Agriculture, Land, Housing, Environment, Youth Affairs & Sports |
| Honourable Crenston Buffonge | Parliamentary Secretary |
| Honourable Dwayne Hixon | Parliamentary Secretary |
| Honourable Paul Lewis | Leader of the Opposition |
| Honourable Donaldson Romeo | Opposition Member of Parliament |
| Honourable Nyota Mulcare | Opposition Member of Parliament |
| Honourable Sheree Jemmotte-Rodney | Attorney General |
| Honourable Kenya Lee | Financial Secretary (Ag) |

1. PRAYERS

The prayer was said by Pastor Shane MacFarlane

2. OATHS

John Osborne takes oath as Minister for Agriculture

Sheree Jemmotte Rodney takes oath as Attorney General

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Madam Speaker said:

Members, before us are four sets of Minutes. We'll take each one separately. So, we'll start with Minutes Number 3 of 2024 dated Friday, April 26, 2024, and Tuesday, 30th April, 2024. Can we have someone move a motion? I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given that this is pretty much a new Assembly, could we take it that the Minutes be accepted as presented?

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder for that?

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion that the Minutes be accepted as presented.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Minutes No. 3 of 2024 be accepted as presented.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

Minutes have been so confirmed. We move on to the next set of Minutes, Number 4 of 2024, dated Tuesday, 25th June 2024. Can someone please move that motion? I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, in like manner as the previous, and I expect all the subsequent ones, that we move a motion that they be accepted as presented, since we are new. We are pretty much all new here.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder for that motion, please? I recognize the Honourable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion that the Minutes be accepted as presented, given that we are mainly made up of new persons. If it pleases you.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Minutes No. 4 dated Tuesday, 25th June, and in like manner Minutes No. 5 of 2024 dated Tuesday, 23rd July, and Wednesday, 24th July, be confirmed.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

Minutes No. 4 and No. 5 have been duly confirmed. And No. 6 dated Friday, 8th November. So those three sets of Minutes, No. 4, No. 5, and No. 6, have been duly confirmed.

4. PAPERS TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Financial Secretary Acting.

The Financial Secretary Acting said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to lay on the table of this Honourable House the following papers appearing under the name of the Financial Secretary.

- i. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2017;
- ii. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2018;
- iii. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2019;
- iv. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2020;
- v. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2021;
- vi. Montserrat Financial Services Commission Financial Statements December 31st, 2022;
- vii. The Golden Years Foundation for the Care of the Elderly Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2022;
- viii. The Golden Years Foundation for the Care of the Elderly Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2023;
- ix. Schedule of Virement No. 1 of April, the financial year, April/March 2024/2025;
- x. BNTF Basic Needs Trust Fund accounts for the financial period ended April 2019 to March 2020;
- xi. Report of the Auditor General on the audit of the public accounts of Montserrat West Indies and other selected activities for the fiscal year ended 31st March 2023;

- xii. Performance audit of the Government of Montserrat's UK Office, Governance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Quality of Service, Office of the Auditor General, September 2024;
- xiii. Montserrat Volcano Observatory Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March, 2016;
- xiv. Montserrat Volcano Observatory Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March, 2017;
- xv. Montserrat Civil Service Association Financial Statements for the year ending September 30th 2017;
- xvi. Montserrat Civil Service Association Financial Statements for the year ending September 30th 2018;
- xvii. Montserrat Land Development Authority, Government of Montserrat Housing Stock Financial Statements for the year ended March 31st, 2023;
- xviii. SR&O No. 45 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax, (Vernon-Farrell), (Exemption) Order 2024;
- xix. SR&O No. 46 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax, (Leandra Hobson), (Exemption) Order 2024;
- xx. SR&O No. 50 of 2024 – Cruiseship Tax, (Exemption) Order No. 2, Regulations 2024;
- xxi. SR&O No. 1 of 2025 – Custom Duties and Consumption Tax (Dockets Montserrat Ltd.) (Exemption) Order 2025;
- xxii. SR&O No. 2 of 2025 – Custom Duties and Consumption Tax (James Christopher Gerald) (Exemption) Order 2025.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to lay on the table of this Honourable House the following papers appearing under the name of the Attorney General.

- i. SR&O No. 30 of 2024 – Proclamation Dissolving the Legislative Assembly;
- ii. SR&O No. 31 of 2024 – Proclamation Appointing a Day for General Elections;
- iii. SR&O No. 35 of 2024 – Proclamation Bringing into Force the Revised list of Voters;
- iv. SR&O No. 42 of 2024 – Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- v. SR&O No. 43 of 2024 – Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- vi. SR&O No. 44 of 2024 – Proclamation Appointing a Session of the Legislative Assembly;
- vii. SR&O No. 47 of 2024 – Interpretation Act, Publication of Subordinate Legislation, Order 2024;
- viii. SR&O No. 48 of 2024 – Proclamation Declaring Block 12 Parcel 1/170 to be a Prison Repeal Order 2024;
- ix. SR&O No. 49 of 2024 – Revised Edition Penal Code Rectification Order 2024; and
- x. SR&O No. 51 of 2024 – Child Justice Act Commencement No. 2 Order 2024;

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5. MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

6. GOVERNMENT NOTICES

7. UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

8. QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have any questions? I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Questions to the Honourable Premier by Honourable Paul Lewis

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have some questions here for the Honourable Premier. First question is,

1. As the Honourable Minister responsible for Access, kindly inform the Parliament 1(a), having announced a Twin Otter service for March, with the RESA still in place, limiting the number of passengers the Twin Otter can carry on departure, whether the Government will pay for the vacant seats that cannot be occupied, given limitations, stipulated by the RESA enforcement?

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Premier, are you going to respond? I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

We do have a contract with WINAIR, and it does not speak to paying for any extra seats.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Can the Honourable Premier inform the Parliament how many passengers are allowed on the WINAIR flight on departure?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, that's a substantive question, and it does not follow the rules of the legislature. That's introducing a new subject matter.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Supplementary, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker said:

Another supplementary?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker, second supplementary.

Madam Speaker said:

You are allowed a supplementary, but go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Mr Premier, you state that there's a contract with WINAIR. Can you explain to the Honourable Parliament the nature of that contract?

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the rules of this House speak to supplementaries, and it speaks to elucidation. I don't know what that means, but it doesn't mean that he can introduce a new matter. I have responded to his principal question, and I suspect that the principal question, if he wants to ask other questions, that's for another sitting. But elucidation does not include additional questions on the same matter, on the same question.

Madam Speaker said:

Before you speak, Honourable Lewis, Standing Order 26 does speak to the elucidation on seeking clarification on a matter of fact that was given in the response. So, therefore, you should not introduce new matter, okay? I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker, you want you to just explain for me if the rules of the House also state that the Ministers or the Premier should not provide the answers in writing. Is that a new rule, or is that allowed, not allowed? Because I did not receive any response in writing from the Premier.

Madam Speaker said:

Standing Order 25 states that a written reply to each question shall be read by the Member to whom the question is put, and a copy of the reply shall be handed to the Member putting the question. Therefore, he is reading the responses, and I suppose that you will get a written reply.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I should not be getting the response after the fact; I should be getting the response like I got from the Honourable Agriculture, Honourable Minister of Health, and I do thank them for following the rules. If the Premier is not following the rules, why should I follow the rules?

Madam Speaker said:

Well, the rule does say, Honourable Member, that a written reply is to be read by the Member to whom the question is put. I realize that precedence has been set previously, but the rule does say what should take place. So that is something we will have to deal with, but can we move on with the questions, please?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I don't know if I should really continue, but I'm gonna continue because I need to see standards set and followed, not one side getting away with anything.

2. How many scheduled morning and afternoon flights per day will the twin otter service provide, and what will be the cost per ticket round-trip?

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me, Honourable Member, you missed the question or you deliberately left it out? B, you did not read B.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

That's because it's pointless to even ask him a question based on what's going on.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, Winair has been contracted by the Government of Montserrat to provide additional airlift services from February 11th to March 26th, 2025. Tickets are available for purchase from January 17th through the Winair web portal, and that will be put up on the websites, the various social media sites, or any local travel agent. The cost per one-way ticket, Antigua-Montserrat, is US \$110, and the return ticket is \$220 plus

taxes. The cost per one-way ticket, St. Marten to Montserrat or vice versa, is US \$135 plus taxes, and these are not Government of Montserrat taxes; these are taxes from the originating countries. In February, the flight schedule, on the 11th, 18th, and 25th, you have flights from St. Martin, Antigua, Montserrat; Montserrat, Antigua, St. Martin. On February the 14th, 21st, 28th, St. Martin, Montserrat, St. Martin, that's for February. But the March flights, from March 4th to the 26th, three times daily, morning flights only.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

You may go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, the Premier is on record, stating that I assume the 100 plus US one-way add up to about the 650 that he spoke to on record. It's been showing on the Winair site, 300 plus US dollars is about 870, closer to \$900, a difference of about \$220. Is the Premier saying that the taxes referring to is in the region of \$220, or there's other factors contributing to that price?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

The basic taxes are the taxes that are charged by the governments of Antigua and the governments of St. Marten.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, clarification. The supplementary ask, if the \$220 for the round trip between Montserrat and Antigua, if the Antigua taxes, the Premier referring to, if they add up to EC \$220?

Madam Speaker said:

Is that a question you're asking?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

I did ask that in the supplementary, if the, I asked in the supplementary, if the difference between the 650 and the 870, \$220, if that's \$220 is indeed the cost of the Antigua taxes. That's what I asked.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I'm not aware of where the Honourable Member gets his figures, but based on discussions with the Access Division, those are not the figures which were presented to me.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. Recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker.

3. The Honourable Minister with responsibility for access announced the exploration of a ferry service that could operate without significant financial commitment from the government. Can you kindly

explain how this could be a viable service throughout the year without any significant government funding? How frequently will it service Montserrat, and the cost of a ticket roundtrip?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the question by the Honourable Member clearly states exploration of a private ferry service. How would he expect to have an explanation of funding and cost? Exploration is precisely what we're doing at this point.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, supplementary.

Is the Honourable Minister saying, Premier saying that this private ferry he spoke about, that he did give assurance that it would be cheaper than the airlines and cheaper than the ferry that's been running? Is he saying that in his exploration, although he gave the assurance, he does not know what the figures are?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I don't think I need to explain to the Honourable Member. He's sufficiently experienced to understand what exploration means. One cannot come up with finite figures until the exploration has been concluded. So, I would suggest to the Honourable Member that he awaits the conclusion of the negotiations, the discussions and the exploration.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

4. Madam Speaker, with most of the projects from CPREG 1 already implemented and the hospital tendered, can you please provide a list of CPREG 2 capital projects and the expected date for funding approval?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member seems to dismiss the importance of the impact of the ongoing projects on the economic and social development of the island and the resources, both financial and physical, which they require. That being said, there are projects under CIPREG 1 that are still being implemented, which includes the hospital project. We are only now, this week, signing the contract for the main works of the hospital project, something which neither his administration nor the administration which followed him were able to achieve.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

The Premier said:

We have to clean up the failures of both....

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Point of Order.

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me, Honourable Premier. What's your Point of Order?

The Premier said:

I thought a question was asked.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I didn't ask that question, Madam Speaker. I asked about the CIPREG 2 projects.

Madam Speaker said:

He rose on a Point of Order. Let us hear his Point of Order.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, the Minister is not answering the question I asked. I asked about the list of CIPREG 2 projects. I asked him, but I didn't ask him anything about CIPREG 1.

Madam Speaker said:

Which Point of Order are you referring to?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

He's not answering the question that I asked him.

Madam Speaker said:

State the number for me, please, let me. Honourable Premier, I recommend you answer the question, please.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I find it rather interesting that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is asking a question and expects me to answer it precisely how he wants it answered.

Madam Speaker said:

Please answer the question.

The Premier said:

He cannot teach me as to how to respond to the question.

Madam Speaker said:

Please answer.

The Premier said:

I'm just responding to his Point of Order. So, here I go again. There are projects under CIPREG 1 that are still being implemented, which includes the hospital project. We're only now this week signing the contract for the main works of the hospital project, something which neither his administration nor the administration that succeeded him were able to achieve. We have to clean up the failures of both previous administrations to get things back on track. With all of the major projects under administration, CIPREG 1, discussions surrounding potential future capital projects are already occurring, including for CPREG 2. The Honourable Member would hopefully understand, given the time he has spent in government and in the Opposition so far, that funding approval is a process which considers performance, capacity, outcomes, financing, and timing. Information on the proposed projects will be made available at the appropriate time.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Yes.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Is the Honourable Premier saying that he cannot give a list because there is no list of CIPREG 2 projects?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Discussions surrounding potential future capital projects are already occurring, including possibilities for CIPREG 2. The Honourable Member would hopefully understand, given the time he has spent in government and in the Opposition so far, that funding approval is a process which considers performance, capacity, outcomes, financing, and timing. Information on the proposed projects will be made available at the appropriate time. I don't understand what he doesn't understand.

Madam Speaker said:

Well, he asks whether there is a list. Do you have a list?

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, as I said, and I'll read it again slowly. Information on the proposed projects will be made available at the appropriate time.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. Probably there is a list, so probably the list is private and not government business, not public business.

Question four.

5. The £50 million previously provided for the building of the hospital is no longer sufficient to build the hospital designed and tendered. Kindly inform Parliament what is the amount needed now to build the designed hospital that's (a). And (b), has your government negotiated the additional funding?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, as previously explained, which the Honourable Member clearly should understand by now, having served as a Minister of Government and as Opposition Member, five years in each case so far. The fact that we have signed or are about to sign the contract for the major work means that the funding has been approved.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I'm not asking the question for myself. I ask the questions for the benefit of the public. So, if the Premier chooses not to answer the public, that's his decision. Clarification on (b).

You said the funding has been approved. I asked you if your government negotiated the funding. In other words, was it your government who negotiated the funding or the previous government?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, we have before us on the Order Paper a Supplementary Appropriation Bill, which includes additional funding for the hospital, which means that that will be approved today. I suspect that answers the question. Funding will be approved today, and the contract will be signed or has been signed this week.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government is continuous. And if a previous government negotiated some funding and they were successful, and the present government gets to sign off....

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, on a Point of Order, please.

Madam Speaker said:

What's your Point of Order?

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the question has been asked and answered. The Honourable Member should not be seeking to introduce new matters or seek to create a debate because if he wishes to have a debate, I will be given the opportunity to debate and respond.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Well, Madam Speaker, the Premier has issues answering the questions, but I'll move on.

Madam Speaker said:

Just a minute, just a minute. Number 26 says that a supplementary should just be asked for clarification, and you should not introduce new matters. So, let us stick to the order, please.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

That's right, Madam Speaker, with all due respect, that's why I asked for clarification, but he refused to give the clarification.

Madam Speaker said:

Let us continue, please.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

That's exactly what I asked for. I said clarification if it was negotiated by this government or the previous government. But he refused to give the clarification. So, you're correct when you said it's a clarification, and I'm correct to ask for clarification. Or maybe he thinks he's bigger than the House, so he doesn't have to answer it.

Madam Speaker said:

Let me just read for you, please. You should not be saying unnecessary things, Honourable Member. Let me just read what Standing Order 26 says. That the reply to any question shall be conclusive, and no speech or debate on the reply should be allowed. But any Member may, with the permission of the Speaker, put a supplementary question for the purpose of further elucidating any matter or fact not made clear to him by the reply. But a supplementary must not be used to introduce matter not included in the original question. Let us please be guided. I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Questions to the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure et al. from Honourable Paul Lewis

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have some questions for the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure, Labour, Transportation, Energy and Ecclesiastic Affairs. First question.

- 1. Under the previous government, £7 million were announced to fund the upgrade of water, electricity and sewage infrastructure. For the benefit of this Honourable House, kindly state (a) if the government has received the funding; (b) explain what areas or aspects of the water, electricity and sewage infrastructure will be upgraded and how soon the work will begin?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure, etc.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Government of Montserrat has formalized an agreement with the UK Government for a Memorandum of Understanding to secure the £7 million allocated for the priority utility projects. These funds are being drawn down in phases to support the smooth and effective execution of the projects. Explain what areas. The priority utility projects aim to address critical infrastructure challenges across water, electricity and sewage systems, ensuring resilience, sustainability and reliable service delivery. The key initiatives are as follows. Water infrastructure, springs rehabilitation, rehabilitation for at least three springs, inclusive of Hope springs. Positive progress has been made thus far, targeting improved water quality and increased output capacity. Pipeline replacements, critical leaks in Davy Hill, Palm Loop and Lookout will be addressed, with construction scheduled to begin in Quarter 2 of 2025.

Continuing Madam Speaker Reservoir upgrades, expansion at possibly four reservoir sites inclusive of Lawyers and Dick Hill Reservoirs are underway to enhance storage capacity for peak demand and emergencies. In respect of electricity, the overhaul of generator number seven is set for March 2025, supported by a lease generator to ensure reliable power supply during the maintenance period. Repairs to generator number three are on track for completion by the end of January 2025.

Renewable energy. The solar PV system is operational, contributing to daytime energy needs. However, efforts to restore the battery energy storage system best are ongoing.

Sewage infrastructure, Lookout, Margarita Bay Sewage Treatment Plant replacement. Construction is scheduled to commence in Quarter 2 2025 after preparatory works and final design approvals.

Jack Boy Hill upgrades. Early works focus on improving sludge handling and mitigating pollution risks. These projects, Madam Speaker, are pivotal for modernizing Montserrat utility systems, ensuring that they meet current and future demands by addressing these foundational challenges. The government is making significant progress in building a resilient and sustainable infrastructure for the people of Montserrat.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

What is your Point of Order?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, I'm having difficulty following the responses, especially if they're lengthy, and that is why I want to suggest, according to replies, Section 25, which you mentioned before, I think there may be, we need to reconsider what's decided. It says, a written reply to each question shall be read by the Member to whom the question is put, and a copy of the reply shall be handed to the Member putting the question. So, it's not who has put the question, putting the question. Let me finish. Provided with the consent of the Council, such written reply may be taken as read. I am not able to tell whether what she's reading is what is written, and it's very difficult for me, if I were in his place, and for the new Member on my right, to follow up with questions and be precise and accurate for clarity when we can't see the answers which are normally given. The other Ministers have given them, and I am appealing to the Member and others to submit the answers prior to us asking the questions. They can do it by email or otherwise. It's very difficult for us.

Madam Speaker said:

I get your point, but we are guided by Standing Orders, and it says that the reply should be handed to the Member putting the question. So, you're not the Member putting the question. However, I am going to request that the answers be provided after. We're in this session now, so let us deal with this session. They are not with us, so we'll deal with this session and we'll decide how to go forward.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I appreciate that, but we want to see that we're treated fairly in this House, or maybe we will not come back to this House because we can't have one side doing what they like and the other side.

Madam Speaker said:

Wait, Honourable Member.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Are you going to proceed with questions?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

With your permission, Madam Speaker.

The Premier said:

Point of Order, Madam Speaker

Madam Speaker said:

What's your Point of Order?

The Premier said:

There are two pieces of Standing Order, the old one and a modified one. Section 30 of the modified states, subject to paragraph 2, a Member of cabinet to whom a question is put, shall read a written reply to the question and the Clerk shall give the Member who asks a question a copy of the written reply. It does not here specify what time that reply should be given to the Member.

Madam Speaker said:

Which Standing Order are you reading?

The Premier said:

It's the Standing Order which I got from -- the revised Standing Order.

Madam Speaker said:

Was that an approved or one being reviewed?

The Premier said:

That's the one that was sent to me by the legislature.

Madam Speaker said:

That might be the one being reviewed.

The Premier said:

Okay, so if it is being reviewed, then the issues which the Honourable Members have should then come into this review when a review is being done.

Madam Speaker said:

Well, now is not the time for that anyway; we'll deal with that when the time comes. Recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let's move on. Time wasting. I want to commend the Honourable Minister for giving such a comprehensive answer to the Parliament and the people of Montserrat. That is how it's done. It's not for me.

Madam Speaker said:

You're making a speech.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

I'm not making a speech. I commend the Minister and I'll move on to the second question to the Minister. If I can critique, I can commend.

2. Please inform the Parliament of the present status of the road patching program and what are the challenges encountered in completing the patching of the potholes?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for the question. The BUILT that's our Ministry renamed continues to address the challenges of road maintenance, including the ongoing road patching program. Recently, during one of our routine asphalt production sessions, a sprocket on the shaft of the pump responsible for circulating the bitumen transfer oil broke. That oil is required to heat the bitumen as it passes through. While this has temporarily halted asphalt production, a replacement part has been ordered and repairs will be carried out promptly to restore functionality. This type of issue, Madam Speaker, is not uncommon during the early stages of operating a complex plant like this. It is a part of the breaking in process as we get to know the plant's systems and address teething issues that arise during its initial period of use. A similar situation occurred with the previous plant, which was older, where early operational challenges were identified and resolved, leading to smoother operations in the long term.

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, patching work has been carried out in key areas to address critical defects, particularly on heavily travelled routes. However, it is important to note that patching is a temporary and costly measure. Operating the asphalt plant for small amounts of material requires significant fuel and resources, making it an unsustainable long-term solution. Many of Montserrat roads, Madam Speaker, were constructed in the late 1900s. They are now under increased pressure due to higher traffic volumes and the impacts of climate change. These factors, combined with limited past investment in road infrastructure, have left many roads in deteriorated conditions, with potholes being a visible symptom of these deeper issues.

To address these challenges, the government has adopted a long-term strategy aimed at preserving and renewing the road network. This includes the use of recently acquired road plainer. It is on its way to us to systematically remove damaged road layers and replace them with improved materials. While this approach will be implemented incrementally, it represents a more cost effective and sustainable solution that will deliver better quality roads for motorists and reduce vehicle wear and tear. The scale of work required to bring Montserrat road to a five-star

standard, however, is significant. Additional road crews and funding will be necessary to achieve this ambitious goal. These resources are essential not only to accelerate progress, but also to ensure the health and safety of staff engaged in this intensive work. The ministry remains committed to addressing the immediate needs of the road network to patching when necessary, and while steadily advancing a sustainable long-term strategy to improve Montserrat's infrastructure, this dual approach ensures that we all continue to deliver safe and reliable roads for our residents and visitors alike.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister. No need for any supplementary. Question three.

3. The International Civil Aviation Organization of which ASSI often refers only recommended and did not make it mandatory for the RESA to be implemented on a non-instrument airport runway, such as the John A. Osborne Airport. As the Minister responsible for the airport infrastructure, have you made any representation to have the RESA removed? if so, to whom?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

I thank, Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question regarding the implementation of a runway end safety area known as the RESA at the John A. Osborne Airport. To clarify, the Ministry has not made any formal representations to remove the requirement for the runway end safety area RESA at the airport. However, we have engaged in discussions with Air Safety Support International (ASSI) and other aviation stakeholders regarding operational adjustments that could enhance the airport's capacity and economic viability. These discussions included the possibility of allowing twin otter aircraft to utilize the full length of

the runway for take off, similar to permission granted at other airports, such as those in the British Virgin Islands. The ministry remains committed to ensuring Montserrat aviation operations aligned with international safety standards while addressing the island's unique economic and operational needs. Our ongoing dialogue with ASSI includes evaluating options for optimizing runway operations in accordance with IKA's recommendation on RESA for non-instrument runways, ensuring safety remains a top priority.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment from Honourable Paul Lewis

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for answering these questions and for doing so in a comprehensive manner. We do appreciate that. I am sure the public does appreciate that as well. Madam Speaker, I do have questions for the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, Environment and Sports. The first question is;

- 1. The previous government budgeted funding to construct roads and install utilities in the Drummonds area. (a) How much was placed in the 2024/25 budget to construct the actual accommodations? And (b) When will the construction of these housing units commence?***

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Housing.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government of Montserrat secured funding in the amount of EC1.5 million under the Capital Investment Programme for Resilient Economic Growth (CIPREG), addendum program for the development of infrastructure and the construction of housing units at Drummonds. And to answer the second part of the question,

Madam Speaker, it is anticipated that the construction will commence in the second quarter of this year.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister. Question two.

- 2. It is understood the sand miners have funded and submitted a completed environmental impact assessment under the previous government as part of the requirements of obtaining permission to undertake mining in Plymouth. Please inform the Parliament of the present status of approval.*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, the sand miners completed and shared informally the environmental impact assessment for the Fort Ghaut area with the Department of Environment and the Physical Planning Unit. The document was reviewed, and comments were sent back to the miners. However, no formal submission has been made to the Planning and Development Authority. One of the key steps required before giving approval to mine in Plymouth is the surveying of the Fort Ghaut area to identify the boundaries within which sand mining can take place. The Lands and Survey Department is finalizing the program to get this work completed. The Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, and Environment is collaborating with the MVO in this regard, ensuring that all safety protocols are in place for the survey work to be conducted. This includes identifying escape routes, having the right equipment when operating in the zone, and making sure that all plans are put in place to mitigate risks when the survey team and the sand miners are working in the area. Additionally, the approval of the National Disaster Preparedness and Advisory Committee (NDPRAC) is required for the survey to take place.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

- 3. Can you inform the Parliament, question three that is, if the government has a land policy on the use of government-owned lands, if so, under what condition would the Government allow private investors to build on government-owned lands?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, the policy on the use of government-owned land is dependent on how the land is zoned. For example, the government has an ongoing Service Lot program where qualified individuals can get access to a service lot to facilitate them accessing finance for the construction of dwelling. The government is always willing to work with the private sector to facilitate development initiatives. Public-private partnerships are therefore actively being pursued.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Questions to the Minister for Education, Health and Social Services from Honourable Paul Lewis

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for answering the questions. I do appreciate that. I have some questions for the Honourable Minister of Education, Health and Social Services. First question is;

- 1. Please provide the Parliament with an update on (a), I'll take it one at a time because it's about a three-part question. Education first. And I'll take it, the first question is about three parts, so I'll take it*

one at a time so I'll give you a chance to answer. (a) Recruitment to fill primary school headteachers and secondary school principals on a permanent basis?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Madam Speaker, I'm unwell today. Permission to sit through responses as I cannot stand for very long.

Madam Speaker said:

Sure.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Paul Lewis. The post of headteacher primary at the Lookout Primary School has been filled by Karen St-Rose. All reports so far suggest that this is working out and may be a permanent solution for Lookout. With any luck, she will be happy to stay beyond the February checkpoint and continue to assist in improving the quality of education provision at Lookout School. You asking them separately? Sorry, I wasn't following. Do you want me to just continue with?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

No, let me ask, but just one clarification, you didn't mention the secondary school, the primary school...

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Okay, here we go. At the Brades Primary School, a lovely and very experienced teacher, Mrs. Ingrid Osborne, has been holding on, covering the post of principal. My understanding is that it is not her intention to remain as a permanent cover. The Ministry was looking forward to the assistance of Mrs. Yvonne Brade Julius, a very experienced retired teacher who would be perfect for the role. However, this was not met with a posi-

tive response from human resources. We remain as a Ministry saddened that our excellent retired teachers are not adequately embraced by the human resources department. Teacher Julius, with her years of experience in the profession, would be perfect for the role. In the meantime, we still await a permanent solution as the role has been advertised. Regarding the Montserrat Secondary School, Mrs. Hogan has been doing her best under the present problems. She struggles with teacher retention and adequate funding. Unfortunately, she is presently only acting in the role. The post of MSS principal has been advertised. This event preceded the UA getting into office, and we hope that Mrs. Hogan feels the support of the new team at education and will reapply.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

(b) Recruitment to fill vacancies for primary schools and secondary school teachers?

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

A recruitment drive has been launched and is ongoing with a view to having the vacant positions of primary and secondary school teachers filled. Applications are currently being received, and shortlisting processes are happening through the human resources department. In the interim, the positions are being temporarily filled by persons who are substituting until the recruitment process is completed. We're hoping that the improvements outlined in answers to questions presented by Honourable Romeo and Honourable Mulcare will explain some of the problems that we are experiencing.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

(c) What is the government's plan and timeframe in addressing the special needs children within the education system?

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

I think a more comprehensive answer is provided for Honourable Romeo in particular, but I'm happy to answer. In regards to students with special educational needs, the Ministry of Education is embarking on creating a fully funded special educational needs program in which we have the full complement of special educational needs staff. This includes educational

psychologists, personal assistants, guidance counsellors, special educational needs and disability teachers and teaching assistants, a speech and language therapist and a special educational needs coordinator. Supporting children with special needs involves a multi-faceted approach that combines not only education but empathy and advocacy along with specific strategies tailored to students' unique requirements. By creating a nurturing environment and focusing on individual strengths, the Ministry feels that we can assist children with special educational needs to both thrive academically and socially. The recruitment of the required positions within schools is pivotal to the overall success of this project. The comprehensive program to be implemented will include diagnostic assessments, the designing of intervention plans through the use of professional persons, the procurement of necessary resources, the upgrade of designated spaces to accommodate special educational needs and disability students and training and development of teachers. The entire program is dependent on acceptance of the need by the Ministry of Finance, by Human Resources and by the FCDO. Without adequate funding, we will not be able to bridge the obvious gap, the disparity between what is acceptable for special educational needs programs in the UK and what is acceptable on Montserrat. If we are unable to have adequate finances to bridge this gap, the disparity will continue to extend and will continue to affect student outcomes locally and ultimately will have a very negative impact on sustainable development for the island. Just to say, Madam Speaker, it was unclear as to whether or not Ministers were going to have statements. In mine, I try to explain the disparity between UK policy on special educational needs and Montserrat's attempt at policy and planning and there's a huge gap that has to be bridged. There are billions of pounds being put into special educational needs in the UK and the need for it and the drive for it began since the 70s, 80s and 90s and Montserrat seriously needs to catch up.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister. I have one more question for you. That's on the health side. One question.

2. How many companies tendered for the construction of the hospital, and who won the tender and the winning tender amount?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, for your question and your concern about the new hospital project. I know we've had discussions as a team but I think it's also useful when we include the Opposition in discussions so they are abreast with everything. So, my answer was provided by the Permanent Secretary of Health. It's quite short, as were the questions so I'm assuming you've got some significant supplementaries coming after which I may not be able to answer. Two companies participated in the tender process. That's ADS Construction and Construction and Industrial Equipment, the latter being out of St. Lucia. Construction and Industrial Equipment won the tender which was for \$102.8 million.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you. I don't want to surprise you. No supplementaries. Thank you for answering the questions. I appreciate it.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Wow.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

That's the end of my questions.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. Could you take your mic off? I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure et al. from Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My first question is for the Honourable Minister of MCWL.

- 1. Before the October 24 elections, many highlighted the challenges and failures with the previous government's handling of the Seaport Development Project. Could the Honourable Minister of MCWL provide this Honourable House with a proper update on the state of the Little Bay Port Development Project and what the government has done so far and will do in the future to get the Seaport Project back on track?*

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Member, you realize we don't have an MCWL. But we understand. I recognize the Honourable Minister.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

I recognize the challenge is coming until I put some muscles on and he could see we are building. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Romeo, for the question. The Montserrat Port Development Project continues to advance despite numerous challenges. The contractor has made significant progress, including the construction of over 90 precast caissons, aligning with preparations for the arrival of sand and aggregates. That was in November 2024. However, the seasonal sea conditions, typical at this time of the year, pose certain limitations. We have experienced key challenges. The project has faced several obstacles, delays in resolving claims, equipment breakdowns, adverse weather conditions, and shortages of material and staff.

Government actions:

In December 2024 and January 2025, the Government of Montserrat held extensive discussions with the contractor to address these challenges and identify a clear path forward. These engagements aimed to resolve the critical issues, ensure continued progress and maintain the momentum of this vital initiative. To strengthen the project's delivery, the government has taken an active role in the governance structures with the support of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, the Min-

ister of Finance, myself involved, the Financial Secretary, Madam Speaker, our PS and we also have our technical team on board. This partnership ensures that robust oversight and strategic guidance are in place to keep, and the Governor, Madam Speaker, please forgive me, is in place to keep the project on track. We commit to complete the Government of Montserrat remains steadfast in its commitment to the successful delivery of the Port Development Project, recognized as a cornerstone of the island's sustainable development. The project is being prioritized to overcome current obstacles and achieve completion within the revised timeline. Madam Speaker, the discussions continue.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Actually, it just came to my head in that as the Minister responsible for labour, would the Honourable Minister also help us to understand why workers are not being paid, as I'm told, and is this a concern, is this something you've addressed and will that hinder the progress of the project?

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, at the time of leaving my office this morning, I was not aware that workers were not being paid, and being a part of this project and Minister for Labour, I certainly will inquire to ensure that our workers are taken care of, Madam Speaker, if that is so.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My second question to the same Minister.

- 2. *Before the 2024 elections, it was promised that our electricity problems would be fixed within 30 days after coming into office. Could the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House or give us an update on the fulfilment of the said promise?***

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the electricity supply has achieved a high degree of stability over the months that we have come into government, with system availability consistently above 99%. This reflects significant progress in addressing the challenges affecting Montserrat's electricity grid. The generator overhauls, the 48,000-hour overhaul of generator number seven is scheduled for March 2025 to ensure uninterrupted power supply during this maintenance period. An additional generator will be on standby, mitigating any risk of outages. This is especially important given the anticipated increase in the population size in March. Generator number three repairs and nearing completion, with a certified technician arriving this month to finalize the process, ensuring additional redundancy and reliability. Our renewable energy integration, the solar PV system, has consistently contributed to 35 to 40% of the daytime energy demand, reducing reliance on diesel generators. Efforts to restore the Battery Energy Storage System (BEST) are ongoing, which will further enhance the grid stability and efficiency. Madam Speaker, while the government has made substantial strides in stabilizing the electricity system and addressing the long-standing challenges of ageing infrastructure and reliance on diesel generators requires continued investment and modernization efforts. These initiatives are part of a broader strategy to achieve sustainable and reliable energy for Montserrat in both the short and long term.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My third and last question to the Honourable Minister of Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour and Transportation is,

3. *Some two years ago, the Governor's Office commissioned a study to determine the most suitable type of air transport for Montserrat. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House whether she has seen the report that came out of the study, and if so, let us know when she received it, and also share with us this report, this Honourable House?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Romeo for this question, a question that has plagued this Honourable House in our last tenure. The report referred to, which was commissioned by the Governor's Office to assess the most suitable type of air transport for Montserrat, was received by the Ministry of Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour and Transport and Ecclesiastic Affairs on the 14th of January 2025. The Governor's Office has accepted the report in its final form. The Ministry is currently conducting an internal review of the report to analyze its findings and consider its implications for Montserrat's air transport strategy. This process is critical to ensuring that the Government is well prepared to determine its position on the recommendations and their potential impact on Montserrat's development and connectivity, while the report is been finalized by the Governor's Office, who commissioned and accepted it, and they will share it accordingly. The Ministry remains committed to ensuring transparency and accountability and will provide updates to this Honourable House once the internal review has been completed and the Government's position has been determined.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Supplemental, Madam Speaker, maybe I can ask it very quickly here.

Honourable Minister, you stated that the Governor's Office has accepted the report in its final form. Was there a form prior to that final form? Are you knowledgeable of that previous form? I'm wondering why that was included in the answer. And also, Madam Speaker, are you saying that the report is not available to us in the Opposition as yet? And when do you think it will be available to us, and why isn't it available to us? Not that I'm blaming you. Unless you know why, could you find out for us, please? you sit in Cabinet, help us to find out why it's not shared? Because it's taken more than a year, and I've been requesting this report for more than a year. So, I would hope that, Honourable Minister, you'll be able to influence the Governor's Office to provide the Opposition with a copy of the report promptly.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I cannot speak for the Governor's Office, but I do not think the Governor's Office has any difficulty in sharing that report with yourselves. With respect to its final form, I say that because it is the final one that I am seeing, although my ministry has had some form of discussion, but this is the final form of it. That's all I can say. I see it marks final, and therefore, I call it the final form. I say what I see. If it pleases you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Questions for the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Land, Housing and the Environment by the Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. We shall deal with that later. My next question is for the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment.

- 1. The Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment has been in office for some three months now. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what are three main challenges he faces in addressing agriculture on Montserrat and how he plans to address them?***

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, just for a matter of clarity before I answer, I have been in office for about two months now, as the Assembly would have known. I would have missed the first sitting of the Assembly because I was in the UK, and I was ably helped by my Honourable Parliamentary Secretary, who acted in my position, so just a matter of clarity for the Honourable Romeo. To answer his questions though, Madam Speaker, the three main challenges so far that we have identified affecting agriculture on Montserrat relate to the lack of suitable and accessible land for both crop and livestock farming, and discussions are actually currently being held with a private landowner to lease 50 acres of land to be subdivided, cleared, access to water provided before being leased to the farmers on a demand basis. So that would be my first challenge, Madam Speaker. The second challenge is, lack of consistent farming throughout the year, as many farmers are considered part-time farmers, and this reduces the overall level of production. I would like to thank the Honourable Buffonge, as he has actually laid quite a bit of a foundation in some of this, so there have been programs to incentivize production and possibly shift to full-time cultivation. The incentives include field fencing wire, irrigation supplies, fertilizer, seeds and tractoring, which are provided to the farmers. Additionally, this has been supplemented with an increase in extension services to farmers.

The next challenge, Madam Speaker, the reduced level of production has been intensified as several of the full-time farmers are now ageing and retiring from the business of farming. The Ministry has embarked on initiatives to actively encourage young persons to enter the profession of farming, demonstrating models for hydroponics and aquaponic production have been set up to allow new farmers to experience different types of production systems which can offer greater yield, utilizing small spaces and requiring less input.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Supplemental, Madam Speaker.

Honourable Minister, I would suppose that proposals would have been put to various agencies by now for the budget coming up to address some of the concerns you raised. A simple question. Have you any idea how much some of the infrastructure you mentioned will cost? If not, you probably can tell me another time, but maybe easier is the question, where do you expect to get the funding from? How much of it will you get from the private sector? And if not, where will you get it from?

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I realize the Honourable Member would have asked two questions in that supplementary, but I will seek to answer them anyway. For instance, Caricom is providing four greenhouses currently and a cold storage, so they are actually providing full funding and construction for that. And in terms of the private sector, I will just use myself. I am pioneering the efforts to deal with hydroponics, so I would have actually had significant investment myself into this as part of a private sector initiative, hoping that this would actually jumpstart other private sector individuals into doing the same.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you for the answer. Just one thing, supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Another?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

He spoke of 50 acres being cleared and repaired. That would be a more significant investment. Where do you expect to get the funding for that from?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I would prefer not to answer this question at this current date. Right, because I think it is better for me to discuss exactly where we will take funding from, because the majority of the costs would be in clearing the land. Although we have secured the land, we haven't actually sat down as a Ministry to decide exactly what we will do in terms of funding for clearing the land. And Mrs Hector said she might be able to give me the money from BUILT.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. I think this is my last question to the same Minister.

2. The Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment has been in office for some two months now. I correct-

ed the three months. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what are three main challenges he faces in addressing social housing on Montserrat and how he plans to address them?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, again, I will identify the three main things that we have identified. First, what I have identified is the maintenance of the social housing stock. I think that has been a long-standing issue for any government. Since the onset of the volcanic crisis, the Government of Montserrat has been involved in the construction and management of social housing. The social housing portfolio is comprised of approximately 200 units, which range from traditional concrete structures with timber, concrete and galvanised cover. There are also a number of units constructed with timber, and there are also the houses known as Force 10. The bulk of the social housing portfolio is located in Lookout and Drummonds. These areas are known for harsh environmental conditions dominated by saline mist, and this has had a major impact on the buildings. As a result, the maintenance of those buildings is very high. Recognizing this and that the continued deterioration of buildings poses a health and safety risk to the tenants, the government has put in place a preventative maintenance program and also a corrective maintenance for the social housing stock. Condition surveys have been undertaken, and currently there is an ongoing corrective maintenance program taking place on the housing stock. Funding in the amount of \$1.3 million has been approved under the Capital Investment Program for Resilient Economic Growth (CIPREG) Addendum Program to facilitate this maintenance. The work being undertaken is designed to make the buildings more resilient and allow for continuity of use. Additional funding is being sought to continue the maintenance of additional housing units.

The second issue, Madam Speaker, is new social housing stock. The demand for housing is another challenge. There is a housing demand, a waitlist of persons who require support and continued funding is required based on this demand. At the onset of the volcanic crisis, the Government of Montserrat constructed several family units at various loca-

tions around the island as a rapid response to the housing needs at the time. Some of these units are still occupied; the decanting of these units and rehousing the occupants is a high priority in the Government of Montserrat housing program. Funding has been secured under the CIPREG Addendum to start Phase 1 work at Drummonds for the installation of infrastructure and the construction of housing units to replace the family units on that site. The other issue, Madam Speaker, is access to land for housing. There is a need for affordable housing provision for a variety of groups. One of the priorities of the Government of Montserrat is the provision of improved access to affordable housing with associated development of resilient infrastructure. To this end, the Government of Montserrat is committed to providing an adequate supply of affordable residential lots, satisfying the rising housing demand. They are pockets of land which are owned by Government of Montserrat. These sites are being mapped and assessed in terms of potential for housing subdivision development, along with carrying capacity of those sites. The Ministry is also looking at sites that are private ownership that could be utilized for housing development. The access to adequate funds to address these challenges will be a benefit to property management and maintenance and is important for successful implementation of future infrastructure interventions. By making this investment, Madam Speaker, it will eliminate a significant risk and liability to the Government of Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Education, Health and Social Services from Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Honourable Osborne, for your answers. My next question is for the Honourable Minister of Education and Health.

- 1. Progress on the hospital project has been slow for some time now. Could the Honourable Minister provide this Honourable House with an update on the state of the hospital project, with an indication of when the contract to construct the new hospital building is likely to be signed and the project start on the ground?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The signing of the hospital project has been arranged for within the next month, which was my answer yesterday. My answer today is that we're hoping to get this done on Friday. Admittedly, there have been significant delays with the signing. Part of the problem reflects FCDO concerns about the progress of the port project, so delays which occurred in the port project and questions about transparency and accountability under the previous government have led to the FCDO wanting to do due diligence with the new hospital project. It was felt also essential that the details of the contract be reviewed again by the government attorneys, so this was done, and they were happy. There have also been discoveries during minor works that have prevented full clarity of structures under the ground, as the new hospital was built on grounds which housed the St John's School, once upon a time when documentation was not at its best, and then the present Glendon Hospital was built during the volcanic crisis, during a period when government offices were either closed or under makeshift circumstances. Thus, the recording of what structures were under the ground would have been challenging. It is felt now, however, after proper investigations and assessment, that all of the unknowns that were needed to be known are known, and presently, we're happy to proceed without the threat of significant variations that would be costly to the government if there were new discoveries. I must thank project manager Carlos Pina-Hasan for the detail and clarity that he has provided. We are confident going forward that the variations will be limited and that the project will continue with ease. Of note, one aspect of the project involving structural adjustments to the previously decanted Margetson Memorial Home, so the patients of the Margetson Memorial Home were moved into the Golden Years Home to allow for space for decanting of hospital personnel into the Margetson Home. So, a project was set out to adjust the Margetson Home to make sure that it was fit for purpose for this decanting. So, this has happened, resulting in a building that is ready for decanting of certain circumstances such as pharmacy, lab, kitchen, and medical records. I must thank Harewood Construction Limited for their very excellent work. You should go and have a look. It is beautiful. It is good to see our local companies being

used and it is good when we see them producing work of such excellent quality. It is the assumption that shortly after the signing of the hospital contract with Construction Industrial Equipment out of St. Lucia that the main decanting process will begin. Some aspects of this have already begun. There have also been minor works at the new hospital project site by Steel Express. This contract was signed in September of 2024 and work began in October of 2024. Steel Express is an excellent and well-established company with strong Montserrat ties. Thanks to Mr. Justin Thomas for clarity on issues that they have dealt with. The contract with Steel Express was a good one and we're assuming they believe that by June of this year that minor works will be completed in line with other aspects of progress that we expect to see with the new hospital project.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question to the same Minister.

- 2. Just over a year ago, the Deputy Governor's Office and Government of Montserrat issued a publication which identified the living wage as EC \$2,485 per month. This means that many public and private sector workers who are single parents in particular and earn less than \$2,485 a month are unable to adequately provide basic needs like food, shelter, and health care for themselves and their school-going children. Some parents must choose between paying their rent or utility bills and buying food. Can the Honourable Minister for Social Services tell this Honourable House what she plans to do differently to address the negative impact of poverty such parents and their children are facing?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks to Honourable Romeo for very relevant questions and for his continued support for the wellbeing of people

who live on this island. The Government of Montserrat is aware that persons on island are experiencing hardship. The cost of living on the island is high and many persons including single mothers with children are truly struggling to make ends meet. I attempted to answer this question from a sort of broad perspective in terms of general response as a team. The United Alliance intends to tackle this problem from several angles. Our long-term plans involve creating a stronger economy through welcoming investors to the island. The potential for development of the financial services sector is ripe with promise presently. We are awaiting certain developments within government that are essential before we can advertise and welcome opportunities to the island. The development of this sector is expected to bring wealth to the island through companies' registration and taxation, but also through job creation. There are already companies who are presently interested in other aspects of investment and to this we are very welcome. Presently, the government is the main employer for persons on Montserrat, and it struggles to pay local persons adequately. Through the creation of a fatter government purse, through income beyond taxation and beyond British Government aid, the United Alliance believes that it will eventually be able to afford to pay workers adequately.

Additionally, new private sector investment is likely to bring jobs, hopefully with higher salaries. Our plans in agriculture, which Honourable Osborne will highlight, should also result in more food items being grown and produced locally. The buy local, eat local option will provide healthy, locally grown food at a more reasonable price and will also be healthier. In regards to reducing the cost that local persons have to pay for health care, the Government of Montserrat is working hard to ensure that off-island travel for certain investigations will become unnecessary and we intend to ensure that the provision of multiple aspects of care are available locally, including endoscopy, vascular consultation, continued urological services and routine cardiac care. The government's new spend request to the visiting specialist program reflects this drive. We also intend to push the topic of health financing, which ultimately allows persons on island to afford the cost of care.

Regarding utility bills in particular, the Government of Montserrat expects to solve the energy crisis locally, though not as swiftly as I know the Opposition would have liked and the people and ourselves would have liked. High prices for poor service delivery in this area require so-

lutions, which we believe we have. Apart from fixing the present problems, the United Alliance has the intention of going green, saving the environment through green energy while providing cheaper electricity to the population, so reducing bills. Small business support is another local option. Many persons in the private sector and many government workers have a second job in order to make ends meet, and we hope they will benefit going forward from United Alliance-led interventions in finding markets for their products overseas and assistance with business grants and the formation of business plans.

In addition to all of this, the Government of Montserrat is anxiously awaiting an assessment of the present state of affairs when it relates to what it costs to live here. Results from this planned study will assist the Government of Montserrat in better understanding how people are managing and what salaries really should be. I wish I could say that at this point that the Government of Montserrat was imminently going to be raising salaries, but rather I can say that our new Deputy Governor is committed to reviewing salaries across the board and funding permitted hopes to see some improvement at some point in the near future in what persons are being paid.

The breakfast program under the school lunch type program is being planned for schools. The breakfast program is intended to ensure that students from households that are struggling are able to receive a healthy breakfast at the school. This was a drive put forward by the student leadership team who noticed that some students were truly coming to school hungry and thus challenged to concentrate in classrooms. We have also asked the student leadership team at the MSS to keep an eye and an ear out for students whose households are struggling financially so that we can attempt to provide individualized support. The Government of Montserrat also has firm plans to ensure, as you heard earlier, that there will be provision of good quality affordable housing so that persons of all income groups living on Montserrat will be able to have reasonable and affordable accommodation locally.

And lastly, there is also the option from social services in which they can assist persons with one-off packages when they're struggling to make ends meet. Of note, this service is nothing new, but thankfully does not hold nationality of the person in a household, for example, where a mother is trying to receive financial assistance urgently, food packaged

for the children. It is across the board and does not regard nationality as a barrier to receiving service.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, many of the solutions seem quite logical and reasonable, Honourable Minister. However, I must ask a question because much of it sounds like futuristic, you know. How much of this do you expect to take place over the next 6 to 12 months? How are you going to address the real urgent needs over the next 6 to 12 months considering the solutions you've put?

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Well, in particular, we expect to see funding approved for the island-wide assessment of persons' needs. So, I'm assuming that within the next six months, we'll at least have a better idea, and going forward after this, the Deputy Governor's Office and Ministry of Finance will have a better idea as to what persons need to be paid, for example. And in the meantime, we have, as a team, the United Alliance Office in St. John's led by Zenoushka Meade. We have published the phone number, and we have welcomed persons who are undergoing financial hardship to give Zen a call or to come into the office, discuss their problems, and Zen will ensure that we find ways of helping. Also, I'd like to recognize the presence in the room of community leader Anne Buffonge Thomas. Anne has already started work in the communities. She is a resource person for the team. She connects the community with the Ministries and so far, has been very helpful in making people feel that there is engagement from the government and she's finding solutions for persons in the community day by day. So, we're very thankful for the existence of Anne's job. Also, I must recognize the presence of Jenzil Skerritt in the room, who has been doing an excellent job in speaking to people who have issues, in highlighting issues that are out there in the community, concerns about poverty, and concerns about persons who need jobs. So, we are on it. Obviously, things take time. I have written down somewhere that I keep getting told that Rome was not

built in a day, but when you Google it, it's something like 800 years that Rome was built in. So, I'd rather not have that comparison highlighted. We hope in the very near future to see some progress, and we're hoping that the people of Montserrat feel truly listened to by this government and that we are striving to find solutions for all of the problems, which are many.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. Honourable Minister, you will have our support. My last question to you, Honourable Minister.

- 3. The Honourable Minister of Education has been in office for some three months 90 days approximately now. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what are three main challenges she faces with the delivery of education on Montserrat and how she plans to address them?***

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Madam Speaker, also to Honourable Romeo for his question and for the expectation that within 90 days in education, I would have found problems and made plans but not realistically achieved any wins. The three main problems we face in the delivery of education on Montserrat are, number one, recruitment and retention of teachers, number two, inadequate support for special educational needs, and number three, student vulnerability.

Under teacher recruitment and retention, the failure to attract and retain teachers to the island is the result of low salaries without allowances and thus an obvious lack of respect for the teaching profession, the high cost of living on island and the challenge of being able to afford to live here, inadequate equipment and supplies in schools, huge challenges from some teachers with obtaining supplies. The art teacher at MSS, for example, on our assessments of the school situation reported that he had been waiting since 2017 to obtain supplies and these teachers are bringing in supplies of their own out of their own pocket money, inadequate

continued education for teachers with inadequate professional support for teachers, staff shortages resulting in a greater workload, failure to fill teaching gaps with sufficient speed to prevent learning loss.

Regarding solutions in this area, we have asked for a salary increase for teachers or the addition of allowances to increase net pay for teachers. This so far has not been, this has so far been met with the human resources department and Deputy Governor responding that teachers' salaries will be looked at as a part of all government salaries, so this is not a quick fix and I wonder here in this regard whether or not we can reduce the taxation that teachers pay in order to increase net pay. So, I'm hoping that we find solutions soon, but I cannot express how desperate teachers are to be paid more and also the need to make the package that we offer teachers look better so that they are willing to actually come here to work and stay here working.

Another attempted solution regarding the high cost of living was to ask teachers to be included in the non-fee-paying category in which we place health workers, police, and fire. This would allow them to not have to pay for many aspects of health care, including dental care. A cabinet paper has been requested from the Permanent Secretary of Health for this, and we're hoping that this could potentially be a quick win for teachers. This move would reduce overall monthly costs for teachers and will allow for wellness. Some teachers have developed health problems due to workplace stress and the stress of struggling financially on an island, and obviously as Caribbean people we are at risk of diabetes hypertension, obesity and elevated cholesterol and their complications which studies have shown are actually more difficult to prevent and control in the presence of poverty and stress.

As it relates to the high cost of living, I said previously the United Alliance is working on housing solutions for the island. We need good, solid, low-cost homes. Housing solutions for teachers are very high upon this list of needs. By making good affordable homes available for them we both improve quality of life and assist with the cost of living. In regard to obtaining supplies, many teachers as I said earlier who are finding money for supplies out of their own pockets, we're in the process of reviewing pathways to access supplies and have the intention of producing an audit form for teachers in which the information can be collected showing what was requested and when, what was requested and when and when

the supplies were actually obtained. This will allow for fairness in terms of teachers accessing supplies and will allow education administrators better clarity in terms of where the problems with this lie. We plan to also improve continued education development for teachers. We intend to thoroughly assess the present program and assess areas in which teachers feel they require additional support. A lot of teachers are specifically asking for assistance with training in special educational needs because they are aware of the problem. As a Ministry, we hope as we go forward to open the intended vocational side of the Montserrat Community College, providing the college with the financial and professional support it has asked for in order to excel at teacher training, for example. We intend to take advantage of previously established partnerships with the UK and, through this will benefit from CPD for teachers, possibly electronically.

I'm asking for a full investigation into the process by which teaching gaps are filled. The present problem of students waiting days, months, and weeks for a teacher significantly contributes to what we as a Ministry see as an area of marked learning loss. We intend to audit the process, the time when it was recognized that the teacher was absent, the time a teacher to cover either electronically or in real life was identified, the timing of the request of human resources to fill the gap, the response from human resources and the time that the slot for the teacher is filled. Thus, we'll have a better understanding of how to solve the present problem of teacher retention. The present problem of there being nobody to blame for the unnecessary gaps in teaching it doesn't help. We must find out what the actual problems are. We can no longer go on like this. It is essential that we solve this problem, which not only results in significant learning loss but also widens the social gap among students. Wealthier families can afford extra classes while poor families cannot. I once again would like to thank Mrs. Anne Buffonge-Thomas for her work in community centers. There is a program that has started with homework help in the afternoons. The funding of a huge extension of this program has been sought. We hope to provide at no cost to the students or parents afternoon classes which will allow them to catch up and will allow them to excel. We are also asking for teacher assistance to help in the classroom with teaching and to help with classroom control. Teaching assistance in classrooms will also provide the option for electronic teaching. This needs a positive response from human resources and the Ministry of Finance. In addition to the hiring of teaching assistance, money will have

to be put aside if we are going to be filling teaching gaps electronically. Since the pandemic, there have been any number of electronic teaching services which now allow for the possibility of filling teaching gaps with professionals electronically. Regarding teacher recruitment, the Ministry plans to advertise at regional and international training colleges. We intend to specifically advertise to persons in the diaspora who may have an interest in coming home to contribute to the island.

The second problem is inadequate support for special educational needs. The fairly recent finding of the presence of a high percentage of students having special educational needs averaging at about 25% has met the population by surprise. We thank those who worked hard with the child find study and the monitored assessment project. I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Julius for his work in this area and for his attempts to find solutions for the problem with no money. The reality is, however, that these studies have revealed what is already here, that very large numbers of students over decades have needed additional support in particular areas in order to excel. However, the support was not there. The Ministry of Education prior to 2023 wasn't able to adequately identify and support students. This includes not only students with profound learning deficits and profound behavioural problems but includes students with subtle deficits who would need to be assessed and supported with education plans in order for this group of students to excel. This lack has resulted in underperformance over generations of students and behavioural problems, many resulting from students not feeling good about themselves as they are struggling to learn without the right support.

The Ministry of Education is requesting a full complement of staffing for special educational needs. And no, there is no money for this. So, the Ministry of Education is requesting a full complement of staffing for a special educational needs program, which allows students to both be assessed and supported with educational plans and additional educational support. Unfortunately, as a team, we have so far not had a positive response because money is a huge problem. We very anxiously await next week's budget support mission where, as a team, we ask for what we need for special educational needs. The United Kingdom Children and Families Act of 2014 and their special educational needs and disability regulations of 2014 with the establishment of a SEND code of practice and huge amounts of money dedicated to SEND programs in the UK reveals a huge disparity with what is acceptable in the UK in terms of a special

educational needs program and what is acceptable in British Overseas Territories, including Montserrat.

Montserrat, which only in recent times is coming to awareness of special educational needs with the Ministry of Education being 100% committed to having a fully staffed special educational needs program, has the expectation of support to remove or reduce the gap that is so obvious between Montserrat and the UK. We have presently made requests for speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, guidance counsellors, special educational needs teachers, special education needs coordinators for the four schools, teaching assistants and personal assistants. With a proper special educational needs program, Madam Speaker, we intend to solve the problem of generations of underperformance and allow students on island a better chance at succeeding and a better chance at positively contributing to sustainable development on the island.

Of note, Madam Speaker, the literacy rate on Montserrat at primary school level is something between 50 and 59%, which is totally unacceptable, and this is because students need more support, and we need to find funding for this. We have the support of the Director of Education, who is planning to put in place what is necessary, and he is with us in trying to make adjustments to the Educational Act, presently the Education Act. It is aware of special educational needs, but it sort of says things like the Ministry or the director can provide things once there is money, so it puts some little loopholes in provision of funding and support for special educational needs, and it also places the amount that has to be paid for an assessment and an educational plan, the Education Act burdens that responsibility on the parents who are already struggling. Sorry, I go on and I go on.

Another intention of the Ministry of Education is to provide options for all students by developing a technical side for education, so this relates to special educational needs students and also to students in general, as in special educational needs sometimes it is a technical subject that the student will excel on, but there are also other students who do not have special educational needs who will actually choose this as a career of choice. So, we intend to not only improve and support technical programs in the secondary school, but we intend to introduce technical subjects at the primary level and at the community college. Technical sub-

jects are the only possibility, as I said, for some students and are the choice for others. All students want to excel at something, and we intend to meet them where they are with a fully supported program, and obviously this is going to require lots and lots of money, which admittedly we presently don't have. I'd like to point out that in terms of funding, the UK government has committed £2.6 billion to be spent between 2022 and 2025 to improve education provision for SEND. Can we have some of that, please?

Moving along to student vulnerability. Students in Montserrat are vulnerable in three main ways. Lack of supervision after school, learning in dilapidated buildings, and poverty. Students are leaving school between 2 and 3 p.m. when their schoolwork is done, and this is long before the parents have made it home, and it has provided gaps in supervision and protection. Students have been preyed upon during this period, are preyed upon during this period by paedophiles who pick up the children from the school compound. A policeman has had to be put in place for the lunch period to ensure that men in our communities are not collecting our schoolgirls during the lunch period. Also, students run the risk of being taken advantage of by each other and being exposed to too much of what the internet has to offer that is inappropriate for their age range. As a solution to the problem, the Ministry has requested funding for after-school clubs. The intention is to provide after-school classes and career-focused activities in the community centres with opening times from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. The intention is that during this period, students are both protected and engaged in educational activities, other fun engaging activities, or sports. Students on Montserrat are made vulnerable also by being expected to attend school in buildings in need of repairs. Repairs are very slow to happen, and we require more accountability for the work in this area. The L&M block that we're still waiting to have completed, which should be completed any minute now, apparently work began in 2018. The makeshift setup that teachers use is resulting in learning loss, which contributes to vulnerability.

My colleague, Mr. Jenzil Skerritt, who has spent a couple of months assessing the need, he has been very concerned about the risk to students in terms of injury, sorry, and, unfortunately quite recently has experienced a dilapidated structure at the school causing an injury to his own family member. The irony of this situation is deeply saddening. Dilapidated buildings and their supporting structures result in injury to both students

and teachers, result in financial hardship for them having to have special investigations done or access health care due to injury, and seriously expose the Government of Montserrat to litigation. To make students and teachers less vulnerable, we must be more aggressive and timely with building repairs. Thank you to our distinguished Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Mendes, early on in her commencement of her new role in attempting to find money urgently for school repairs. Both the need and the risk to teachers and students are very great.

With regard to vulnerability as well, students on Montserrat are vulnerable due to poverty. Previous studies have suggested that 25% of persons on island are significantly affected by poverty, and this may be an under-estimation, so as a government, we anxiously await the poverty assessment that's planned for the island. Poverty will affect nourishment, access to school supplies, and access to extra classes. The student leadership team at the MSS is making inroads in this area, as previously described. The Montserrat Secondary School also students do not have homerooms, they do not have classrooms to call their classroom, so the classrooms are based on the subject being taught. And then this is different to in the primary schools where students actually have classrooms where they can eat lunch. As a result, at lunchtime there is simply nowhere for students to eat. We have photos of students sitting on the ground eating their lunch because that is what is there. They sit on the floor, they sit on stones, they catch upon side walls to try and eat. This is totally unacceptable as it exposes them to the elements, exposes their food to potential contamination and thus diseases. The students must feel like they are being treated like animals and not like students. We do not yet have funding for a lunchroom or hall, but we note as a Ministry that the treatment of MSS students as it relates to lunchtime is presently totally unacceptable and contributes to student vulnerability.

Regarding access to social welfare, the department is doing all it can to ensure that they provide assistance for students when necessary. So, ideally, the social welfare department will assess them in terms of their vulnerability, their need for funding. Montserrat has benefited from contributions from the Montserrat Diaspora to the MSS, and we are very thankful for this. We have received in the past everything as a, not we, the government, but the school, has received in the past everything from school supplies to sanitary napkins for students. As a Ministry and as a government, we would like to thank and encourage individuals of the

Montserrat Diaspora who have contributed. Your island definitely needs your help, and we welcome this. Sorry for the length of this response.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister. Quite a comprehensive response which deserves just two supplementals, but one, if you will allow me.

Madam Speaker said:

Two?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Two. Yes. Two. Very simple. Five pages of answers, two supplementals, which literally support her position.

The Honourable Minister spoke about the SEND programs in the UK and the disparity between their SEND programs and ours, our situation here. And she said, so there's a huge disparity between what is acceptable in the UK and what is acceptable in the BOTCs. My question, Honourable Minister, who determines what is acceptable? Do we determine what is acceptable, or does the British Government determine what is acceptable?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Health, Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

How do I respond, Honourable Romeo? Montserrat, over decades, has failed to uphold international standards for many things. And as you know, my rant for health for the last God knows how many years is a reflection of this. Just to clarify a bit more about where this is coming from, and it's all research-based. So, research and advocacy to improve awareness and understanding of the presence of learning deficits in the student population. Learning deficits that could be identified and sup-

ported in mainstream education began in the 1970s, so research was being done. In the 1980s and the 1990s, education practices in first-world countries were evolving to accommodate students with learning deficits in general educational classrooms. In 1994, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice provided guidance in policy and practice in schools and in the procedures to be followed by schools, and it was aimed at creating a partnership with parents on behalf of the children with special educational needs. The UK Children and Families Act in 2014 introduced education, health, and care plans, so previously known as education plans, which were legally binding documents that outline the support a child with special educational needs requires. And local authorities were obligated by law to provide the necessary resources and the specified plans for students. The Act mandates that local authorities use their best endeavours to ensure that students with special educational needs receive the appropriate support, and this includes ensuring that there is a special educational needs coordinator designated for each school that would oversee the provision of special educational needs. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations of 2014 complement the Children and Families Act by detailing how local authorities must allocate funding, and they emphasize the importance of collaborating health and education social services to make sure that we're meeting the needs of the SEND children. And lastly, the present SEND Code of Practice in the UK is a statutory guidance document that the present one established under the Children and Families Act in 2014 that provides statutory guidance for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with special educational needs, and the Code outlines the legal requirements that local authority schools and health bodies need to follow to ensure that children are receiving adequate support, notably a new mandatory qualification for special educational needs coordinators, and then the \$2.6 billion to be spent from 2022 to 2025 in terms of what is present on Montserrat. So, you know, you told us in 2014 that we are British, and that's nice, but the standards that are upheld in the UK, they seem to not filter down to Montserrat, and presently there is will. There's obviously political will, and there's will from within the ministry.

The problems with the Special Education Act that I mentioned as well is a thing, but I must also recognize that the Social Services Department have produced a national disability policy for Montserrat, and their present draft form is trying to ensure that persons living with disabilities on Montserrat, including those with special educational needs, receive the

right attention and the right support from government. So, there's a lot that we have to do to bridge the gap, and the standards are sort of internationally recognized standards for special educational needs that we are not yet up to grips with because of delays in policy writing and the lack of funding.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo with his final supplementary.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, it is the final supplementary.

Honourable Minister, it's such a comprehensive answer. You spoke of desperate teachers, the need for retention and recruitment, increase for teachers and benefits, I could go on and on. All of these, to me, means money. My question to you, Honourable Minister, is how much of this money do you think you'll get from the private sector, or how much of this money do you expect will come from the private sector, and how much will come as grants, and where will the grants come from?

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker, to Honourable Romeo for his supplementary. So obviously, there's no money. So, if we put everything that we need to the Ministry of Finance, the answer is we don't have enough to support you. Next week, we beg for money at the financial aid mission. The long-term plan of Government of Montserrat in terms of making our own money through investments to Montserrat etc, obviously that's going to take years to happen, but the idea is once we reach that sort of level of sustainability in terms of us having an income rather than us being totally dependent on British aid, then some solutions will come from there financially.

One option that I'm hoping for or longing for is a similar option to what Health has experienced over the last three years. So, three years ago, Health was offered a person and a project, Health Transformation Project. Health said yes, and three million pounds were given to Health. And it is through this program that we have managed to have the CT scanner, the mammogram machine, health information systems, so electronic med-

ical records, new equipment in the clinics such as defibrillators, proper crash carts, and training for staff that has happened over the past two years for in an emergency care courses, put it that way. We are hoping that because of the obvious need that the FCDO will realize that this requires a huge pot of money, there is an advertisement out for a person who we're hoping will be hired over the next six months who that person's pay is coming from FCDO. And we are desperately hoping that we can mirror what has happened in Health with FCDO person coming in and money following them. We need about three million pounds.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

*Questions to the Honourable Premier from Honourable
Donaldson Romeo*

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister. I'll move on to Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance.

- 1. Before October 2024, the now Honourable Minister responsible for access said then that without subsidies from the FCDO, there would definitely be a ferry in place by November 18, 2024, a ferry that is up to international sola standards. Just after coming into office, he publicly reaffirmed that there will be a ferry for Christmas and that passengers should go ahead and book their flights to Antigua. To be transparent, as he has also promised, could he please explain in some detail why his government failed to provide the ferry as promised?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I can't promise to be as generous with my time as the Honourable Minister who spoke just before me, but I've addressed this question publicly before. But for the benefit of the Honourable Member, I

will clarify once more. Upon taking office and after conducting several consultations, we discovered that the vessel initially earmarked for the service did not have the SOLAS, that is Safety of Life at Sea, or ISPS certification as required by the UK regulator. Additionally, we explored available vessels within the region and found that none of them met the SOLAS standards necessary for our needs. The one vessel that was even close to being ready would have required substantial funding, which was not available within our current budget. Therefore, we had no choice but to consider enhanced air support facilitation.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Supplemental, for clarity, because I don't have the question and the answer in front of me to really be clear on what he said. Did he say that after elections, he discovered that the ferry he promised was not SOLAS, up to SOLAS standards? After elections, he discovered that? And then, Madam Speaker, let's say, so then if SOLAS standards was the main issue, then had there been SOLAS standards, you would have had the funding to carry it out and would not have needed the funds that you mentioned within the budget. Could you clarify that, please, sir? Did you need funds from the FCDO or not? Do you need FCDO funds? If it was SOLAS, up to SOLAS standards, would you still need FCDO funds or not?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister.

The Premier said:

The Honourable Member would be aware that statements made during campaigning are statements made during campaigning. Once you get into government, one would recognize some of the difficulties, and he has been through that, especially, Madam Speaker, when in 2014, he promised that all students who leave school would get \$1,500. That has not materialized. He also indicated that he would have carried up the social

welfare payments beyond what they were. Madam Speaker, it's the supplementary he's asking. So, I'm free to respond to his supplementary.

Madam Speaker said:

Yes, but let us stick to the response on the FCDO.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, he has asked a question, and I'm free to respond how I deem fit.

Madam Speaker said:

In accordance with the rules.

The Premier said:

In accordance with the rules, and the rules provides me with the latitude to respond to supplementaries. So therefore, as indicated, you made promises in your campaign which you did not fulfil because you realized you couldn't fulfil them. I may have made a campaign promise based on the information I had, and having come into office, I realized, one, that the request for proposals for a ferry, that ferry would not have been available for some time. Secondly, when the tenders were reviewed, it was also recognized that that ferry did not meet the requirements, and that is as per a government tender which was done prior to becoming into office. As it relates to the vessels which we are looking at, it was our view that with Adam's certification that we would have been able, on a regional basis, to be able to use regional certification. That was not acceptable by the UK regulators. The same vessels which we are seeking to have are in the position to travel to other Caribbean territories with the regional certification, but they cannot travel to Montserrat because of a special requirement by the UK regulators. Hence, with all the best will in the world, we had to concede that although the vessel could have travelled to other regional territories, it was not permitted into Montserrat. As it relates to UK funding and FCDO funding, the one which was being tendered would have been funded from the UK, but that was not possible because the tenders were all rejected.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My second question to the Honourable Minister.

- 2. To be transparent as promised, could the Honourable Minister responsible for access please tell us how many passengers the ferry promised for Christmas could carry, what the anticipated ferry ticket cost was, and travel schedule which was planned for that ferry?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister - Access.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The intended ferry would have been able to carry around 120 passengers given the opportunity to conduct ferry services. However, since there were challenges in certification requirements, the additional details which are being asked were not formalized.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Honourable Minister for Access, are you saying that when you made a promise to provide a ferry and you spoke of it working regionally, at the time you had no idea what the schedule would be to provide sea access by ferry to Montserrat was, or you hadn't figured it out, could you kindly explain?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Member fully recognizes that there are processes. You start off with your initial negotiation for a service. If the service now becomes available, then you negotiate a schedule and price. Yes, there were discussions in relation to possible schedules and possible prices, but those could not have been concluded because we did not have the certification. So, it's a moot point as it relates to what it may or may not have costed or what the schedules may or may not have been because it just was not possible to have that vessel operating in Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, a further supplemental because I don't think I got a clear answer. Okay.

Madam Speaker said:

No, no, no, Honourable Member.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Okay, that's okay.

- 3. It is now the end of January, and St. Patrick's celebrations are upon us. With less than two months to go, our people and tourists need to know whether there will be a ferry or additional airlift to improve access in and out of Montserrat. Madam Speaker, I must make it plain that these questions were sent in before statements were made on radio to clarify this issue. So those questions, and for the record, I'm asking these questions although they may have been mentioned. So, let me repeat. It is now the end of January, and St. Patrick's celebrations are upon us. With less than two months to go, our people and tourists need to know whether there will be a ferry or additional*

airlift to improve access in and out of Montserrat. One entertainment company has already cancelled a planned event for the 2025 St. Patrick's season due to uncertainty over access. Can the Honourable Premier tell the public exactly, this House and the public, exactly what to expect, whether there will be a ferry and or additional airlift like twin otters available from March to April and beyond and what tickets will cost?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, we have not secured any ferry services at this point and emphasis at this point. However, we have already contracted additional airlift using Winair's twin otters' aircraft. The fare for the twin otters will be US \$110 plus the required taxes for single journeys between Antigua and Montserrat. We are currently exploring various options to enhance air access. This includes continuing discussions with SVG with respect to upgrading to twin otters as well as with Fly Montserrat to ensure we continually improve overall air connectivity.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Supplemental, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Yes.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

From what I understand, only Winair will provide twin otter services, if I'm correct, and I'm told that SVG has capability or can do so in short order, provide twin otters. What I also understood is that the flights from Winair will only be in the morning, so people have to stay over-

night in Antigua to catch it in the morning, and therefore, the cost will go up again. So, the question is, can you not arrange a contract with SVG to provide the afternoon services for twin otters and air access?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, may I just reiterate? We are currently exploring various options to enhance air access. This includes continuing discussions with SVG with respect to upgrading to twin otters. Does that answer your question? Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you very much. Again, if I had the question in front of me the answer it would help. So, let's go on to the next question.

4. With the absence of a ferry, our people have seen the cost of the airfare increase to as much as EC \$1,357 round trip. Some paid as much as \$800 plus to get to Montserrat in December. Can the Honourable Minister responsible for Access tell this Honourable House why there is no subsidy in place to improve the extremely high cost of airfares to and from Montserrat?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I can simply respond to that by saying affordability and availability of funds. Remembering, of course, that when we came into government, we have to utilize funds available or not available from the previous administration. Does that satisfy you?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My supplemental to the Honourable Minister. Are you saying that there was no way to find extra funds within the budget or from Her Majesty's Government to make sure that people do not have to pay these excessive fares traveling in and out of Montserrat, thus inhibiting trade, health care trips, and you name it? Is there no way for the British government to have provided extra funds, and there were no funds within the present budget, even from surplus monies raised to address this?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I am absolutely certain, absolutely certain that the Honourable Member has a copy of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill which is coming before this House during this session and he would then recognize the extent of monies that have to be paid out from surpluses or otherwise, plus additional funding which has been provided to provide for critical services which had to be met. As to whether or not the British Government would have been able to provide additional funds, I can't speak for the British Government. What I can assure the Honourable Member is that the BSM team, and no emphasis on the BS, but BSM team will be here next week and I'm certain that you'll have an opportunity to meet with them as well, but that is when we negotiate for funds for the first time during our administration.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

So, you did not ask for additional funds. Okay, next question.

The Premier said:

On a Point of Order, Madam Speaker, I never said we did not ask for additional funds, and I think that should be struck from the record. I'm simply saying you understand and should understand the position. Having asked for additional funds, these things come to a head during the BSM.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

We will deal with that later. No further supplement also. We'll let it go.

5. Recently, the Honourable Minister responsible for access said that we do not need a ferry all year long. Can you tell this Honourable House which months of the year having a ferry would be viable, subsidized or not?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister responsible for access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, my Honourable Colleague should, having served as Minister for Finance and Access, know that such a question cannot be faithfully responded to without the data and knowledge of ferry cost and routing options. But again, my emphasis is on should know.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Honourable Premier, Honourable Speaker, he tempts me to ask a supplement. Did he not know, as Honourable Premier twice before and Minister of Finance, before elections, that that was the case?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I'm a little puzzled as to the question. Is it that the point I made about him serving as Minister for Finance and Access, he should have known? But again, my emphasis is on should know. Is that what the supplementary is about?

Madam Speaker said:

Could you make your supplementary clear, please?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

To make it more clear, he had no call. I'm asking you, did you have any call to even promise a ferry without all those facts you mentioned that are necessary?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, when he made his promises in 2014 that he would have increased welfare payments beyond what it is and what he met, did he have any call to do that? He never satisfied that. Madam Speaker, also, when he made other statements, did he have a call to make those?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

What is your Point of Order?

The Premier said:

I don't understand what he's asking.

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Minister, let me hear his Point of Order, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My question was very specific to the answer he gave, and I dare remind him of the point Standing Order that speaks to creating an argument and being argumentative, even with an answer. However, I can handle it. Could he just try and answer the question? You said so before. Just answer the question. The question is, if you did not have those same facts prior to the election, why did you promise a ferry when you didn't have it, those facts that you said were necessary?

Madam Speaker said:

May I read the form of questions? A question shall not and this is Order 24, a question shall not contain arguments, inferences, opinions, imputations, epithets, ironical expressions, or hypothetical cases, nor shall a question refer to debates or answers to questions in the current session. In your question it could be considered argumentative. Which is the point you brought up? Which is the point that you brought up? So, let us ask questions that are in keeping with the Standing Orders and answer them in like manner, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I shall respect the ruling, Madam Speaker. My next question.

6. The Honourable Minister for Access has been in office for some three months now, 90 days, and has repeatedly stated that access is one of his priorities and that his government is in the process of figuring out how to fix access. Can the Honourable Minister responsible for Access tell this Honourable House what are three main challenges he faces with the delivery of access on Montserrat and how he plans to address them?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

The government's main challenge, Madam Speaker, is funding and long-term commitment of funds, which we are currently discussing with HMG on ways in which we could address such challenges along with discussions with other private sector service providers.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question to the Honourable Minister.

7. In December last year, the Honourable Minister of Finance promised to get the LPG cost reduced by December 21. Could the Honourable Minister of Finance please tell this Honourable House whether the LPG cost was actually reduced in December as promised, and if not, why not?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is fully aware that the prices were not reduced in December as expected. But following discussions with Delta in December, an agreement was reached that the price of LPG would be reduced. Following further discussions with Delta, this price reduction came into effect on January 13, 2025. The following have been the price adjustments. The 100-pound cylinders were \$265. They were reduced in January to \$195, which is a reduction in price of \$70 per 100-pound cylinder. The 22-pound cylinder was \$58.25. In January, it was reduced to \$42.84, a saving of \$15.21. The 21-pound cylinders were \$52.95. The January price was reduced to \$38.95, a reduction of \$14.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I'm very happy for that, Madam Speaker. Just a supplemental, so for clarity.

May the Honourable Minister tell us whether the changing pricing in the first instance, the increase from around 200 to 265, was as a result of transportation issues and, therefore, the reduction as a result of transportation issues being resolved. Just to be clear, because I was just asked the question while I was sitting here, and it's not just for me; it's for the public. What exactly caused the agreement to reduce the cost of LPG? Does it have anything to do with the transportation costs being changed?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, there is a whole range of issues as it relates to how the pricing of fuel is done through the pricing calculator. It includes, but not limited to, the price of the product, the cost of getting it here, the duties, handling charges, agent fees, etc. When the prices were calculated in December, and we recognized that the prices were not what we expected them to be, we called upon Delta to honour the agreement which they made to us. The President of Delta had visited Montserrat previously, and an agreement was made. When the shipment came, it was outside of the agreement. We therefore asked for an additional meeting to negotiate what Montserrat government wanted, and we're not going into the details of that negotiation, but we have been in a position to have the price of the 100-pound cylinders reduced by \$70, the 22-pound cylinders reduced by \$15.21, and the 20-pound cylinders by \$14.

I can say, additionally, Madam Speaker, one of the issues with us is volume. The unit cost goes up based on volume, or down based on volume. If we increase our storage capacity, then we will be able to have prices fixed for a longer period of time. Coming out of the discussions which were held last week here in Montserrat with the company, we have been

able to have an understanding that they will, in fact, increase the volumes of LPG by bringing in extra tanks, storage tanks at their cost.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My last question to the Honourable Minister of Finance.

8. The cost of living has increased astronomically in recent years. Could the Honourable Minister of Finance tell this Honourable House whether in his negotiations with the FCDO a salary increase for the public servants is a priority?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The government wishes to take a more holistic approach to tackle the cost of living on island. While we do not discount the possibility of further salary discussions, we will be approaching this with the goal of providing relief for all residents and not just civil servants. I will discuss the details of these proposals in the budget address which will take place in March.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Minister. No more questions. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment from the Honourable Nyota Mulcare

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My first questions will go to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture. My first question.

- 1. Some of the factors affecting sustainable food production on Montserrat are animals such as iguanas and agouti. Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture inform this Honourable House of the measures his Ministry intends to implement to address this persistent issue?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm just hoping that the Honourable Opposition left the best for last when they left Honourable Mulcare to ask her questions last. Madam Speaker, in answering this question, while the black iguana is a protected species, there are plans to do some population control in heavily farmed areas. And just as a point of information for this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, the black iguana is actually endemic to Montserrat. What that means is that we are the last country to actually have the original genetic black iguana, so that poses a bit of a problem for us in population control. But we have been discussing within the Ministry how to control them. We will establish a crop protection team, and part of their focus will be to control these pests using various methods of trapping and, in terms of the agoutis, even air rifling.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My second question to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

2. Can the Honourable Minister inform this Honourable House on the Ministry's plans on ensuring food security on Montserrat?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is actually a common misunderstanding of what the term food security and what it really means. So, the Ministry and myself actually felt it necessary to address that issue. See, a government can easily ensure food security on this island, but to the detriment of local agriculture production and also the health of the island's residents. And I'll just give an example, even though it's not in my answer. A government, for instance, can order a lot of food and store it, whether it be canned goods, order and store it, and that would provide food security. But I don't think that's what the Honourable Member is trying to reach. So, what we have done is talk about food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is different from food security in both approach and politics, as food security does not distinguish where food comes from or the conditions under which it is produced and distributed. Food sovereignty emphasizes ecologically appropriate production, distribution, and consumption, social economic justice, and local food systems as ways to tackle hunger and poverty. The Department of Agriculture has recognized the importance for increased and sustainable production on island. There has been a twofold approach taken, which includes reducing production losses and increasing production in specific crops. Some of these losses were sustained by pests, such as insects, and we have addressed this concern by providing bait stations, traps and chemicals for the control of some specific insects that affect specific crops. Additionally, Madam Speaker, a crop protection team has been established to assist the technicians with applying pesticides, controlling agouti, iguanas and loose livestock. The Department has provided field

fencing wire to reduce the damage from loose livestock to crop farmers, and we have also provided fencing wire to livestock farmers to assist in the control of the animals. With the aim of increasing production, the targeted crop production program is being continued and it will be extended to the four greenhouses allocated to Montserrat through the Caricom Youth and Women in Agriculture Project. With these four greenhouses in production, this should significantly reduce the need for importation on four identified crops set to be produced in these greenhouses.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My third question to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

- 3. The lack of proper irrigation remains a significant concern for many farmers on Montserrat posing a serious challenge to agriculture productivity and food security. Can the Honourable Minister of Agriculture inform this Honourable House of the specific plans and initiatives his Ministry intends to implement to address and resolve this critical issue for all farmers across the island?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has done a significant amount of work with regards to irrigation. A large quantity of irrigation hoses was purchased by the Ministry and are available for sale to farmers at a subsidized rate. In addition, the department has implemented a water subsidy program, and some 10 farms are currently benefiting from a reduced expenditure for water. Just to add, Madam Speaker, part of our thought in the Ministry is to give farmers turnkey production. What I mean by that, Madam Speaker, is, we understand that some farmers don't have the expertise to set up some of these irrigations, so we're thinking of getting additional

support within the Ministry to give them the turnkey production in terms of setting up irrigation systems for them.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, request for a supplementary question.

Madam Speaker said:

Go ahead.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

The Honourable Minister indicated only 10 farmers. Can he say what are his plans to address all the remaining farmers?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, just as a point of clarity, does she mean addressing the 10 farmers that are currently on subsidy or 10 farmers or addressing the rest of the farmers in terms of irrigation?

Madam Speaker said:

I think she said all the other farmers.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

No, but is it in terms of the water subsidy program, or is it in terms of irrigation?

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, going back to my initial question, it spoke to proper irrigation for all farmers, so I'm addressing, in respect of all farmers, not just 10, but all farmers.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I think I would have addressed that in my initial response when I said that the Ministry is intending to do turnkey production for the farmers, where we would actually help them in setting up the irrigation systems.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My fourth question to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Sports.

- 4. Given the absence of hardball cricket on Montserrat for the past five years, can the Honourable Minister of Sports provide this Honourable House with an update on the progress made to uphold the Honourable Leader of Government Business' commitment to have what was termed an easy solution to immediately fix the pitch at the Little Bay Playing Field to facilitate the return of hardball cricket to Montserrat?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Sports.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, as has been reported to me by the Ministry, the Little Bay cricket pitch was relayed over a two-year period, and the current

square can accommodate three game pitches and one practice pitch. Madam Speaker, the Salem cricket pitch and the park have also been used effectively to support cricket. However, in order to improve and retain their quality, and by that, I mean both pitches, the pitches require regular rolls utilizing a heavy roller. The sports department will explore the use of rollers from BUILT or a private company as it is this government's administration's intent to facilitate cricket on Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My next question for the Honourable Minister of Youth Affairs.

5. Can the Honourable Minister of Youth Affairs outline any new or ongoing programs aimed at empowering young people, particularly in the areas such as entrepreneurship, skills development and leadership training?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I must first say that this question was actually not submitted to me. It was submitted to the Honourable Minister of Education and she ably answered so I will just read that answer because I didn't get that question until actually sometime late yesterday. But she answered for me.

Madam Speaker said:

Where did she answer?

The Minister for Agriculture, Land, and the Environment said:

Sorry, and then thank you to the people in the Ministry for actually providing that answer to that question. So, I will read as they provided. Our national curriculum places some focus on teaching vocational sub-

jects at the secondary level and linking them with the principles of entrepreneurship. The expectation is for some school leavers to start their own business and by extension becoming self-employed. The apprenticeship program focuses on empowering our young people by allowing them to be attached for a period of one month in a field of their choice. These areas cover but are not limited to career pathways, including entrepreneurship and skills development. The Helping Youth Prepare for Employment program the HYPE program is another established program which also attaches youth within institutions to gain exposure in their field of interest for a period of a year in the first instance. This has gained success over the years as we have seen many joining these institutions on a permanent basis following their attachments. Leadership training is undertaken in youth, community and sports departments capacity building workshops which are held primarily for the attached apprentices and other young persons who are attached in the communities. New accredited programs are planned to be introduced along with the deliberate enhancement of the current apprenticeship program which will be better tailored to the needs of young persons and fill the skills gap on Montserrat. These programs include but are not limited to carpentry apprentice program, electrician apprentice program, masonry apprentice program, plumbing apprentice program, general handyman apprentice program course, new port operative apprentice program, two-year mechanic apprentice program, the reclaim program, the reintegration into society RISE program, the community learning enhancement program and the community English language program. The programs are intended to develop and deliver innovative youth employment based on evidence from existing projects and programs. They will promote the creation of new jobs and improve the quality of existing jobs.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure et al. from the Honourable Nyota Mulcare

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Also, thank you to the Honourable Minister for forwarding the questions, I guess because of the change in Ministries.

So, my questions now go to the Honourable Minister of BUILT. My first question.

- 1. With the St. Patrick's festival period quickly approaching, can the Honourable Minister kindly inform this Honourable House of a Ministry's plans to complete road patching in the entire Little Bay area as well as the clean up and beautification of the surroundings given the importance of this area for social activities during this festival? If not, could the Honourable Minister provide a rationale for this decision?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Roads.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, BUILT continues to undertake initiatives to enhance roadways and provide economic opportunities for residents. The outsourced verge cutting program, Belham to Lookout, ensures regular maintenance while creating jobs for the local community. Additionally, roadways in south of the Belham River, Corkhill, Foxes Bay, Richmond Hill, have been cleared, improving access to the area and enhancing tourism experience, including Little Bay. With the St. Patrick's festival period quickly approaching, BUILT plays a vital role in assisting with festival preparations. This was evident during the festival seasons when we, without encouragement, used our volition and coordinated under the guidance of the Montserrat Arts Council and other government agencies. The Ministry is ready to collaborate with key stakeholders responsible for beautifying the festival areas, ensuring that residents and visitors alike can enjoy a scenic and welcoming environment. With regards to road patching in the Little Bay area, the heavy traffic associated with the ongoing port project has had a significant impact on sections of the road network. Only limited road patching will be carried out in the area at this time to reduce waste and allocate resources towards more cost-effective and sustainable solutions across other critical networks. The Ministry remains committed to supporting the festival preparations, working within budget constraints to deliver an enjoyable and safe experience for all during this important season.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My second question to the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

2. Can the Honourable Minister inform this Honourable House whether the Ministry intends to reinstate night security at the John A. Osborne Airport? If not, could the Honourable Minister provide a rationale for this decision? If yes, could the Honourable Minister provide a timeline for when such action might be implemented?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. The Ministry of BUILT, Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour and Transportation, including Ecclesiastical Affairs, has consistently maintained that having permanent night security officers stationed at the John A. Osborne Airport is the ideal arrangement. This position is informed by our commitment to ensuring the security and operational integrity of this critical national facility, particularly during off-peak hours when vulnerabilities may increase. However, as the Honourable Member is aware, under Section 28 of the Montserrat Constitution Order 2010, the authority to constitute offices rests with the Governor in His Majesty's name and on His Majesty's behalf. Therefore, while the Ministry remains firmly in support of reinstating night security at the airport, the final determination of this matter lies outside the Ministry's direct purview. Our aim is to align with the broader framework of security responsibilities while upholding the safety of airport facilities, staff, and the public. The Ministry will continue to advocate for the necessary resources and arrangements to ensure security of this critical facility.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My third question to the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

- 3. Given the fact that the cost of living on Montserrat is exorbitant and noting that the groundwork and recommendations have been completed by the Labour Advisory Board, can the Honourable Minister of Labour inform this Honourable House on the expected timeframe for the implementation of the minimum wage for Montserrat? If the intent is not to implement, could the Honourable Minister provide a rationale for this decision?*

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Labour.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Honourable Member for the question and the work that went into the recommendation. I have the paper with me as a testimony that it has not been thrown aside. The Labour Advisory Board has indeed completed its comprehensive review and recommended setting the minimum wage at \$12.50 per hour. The Government will review the Labour Advisory Board proposal with a view to decide on the most favourable or feasible approach to its implementation. This includes considering the financial implications for both the public and private sectors, as well as the legislative and administrative steps required. You will have heard my Honourable Colleague speak about the enhanced poverty study, which will help to inform this decision. While I cannot provide an exact timeline today, I can assure the Honourable House that the Ministry is committed to advancing this process. Our goal is to ensure a decision that is not only fair but also sustainable for Montserrat's economy. Should the Government decide not to proceed with the implementation of a minimum wage, an explanation will be provided to this Honourable House and to the public outlining the rationale and alternative measures to address the cost of living and labour market conditions.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

*Questions to the Honourable Premier from the Honourable
Nyota Mulcare*

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next set of questions will go to the Honourable Premier and Leader of Government Business.

- 1. Now that the Honourable Leader of Government Business has had the opportunity to dialogue with the UK team at the Joint Ministerial Council, JMC, and has further consented to accept the transfer of three migrants with criminal convictions from Diego Garcia to Montserrat to serve their sentences due to the fact that he has stated that it is difficult for them to go into the United Kingdom as once they get to the UK, they are trapped in the UK system. And further noting that the Honourable Leader of Government Business has publicly declared that once these prisoners have served their sentences, they will have to be promptly removed from Montserrat. Can the Honourable Leader of Government Business please inform this Honourable House a) if he has received this assurance in writing and that these prisoners will leave Montserrat immediately upon the completion of their sentences? If not, why?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, since this subject matter falls within the constitutional remit of the Governor, the Governor has provided me with responses which I will faithfully read, and I will not be in a position to provide any responses as it relates to any possible supplementaries. We have set this out as one of the conditions of agreement, and it has been committed to by HMG.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Question (b) to that question. What preparations will be undertaken to ensure the upgrade of His Majesty's prison facilities to properly facilitate these new inmates? If none, why?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

There is no requirement, Madam Speaker, to upgrade facilities because of new inmates. The prison has a program of work ongoing to improve its infrastructure and conditions, which is supported by the Ministry of Justice in the UK, including but not limited to providing expertise from an ex-prison governor in the UK. Enhanced rehabilitation support and continual training and development for the staff. Last year, the prison opened its own library, which includes access to computers, and we are recruiting for a teacher to provide enhanced rehabilitation and education opportunities.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So, the Minister went into responding to question (c). So I'll just go on to (d). What steps are being taken to safeguard the well-being of current inmates and to minimise potential negative influences or impacts that may arise from the presence of these prisoners? If none, why?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier. Sorry.

The Premier said:

The prison has a continual obligation to safeguard all inmates. Every prisoner is assessed, and the relevant actions taken. Any new prisoner is treated in the same way.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(e) What financial support has the UK Government committed to assist with the additional costs related to the custody, rehabilitation and eventual removal of these prisoners? If no financial support is being given or requested, why?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

The discussions with HMG are ongoing. Costs will include, of course, all transportation and housing costs and support for the general support of the prison, including rehabilitation, education and mental wellbeing. At this stage, there is not a final agreement in place, and the details continue to be discussed between the Governor's Office, the Office of the Premier, the Attorney General's Chambers and HMG.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Question 2.

2. The Honourable Leader of Government Business has stated publicly that work is being conducted to make serious financial injection into the private sector, particularly for hotel and tourism infrastructure development, as well as housing construction. Could the Honoura-

ble Leader of Government Business kindly inform this Honourable House, (a), of the specific process or mechanism through which these funds will be sourced?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I took the liberty of responding to a, b and c of two. I saw it as one question. I will provide a single response to all parts of the question. The Government has not at any time indicated that it will make serious financial injections into the private sector. It is important that Members of this Honourable House quote accurately rather than making spurious allegations. However, the Government is currently working on initiatives to spur private sector involvement in the economic growth and development of the island. As the Honourable Member would no doubt be aware, it would be imprudent to provide details of negotiations before they are concluded.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I note the Honourable Minister's comment on providing accurate information, but I will inform this Honourable House that my information is accurate because they were provided by him. But I'll move on. Question 3.

- 3. The previous Government approved a change in the working hours for the Montserrat Public Service to allow only selected workers the opportunity to choose whether they wish to work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. or from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with implementation set for 1st February 2025. However, this decision was made without proper consultation with various public service groups and without providing the unions with sufficient time to engage with their membership. Given that Montserrat operates as a democratic society, can the Honourable Leader of Government Business inform this Honourable House***

of the following (a) what measures will be taken by this Government to ensure that this decision is retracted and that the principles of democracy are held in this matter as well as in all future employment related matters; and (b) an outline of the steps that will be taken to ensure that future policy changes affecting public service workers undergo a comprehensive and transparent consultation process with all stakeholders, including the unions?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wish to highlight that the Honourable Member has stated that this was initiated by the previous administration. Hence, I wish to state what this current administration has done. The error in published communication was recognized and retracted. Consultations are currently ongoing. It is important to note that the implementation date will be finalized only after the completion of consultation. On (b), the following are the steps which will have been established. Cabinet supports a concept; consultations at initial and appropriate intervals throughout the process; feedback incorporated into options and recommendations; then it comes back for approval; then implementation and post-implementation review.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker and thank you to the Honourable Member for that response. Number 4. question to the Honourable Leader of Government Business.

- 4. Can the Honourable Leader of Government Business inform this Honourable House of his government's commitment to providing economic relief and empowerment for residents, specifically outlining the expected initiatives aimed at (a) easing the financial burdens faced by residents, particularly the most vulnerable households, and***

(b) ensuring that all residents, including those at risk of being marginalized, are supported and included in Montserrat economic development plans?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government is working on initiatives that will potentially ease the cost of living of all residents of Montserrat, including the vulnerable. These will be discussed at the upcoming Budget Support Mission, and more detail will be provided during the budget presentations in March.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My final question to the Honourable Leader.

5. Can the Honourable Leader of Government Business inform this Honourable House (a) on what is the local process for receiving and shortlisting applicants for Commonwealth scholarships; (b) whether decisions to deny single applicants are made solely by the responsible Ministry representative, or whether all applications are forward to the committee responsible for processing, and (c) what measures are in place to ensure the authenticity of the process, particularly in safeguarding applicants marginalization or victimization, due to personal biases or attacks?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the Government of Montserrat, through the Human Resources Management Unit, invites citizens and permanent residents an-

nually to apply for Commonwealth Masters Scholarships tenable in the United Kingdom. The process is as follows. Applicants are invited to submit their applications to the Commonwealth Development Office in the FCDO via their online application system. As the Government is the official nominating agency for Montserrat, applicants are required to provide a copy of their application to the Human Resources Management Unit addressed to the Chairman of the National Training and Scholarships Advisory Committee, and I'll refer to it hereinafter as the NTSAC. The NTSAC evaluates applications based on the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission's established guidelines and in line with Government of Montserrat national priorities and policy framework. Nominated applications are submitted to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission for final review and consideration. In response to question (b), all applications received are submitted to the NTSAC, which is the body responsible for the evaluation of scholarship and award applications within the Government of Montserrat. Candidates submit their applications through the Permanent Secretary or Department Head, who in turn expresses support or otherwise, taking into consideration the Ministry or Department's strategic goals, existing human resource capacity, and implications of the officers' absence for the program duration. (c) of the question all applications are evaluated collectively by the NTSAC, which comprises members representing various sectors, agencies, and disciplines. This approach ensures decisions are not subject to the influence of any single individual, mitigating the risk of personal bias.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Education, Health and Social Services from Honourable Nyota Mulcare

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next set of questions is to the Honourable Minister of Education, Health.

- 1. Given the challenges faced in retaining and recruiting qualified teachers, can the Honourable Minister of Education outline the steps being taken to retain and attract teachers, including any initiatives or professional development programs?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

I'd like to thank the Honourable Mulcare, Madam Speaker, for her question, similar to that of Honourable Romeo, so forgive some repetition. The solutions, which admittedly we don't have enough money for, addressing salaries and allowances, allowing them free medical and dental care, that doesn't cost us much, planning good quality and affordable homes, finding solutions to the problems which they face in the classrooms, hiring teaching assistants, being faster and more effective at filling teaching gaps, improving continued education programs that are provided for them, and ensuring that the students they receive at every level are actually prepared for that level, which is one of their huge challenges at the moment. Additionally, the Ministry, in conjunction with the Human Resources Unit, has advertised and are in the process of trying to select an educational supervisor with specific and focused UK funding, and the post I have told is referred to as, this is the post that I'm hoping will bring us expertise and hopefully funding, the post I've been told is referred to as the Principal Strategic Change Manager and an Education, Educational Standards and Excellence Partner, and this post has been felt critical to the everyday support of the teaching fraternity in coping with their multiple issues in education. The added support and leadership are also expected to assist generally in teacher retention programs and, as I said, in securing UK funding for local education projects, and regarding funding as a Ministry, we welcome this, bring the money and come.

The other comprehensive programs we have formally requested, made requests for, will also help with overall improvements and will improve the teacher's experience in the classroom basically, so sorting out the special educational needs issue, sorting out the fact that some students are hungry and struggle with attention in the mornings, ensuring that the teachers are dealing with safe students who are adequately prepared by giving them assistance and supervision and guidance in terms of educational programmes in the afternoon, and then obviously their building repairs program. No teacher wants to be injured during her course of work, and it presents quite an off-putting image for us in education. We

expect that once we can properly address these needs that teachers will be more motivated to remain in our system.

Additionally, the Ministry is currently trying to advance in an electronic system for education, education management information systems, which should digitally transform, modernize and enhance the systems being utilized by teachers. And in regard to teachers in the future, we are presently planning to intentionally engage third-form students to see which ones are interested in focusing on teaching as a career option and hoping to support and guide them on this path so that we turn them into the teachers that we need. We are also in the process of initializing a teacher training programme on island for other persons who want to become teachers, beginning with teaching assistants, and then hoping to expand the program to trained teacher status, either locally or off island, and it's anticipated that this program will involve the local community college and regional teacher training colleges and universities. We are already presently trying to invite teachers to Montserrat and other educational professionals in the diaspora to assist with what we are trying to build in education.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

My final question and to the Honourable Minister of Education.

2. Can the Honourable Minister of Education provide details on planned updates to the school curriculum to better align with regional and global standards, particularly in the areas of STEM, that is, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and digital literacy?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Madam Speaker, I thank Honourable Mulcare for her question again. So, this response is directly from the Ministry, but basically at the end of last year, we were in discussions about the new national curriculum that has had some delays in implementation, but this is something we want to start now, as January has come. The new national curriculum was developed to deliver an excellent foundation in reading, writing and mathematics to ensure that every young person gets the opportunity to develop speaking and listening skills. The new national curriculum is built on the foundation of high standards to cater for all and has a cultural learning life skill component to set up our children to achieve and thrive for the future. The development of the new national curriculum has taken into consideration the following elements: alignment with regional and global content, but in particular, local knowledge and resources associated with living and non-living things. The approach is grounded in problem-based learning using the scientific method of inquiry or discovery, which uses the application of the STEM areas. Consistent use of technological tools, technological tools to experience both teaching and learning in the classroom, so interactive whiteboards, laptops, small projectors, and we expect to have a proper and developed ICT curriculum with the aim of introducing basic ICT skills into the primary sector. The Ministry's mission is always to achieve a high and rising standard for teachers and schools. Therefore, we will always make sure that we make adjustments where necessary to suit the needs of each student, giving opportunities which align with the region and that they're able to align with global standards, in particular in the area of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and digital literacy. While there continue to be challenges with retaining teachers, our teachers thus far have proven their ability to complete their syllabus with the introduction of the syllabus with the existing resources, and we intend to use all means that we have available to ensure that we implement this program and that it's accepted and works well for our students. So, we're assessing it as time goes on.

Madam Speaker said:

Are we done with questions?

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. That ends my session of questions.

Madam Speaker said:

I would just like to ask the Ministers who would not have provided their responses to get them into the legislature department. Okay. Thank you. And before we move into the adjournment for lunch, okay, let's just go into the adjournment. Recognize the Honourable Premier?

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I was hoping that we would have been in a position to do the Supplementary Appropriation Bill before adjourning for lunch. We've just been here for three hours.

Madam Speaker said:

Lunch is downstairs and we wouldn't want it to get cold. Okay. Okay. If you want us to move on, we'll move on.

10. MOTIONS

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

First Reading – Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to move the motion for the first reading of a Bill shortly entitled *Supplementary Appropriation 24 No. 2 Bill of 2025, No. 1 of 2025*.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder, please? I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure, etc.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion for the introduction of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Bill shortly entitled Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025 be read a first time.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will be read a first time.

Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Second Reading – Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I beg to move a motion for the second reading of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025, No. 1 of 2025.

Madam Speaker said:

Can we have a seconder?

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Bill shortly entitled Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025 be read a second time. The House is now open for debate.

The Premier said:

You do the suspension on the third reading. You can do two readings before. Madam Speaker, this Bill seeks to authorize some variations in ex-

penditure, moving around some old money and including some new funds. The various sums of money set out under the schedule totalling 9.9 million in addition to the sum of 157 million granted under the supply votes by the Appropriation Act of 2024 No. 11 of 2024 and by the Supplementary Appropriation Act 2024 No. 16 of 2024 are declared to be charged upon and made payable from the Consolidated Fund.

The various sums of money set out under the schedule totalling 16.2 million in addition to the sum of 106.4 million under the development fund votes by the Appropriation Act 2024 No. 11 of 2024 and the Supplementary Appropriation Act 2024 No. 16 of 2024 are declared to be charged upon and made payable from the development fund. With the approval of this Bill, the Accountant General will be authorized and required from time to time upon the authority of warrants issued under the hand of the Minister for Finance to withdraw and pay the sums appropriated for the purposes set out in the schedule to the several services mentioned as the warrants may direct out of the Consolidated Fund without further order or formality.

We have two sections, Madam Speaker. We have the supply votes and we have the development votes. Sorry, just one moment, Madam Speaker. My technology has eluded me. Okay, wrong place. From the supply votes, the summary and schedule provided for increases and decreases to the supply votes in the amount totalling \$9.9 million. The increases, vote 05, police, additional funding is being requested to provide for the safeguarding justice program. The requested 60,000 will represent the initial drawdown and would cover remuneration for key resources. These additional funding were provided by the FCDO.

Vote 10, legislature, an amount of 47,500 is required to cover salaries in strategic administration; \$36,000 and the Constitution Commission, 11,200 until the end of the current fiscal year.

Vote 12, Office of the Deputy Governor, an amount of 1.4 million is required under program to cover salaries, which would be 149,300 and pensions of 963,600 until the end of the fiscal year. Additionally, 280,000 is required for urgent repairs at the prison.

Vote 15, Office of the Premier, an amount of \$125,000 is required to cover salaries and allowances on the program. Strategic administration,

43,800. Broadcasting, 18,600. Regional affairs, 25,600. Access, 3,400. Immigration, 34,000 until the end of this current fiscal year.

Vote 20, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, an amount of 7 million is required to cover legal claims against the Government of Montserrat. I'll repeat that again. An amount of 7 million is required to cover legal claims and judgements against the Government of Montserrat. The amount requested will also cover ongoing cases expected to be resolved within this current fiscal year. And Madam Speaker, just to elaborate, these are matters which we met, but we're clearing them up.

Vote 40, Ministry of Education. The Ministry is seeking to open line 218, pensions and gratuities under program, early childhood. This will facilitate the transfer of funds into the correct line for processing. Ministry of Health, an amount of \$1.3 million is requested to facilitate the processing of critical expenses under the following programs. Let me read that again. Ministry of Health, an amount of \$1.3 million is being requested to facilitate the processing of critical expenses under the following programs: Strategic management, 95,000 is required under the professional services line for the payment for the Canadian health insurance license fee for five months plus the support staff on service level agreement for this service; Primary health care 73,200 is required to cover increases in expenditure relating to the visiting specialist program; Secondary health care \$676,700 is required to cover expenditure in relation to coverage for specialized positions, that's \$388,300 for that; a shortage in allowances of \$153,400 and an increase in maintenance costs of \$135,000 to allow for preventative maintenance measures to be taken on critical equipment; social protection \$427,600 is required to facilitate expenditure associated with increases in the number of medivacs, referrals and other social protection payments such as food packages and funeral grants. In addition to grants and contributions for increases to the home care for the elderly.

Madam Speaker, permit me now to go on to the development votes. Development votes is seeking a supplement of \$16.2 million, and the details are as follows. The following projects were provided for under development for fund warrant No. 2 for the financial year 2024/25 and seek to approve the additional expenditure of \$40,000 under the expand and diversify the tourism product project. These funds were provided for under development fund reallocation No. 1 warrant. Funds will aid the procurement of a welcome sign as well as to allow for the contracting of ser-

vices and purchasing of materials required for social media and communication management under the Tourism Authority. Approve the additional expenditure of \$80,000 under the develop visitor attraction and amenities project. These funds were provided for under development fund reallocation warrant No. 1, and funds will help to bring various components of this project to a close.

We're also seeking to approve the opening and expenditure of \$11,900 under the biodiversity and conservation project. These funds represent the balance held by Darwin to support the scholarship awarded. We're also seeking to approve the opening and expenditure of \$159,600 under the management of the invasive fire ants project. These funds were provided by DEFRA to allow for various objectives to be achieved, which include but are not limited to a feasibility and viability study to be conducted in the priority areas. Assess whether the invasive species have caused any changes to the community structure of local and diversity and other invertebrates through the collection of samples and the development of strengthening of regulatory on biodiversity actions and biosecurity actions which are essential in keeping the population levels low. That's the ant population levels and not the human population levels low and mitigate its negative impact on the ecosystem, public health infrastructure and the economy.

We are also seeking to approve the additional expenditure of \$130,700, which is required under the housing assistance program. These funds represent the balance remaining under the project for awarding of grants and financial assistance to successful applicants. We're also seeking to approve, Madam Speaker, the additional expenditure of \$15.9 million under the hospital project. These funds were provided for by the FCDO to fund additional works associated with the construction of the hospital.

Additionally, under fund reallocation warrant one for financial aid 24/25, we're seeking to transfer \$120,000 from the protect and enhance the natural environment project to the expand and diversify the tourism project of \$40,000 and develop visitor attraction and amenities project by \$80,000. Savings under the project were found due to various components no longer deemed necessary to progress. So, Madam Speaker, with these very few words, I commend this Bill for a second reading.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. We already had a seconder for the motion, so we'll open the floor for debate. I recognize the Honourable Minister of Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I'll be very short. I have already seconded the motion. I have also discussed the various sections that money is going to be moved to, and Madam Speaker, I can say these speak to growth, protection, and also Madam Speaker ensuring that our people are well looked after. So, Madam Speaker, as much as I would have liked to have some of this money for beautifying the environment and for roads, I will defer, and I wholeheartedly support where these monies are now going. So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. Any further presentations? I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, Madam Speaker, we are aware that from time to time, it's necessary to bring a supplementary to the House to get along with government business. Madam Speaker, as it pertains to vote 5, the additional funding that was provided in the tune of 60,000. Madam Speaker, for the safeguarding of the justice program, we welcome that, Madam Speaker. I hope that there will be more funds coming as there is a lot of work to be done where this is concerned, and this vote is under the police vote. Madam Speaker, since I'm on the police, Madam Speaker, sometimes it's really strange when you have discussions such as policies to prevent police from working on their own time and so forth. Given that Madam Speaker, we are discussing a supplementary here that speaks to money and we know that the government do not have the level of funding to pay police or civil servants adequately and therefore if they use initiative to do jobs on their own time, they should be allowed. This is not a dictatorship. Last time I checked, we are operating under a democratic system.

Madam Speaker, as it pertains to the Office of the Deputy Governor, vote 12, in the tune of 1,392,900, it is required to cover salaries, pensions, and additional 280,000 is required for urgent repairs of the prison. Madam

Speaker, these are all important areas that must be covered. I'm thankful that there are some underspend and new funds that can be found to address these issues. Madam Speaker, I do hope, I do not know, I'm asking if the civil servants would have left some four to six months ago, left the service and have not been paid their gratuity to this point. If the moving of these funds, Madam Speaker, include monies to resolve that issue. I do hope that that's the case, Madam Speaker, because we don't want to see a situation where people are suing the government and then we have to be paying monies again unnecessarily when they could be used for other services.

Madam Speaker, I do also notice that under health, the Ministry of Health, I don't think anybody will ever argue against the Ministry of Health getting funds. Madam Speaker, we see the amount of 1,272,500 requested to facilitate, for example, strategic management, 95,000 required for professional services. For the Canadian health insurance license fee, five months, I don't know if the Minister will speak on this Bill, but it would be nice to provide some clarification as to what the Canadian health insurance license fee is all about. I do sure it's something important, but just for the clarification of the Parliament, I would appreciate that.

Primary health care, 73,000 required for increased expenditure relating to the visiting specialist program. We do welcome that, Madam Speaker. I also notice for secondary care, some 676,700 required to cover expenditure in relation to coverage of specialized positions, shortage of allowances, etc. Madam Speaker, on this matter, I'm aware of patients who would have, of course, we congratulate the government to have the money to send them overseas, but while overseas, patients would have basically suffered from strokes, they were able to get therapy, but returning to Montserrat, no therapy has been administered. I wonder if that is because there is no one actually employed within the Ministry to carry out such important specialized work, or if they just don't have the money to pay someone. I don't know why it is, but I would like to see this being addressed because there are patients in the hospital, as we speak, who require this therapy, receive the therapy, while in another country, but having returned to Montserrat, nil, nothing, zero. So, as they say, only in Montserrat, we get away with that. So, I hope that we don't get away with that in Montserrat this time around, and that the authorities would deal with this subject matter urgently, as everyone is important. No one left

behind should be the motto and followed. So, Madam Speaker, I do support the moving of these funds in order to allow the government to address these important issues.

On the matter, Madam Speaker, of this 9,874,400 in the supply votes, one would note that 70%, Madam Speaker, of this supplementary in the tune of 7 million, Madam Speaker, is being spent to cover legal claims against the Government of Montserrat. Madam Speaker, as it states, it will also cover ongoing cases expected to be resolved within the fourth quarter, which is this quarter between January and March. Madam Speaker, it left me to ask a question because there's 7 million to cover ongoing cases, and we also heard mention in the House previously of an \$8 million claim against the government that has to be paid to, I think it was the Galloways group or something like that. Madam Speaker, I beg to ask the question whether or not the \$7 million, if part of it is going towards the \$8 million that has to be paid to the Galloway group, if not, then we're talking about an additional \$8 million. I would like to get some clarification on the matter so I could clearly understand what's captured within the 7 million. If part of it is going towards the \$8 million that should be paid to the Galloways. And while I'm speaking of that, Madam Speaker, I want to encourage us all who hold any key position in government, be it Ministerial, be it Opposition, be it leader of government business, be it any other authority within the Government of Montserrat, that we understand and that we understand clearly that when mistakes are made by any of us, that is not we who pays this money, but is the taxpayers who have to pay this money. And it's unfair to have the taxpayers, who are in most cases innocent to what went down, having to pay \$7 million out in claims against the government. And as I said, I don't know if the 8 million is an addition to the 7 million, if the 7 million is part of the 8 million.

Madam Speaker, I know in the past we have had leaders of government business and their Cabinet Ministers making decisions that were challenged in the court, and it has resulted in the government having to pay significant funds. Yes, they may not have started at \$8 million, they may have started at 3 million, but in time, as within their wisdom, the legal person on the government side may choose to appeal and so forth and get stretched out, and now we have to pay an interest. So, from 3 million to \$8 million. Madam Speaker, if I was a Minister, I would rebuke that. But, Madam Speaker, all I can do is urge, Madam Speaker, that we are more diligent in our actions, that we understand before we make decisions, that

we seek proper sound legal advice, proper sound technical advice, Madam Speaker, and not make decisions on emotions or political, politricks decisions. Because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it is the taxpayers, innocent taxpayers who have to pay these monies, not the persons who made the mistakes or made the wrong decisions. So, Madam Speaker, I cannot urge enough that all of us who sit here in this parliament and those who act on behalf of the government, take due care and attention to make sure before making decisions that they are sound technically and sound legally, Madam Speaker. I do not want to know that we continue with this kind of situation where we keep paying out all these significant monies.

Madam Speaker, this supplementary on the supply votes of 7 million that we are paying out represents 70% of what is brought to the House. It means that 70% of this money here cannot be used to assist teachers who've been going in the pockets to buy supplies to help the students when that should be provided by the government. This cannot, because the 7 million has to be paid out, you cannot use any of it to help with the sports facilities, you cannot use any of it to help with the sports men and women, you cannot help any of it to pay people to teach people the culture, you cannot pay any of it, Madam Speaker, to get critical health equipment. You know, I mean, it's not really a pleasure for me to come here and even debate this, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, social services, when we come here and we call on the Minister to do this and do that from social services, I sure it burns the Minister to know that 70% of what is presented here is going in paying legal claim. Of course, justice must be served and if people are treated wrongly, they must be paid. If they sue, they must be paid. But the point I'm making here is that we must take due care and attention, not because we figure that we're immune to these things and we will not have to pay personally. Maybe they should start making us pay personally and I'll bet you that you will not have even one dollar claim from coming here against government. So, Madam Speaker, this is very important and I'm very passionate about this because I hate to see 70% of the supply votes coming here going towards claims against government.

Madam Speaker, I must say to you, when you have people in the community asking about jobs and \$7 million that is coming in the supply votes, none of it can be used to supply to do any jobs. You gotta pay the people. So, we must as Members of this Parliament and government un-

derstand that when the Opposition comes here and we scrutinize these supply votes and we speak up against and criticize, it's not because we want to criticize, but we are showing you, Madam Speaker, the serious implications and the poor innocent taxpayers who have to now pay these monies and now they are denied all these different services that they could have gotten for seven million. You could have built 21 homes, Madam Speaker, and put people who are out there who are looking for homes to go in but we can't do it because \$7 million dollars, 70% of the supply vote is gone in legal claims.

Madam Speaker, I must say that I do welcome the EC \$15,890,000 that's been drawn down to go towards the hospital project. I know that a particular Member of Parliament did not want it mentioned, Madam Speaker, that 15 million pounds was negotiated by PDM and the other 15 million or 16 million pounds by MCAP. But, Madam Speaker, I am not afraid to give Jack his jacket and give Jenny her dress because I say, Madam Speaker, government is continuous, and if it takes two governments to get the money and another one to implement then so is it. I don't have to come here and twist nothing, Madam Speaker, because I'm straight as an arrow, straight to your heart, Madam Speaker. So, you see, Madam Speaker, I want to just say I do support the supplementary, and I rest my case. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other intervention? I recognize the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm seeing most people in this room for the first time in nearly a month. So, before I say a word, please allow me to say Happy New Year to you first and all in this Honourable House. And I guess everybody had a chance to make statements publicly on the radio. I didn't. So, I have to extend those greetings to, of course, all our Ministers, Honourable Premier, Parliamentary Secretaries, my fellow Members of the Opposition, Honourable FS, AG, Clerk, Legislative Staff, ZJB, the fittest man especially on my left, and the police officers, and especially the people of Montserrat who happen to be our boss. So, Happy New Year to all. And I

can tell you my theme for the year is to think big for the people of Montserrat and to fight hard for them.

Madam Speaker, I was taught that a major role of all elected Members is to ask questions, all of us on both sides, especially the Opposition. We are also taught that we must know the answers to our questions before we ask them, which means our questions are not always for us.

Madam Speaker said:

Are we speaking to the Bill before us?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam Speaker, I'm introducing myself, and that I want to make it plain that the questions I ask, Madam Speaker, are not just for us but for those listening and to help us all to get a better understanding of what is being discussed. That's all I'm saying, Madam Speaker. I am happy, like the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and others, to see that funds are being added and reallocated for good reason. I also know that the government is new, so they have to patch up and fix what they can. We can't blame them for a lot of what they faced. And we also know that we have limited funds, as the Honourable Premier said earlier today. However, our job is to challenge them and our UK government to do their best, the utmost, for the well-being of our people. Regarding the details under Schedule A, Supply Votes Summary, mentioned, which provides \$9.871.400 million additional. I'd like to ask one or two questions. One, what is the overall revised estimate of revenue and expenditure as of January 2025? I hope, somehow, I don't know if that's too much to ask. What is the overall revised estimate of revenue and expenditure as at January 2025? And that leads me to ask, particularly, what is the current estimated deficit or surplus? And perhaps, if there's a surplus, the Honourable Premier can tell us where the surplus came from. Give us a good idea. Madam Speaker, under Vote 5, police additional funding provided by the FCDO, it speaks to \$60,000 being allocated or drawn down to cover remuneration for key resources. So, what is the total additional funds allocated, and what are the key resources being financed mentioned here? What are they within the police force? I hope I'm not asking too difficult a question.

Okay, vote 10, legislature, speaks to the amount of \$47,000 required to cover salaries in strategic administration. What area in strategic administration are we referring to? Well, curiously, I was asked the question, and I couldn't answer it. And I just want to draw the Honourable Premier and Ministers' attention to the fact that while we speak about funding the legislature, that the opposition Office has put forward a new spend request. And in keeping with the one government, one Montserrat theme, I'm hoping that you will support our new spend so that we can function in supporting you better. I had to put in that plug because we don't, you know, we have to make sure when they come and you discover this, that you're going to support us, Honourable Premier and Ministers. Mentioned by the Honourable Opposition, spoke about the \$963,000 to cover salaries, \$149,000, but pensions, \$963,600 until the end of the fiscal year. I guess, Honourable Premier will provide more clarity on that because you did ask a question. Why such a large amount? What is it for?

Now, it also speaks to an additional \$280,000 that is required for urgent repairs to the prison. I don't want to repeat the question Honourable Lewis asked, so let me - Honourable Mulcare asked about the prison and the prisoners coming, and I thought probably they were repairing the prison with the prisoners coming in mind. I'm wondering this: will the prisoners who come continue to have legal aid, which they have huge sums for in the UK right now, to represent them as refugees and asylum seekers? Will they have that available? Are we going to be asking for more funds to make sure that they have legal representation while they're here, or will they continue to have the one that Britain provides? And at the same time, will our prisoners have legal aid? And certainly, I expect that the media from the UK is going to be visiting Montserrat to see what's happening to those prisoners, and it will be an excellent opportunity for the Honourable Premier to make sure that we get additional funds to this amount, as mentioned today, to bring the standards of our prison up to an acceptable one. I remember Honourable Buffonge spoke about standards. Well, I believe that we should set standards. If nobody wants to pay for them, that's up to them. But we need to set the standards, outline what it will cost for those standards, and then let us have a debate over funding. Not giving and saying we don't have money and we're begging and they have, no. Let us establish a standard, insist on a standard, and make, as I said, a strong case, fight hard for the people of Montserrat. Because Madam Speaker, it's important in these debates to get everybody to understand that the prisoners at present, 60 of them, 60 asylum seekers on

Diego Garcia, which is a British territory, guess how much they spent on them in a year? 50 million pounds. 50 million. That is the exact amount almost as our recurrent budget, which includes what our people work for, 40 percent, and 60 percent that the British government provided for us, almost the same amount and that... Think about it. This budget for 4,000 plus persons is less than 50 million, just under. Hospital, medevac, social services, some of what we're mentioning in this Bill. We need to pay doctors, nurses, teachers, police force, primary schools, the secondary school and teachers, air and sea access, nearly 1,000 civil servants, road maintenance, all of which comes from our taxpayers on Montserrat and the taxpayers in the UK. And 60 people, you're spending 50 million pounds on, something no make sense. And, Honourable Premier, the Opposition is willing to stand by the government in making a stronger case than ever, than I ever made, than anybody ever made before. So please remember that we are going to hold you to the one Montserrat theme. And I'll come back to that in a second.

Let's see what else the Honourable Lewis didn't touch. Yes, well, it's a sad thing that settlement of legal bills for mistakes made by an administration 15 years ago, and I'm not trying to get into any political game right here, I'm just saying are being taken from the current year's surplus, if this is a surplus, that was gained on the back of our poor people, our businesses, that's where the surplus came from because of the high freight, the increased freight, cost of goods, duties are higher, fuel and everything costs more, the people are paying the price. And instead of offering an opportunity to ease their burden with a surplus that is gained, we're going to have to take that surplus, almost all of it, to cover legal fees for a mistake made 15 years ago. That was not sorted out in the 15 years, so I'm not trying to point to anybody. Think about it: EC \$7 million that could have provided money for the ferry, that could have allowed the Honourable Premier to say to SVG, I want your Twin Otter to join the access relief coming up. He could have said, like St. Kitts, here's a cost of living adjustment to all, not just some, not just public servants, but to everybody. He could have said something, but guess what? The people of Montserrat at a time when, after COVID, we're still trying to recover, you're going to force us to pay \$7 million or whatever, whatever the figure that's coming up, from our measly little budget. That is not fair. And if the St. Kitts Government can do something, surely the Government of Montserrat, in conjunction with the UK Government, can do better. Am I right, Honourable? I see somebody nodding, and I'm not going

to call your name. Am I correct? Well, I hope you tell the people of Montserrat that I'm supporting you in making the argument because a lot of people misunderstand my role.

What else do I want to speak about so I don't touch on what Honourable Lewis touched on, the £16 million for the hospital. Is that for work already done? It says it has to be spent in the next two months. Is it work already done? Is it because of the underestimated figure for the construction of the hospital prior to now? The funds are classified, are mentioned here as additional. Additional to how much, right? Underestimation of a cost of work and additional work are two different things. So, which is it? Is it additional work, or is it for underestimated calculations? Okay, so I repeat, was it just an underestimation of the original cost? And what is the nature of the additional work, if there is additional work? Is it work already done? Okay, and so that we're quick, some of us may need to eat soon. The last and most important point I want to make is this one.

Office of the Premier, vote 15. An amount of \$125,400 is required to cover salaries and allowances under programs. Strategic management, I don't know, right. But then it speaks about access. Yes, it speaks about \$3,400. That's all that's been added to the funds already had. The access budget is only being increased by a mere \$3,400. This suggests that the payments to Winair for the contract that was mentioned were already largely in the access budget. You didn't really need to ask anybody for funds. So, this is the question I was asked by somebody who took the time to read what was circulated. Why did the Premier have to seek permission from the Governor, as he said on the radio, or from the FCDO, to spend money already in his budget when he mentioned he needed their permission to get money to work on the contract? Was the permission for single sourcing? it had something to do with procurement. That's why I asked him earlier, did he ask for funds? And I'm not going to get into any debate there. Permission to use what you have, only 3,400 leaves to some questions.

I want to close on a safety issue with access, which affects exactly what we're negotiating today and will affect how we negotiate in the future. I shared this with the Parliament before, and Madam Speaker, I'd like to share it with you, Honourable Premier, Deputy Premier, Attorney General, and I don't know how many copies I have left. I will circulate the rest to everyone. I want to specifically have the Attorney General get one,

Honourable Deputy Premier, Premier and you, Madam Speaker, that's how many, three, four, and you can circulate two to the other Ministers. It's a letter I wrote to the Secretary of State in August, 4th of August, Madam Speaker and I want to ask them to carefully read this, because while we discuss monies being added to the budget, while we are challenged for the St. Patrick's season, I want to suggest that there's an area that we must explore that can influence decisions with money and which aircraft we have, and that could be soon. I shared it with all Members before, I shared it with the Governor, I shared it with the Commissioner of Police, because it's for safety, it's your concern, and I'm closing by simply saying that Honourable Minister for, what's he called now, MCW, what's it called now? BUILT. I asked about the report, and I think that in conjunction with the report that is had in your hand, not in ours yet, that this information that is provided will tell us something very important. And I'm, at this point, appealing to the Government to hold to the one Montserrat theme, because I'm willing to sit with the Government of Montserrat, with particularly the Premier and Cabinet, to look at what I just shared, and after I get a look at the report, I'll be able to explain why it's raised in this sitting, and will be raised in the future. So, I'm hoping that we can work together to address one of the most damaging areas in our sectors on Montserrat. Madam Speaker, with that, I want to again say that I'm happy to support the additions and reallocations being made today. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Any others? If there are no other interventions, the Premier, the Honourable Minister of Finance, may wish to wrap up.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I just wish to just address a few of the matters raised. One is a statement made about the police not being able to have second jobs. There's nothing that goes that way. There is no restriction on police or other civil servants having second jobs. They just need to declare it for transparency's sake. So, if they're having a second job, they need to declare that they're doing a second job. Story finished. As it relates to the role of the Governor as in dealing with the Winair contract, I presume that the Honourable Member understands that ring-fenced monies are controlled by FCDO. So, there-

fore, if one wishes to spend it, it's just a matter of indicating to them that you're spending it for the purpose for which it was ring-fenced and that it meets with their approval. We never claim that we got new monies, so don't put that on the record that we claim that we get new money for Winair. We never said that. We're simply saying that we have a contract with Winair, and the funds are available. As it relates to the recurrent and capital budget, we'll deal with that in committee so that you'll have the full extent of that, and that will also be published. However, without calling names, and I see you refer both yourself and the Honourable Lewis referred to decisions made by the government, and you mentioned 15 years ago, so clearly it would have been during my time. You mentioned 15 years ago. Decisions as it relates to the termination of contracts. You're listening? Good. Decisions as it relates to termination of contracts, and in particular, the contract to which you alluded to were determined by the consultants who were hired to advise government and they advised government and government took their advice. So, I want to assure you that that was not a decision made by any single individual in government but made following the process as established within the contract. Yes, I need you to understand that. The fact that the funds were not paid previously don't hold that on us. Because it was a matter during your time and the subsequent administration. We are now clearing it up, so we're clearing the books. Part of those monies were paid previously, and we're now clearing off the balance, which means that we will continue with a clean sheet as it relates to those outstanding matters. And I leave it at that.

There are, however, some other management issues as it relates to major projects. The hospital being one, the port being another, the utilities project also relatively large, being another, which are currently under implementation. We have established a process whereby decisions to be made as it relates to variations above a particular size, anything dealing with continuation of works, etc., are referred to a steering committee and that steering committee reports up to all the Cabinet members along with the FCDO SRO. So, I just need to clarify that. So, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Members for their contributions, and I trust that we have responded sufficiently to their concerns. The further details as it relates to specific items within the supply votes, we will deal with those when we come back and go into committee stage. So, Madam Speaker, with these few words, I wish to thank the Honourable House, and after we come back from lunch, or do you want us to continue? Continue. The Leader of the Opposition is saying to continue. So, Madam

Speaker, with these few words, can I ask for the suspension of the appropriate Standing Order?

Madam Speaker said:

Let us first put the question on the second reading.

The Premier said:

So, Madam Speaker, I commend this Bill for a second reading. I thought we had done that before.

Madam Speaker said:

So, it has been moved and seconded that the Bill, shortly entitled *Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025* be read a second time.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will be read a second time.

The Clerk read the Bill a second time.

Madam Speaker said:

We can now go into the suspension of the third reading. I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I wish to move a motion for the third reading of the Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill, No. 1 of 2025, and further request a suspension of the appropriate Standing Order to facilitate the third reading of this Finance Bill.

Madam Speaker said:

We will need to go into committee before we do the third reading, however. So, we can deal with the suspension now.

The Premier said:

We deal with the suspension. We go into committee stage, and then the third reading is done.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that Standing Order No. 53 be suspended to allow for the third reading of the Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

Standing Order Number 53 has been accordingly suspended. So, we shall now go into committee.

COMMITTEE STAGE

Madam Chair said:

We will first look at the supply vote, starting with Vote 5, Police, an authorized estimate of \$8,081,700, supplemented by \$81,300 for a revised estimate of \$8,163,000. Oh, sorry. I recognize the Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Financial Secretary said:

Okay, thank you, Chair. We'd just like to make an adjustment to the supplement of Vote 5, Police. It's \$60,000, 60,000 instead of \$81,700, I think, 300? \$60,000. So, the revised sum for Vote 5 would be \$8,141,700.

Madam Chair said:

Could you give me the figure again, please?

\$8,141,700.

Madam Chair said:

Thank you.

The Premier said:

Chair, procedurally, should we not have dealt with the supply votes details first?

Madam Chair said:

The details? Not really.

The Premier said:

Oh, it's not necessary? Okay.

Madam Chair said:

So, with that amendment, Police authorized estimate of \$8,081,700, now supplemented with \$60,000 for a revised estimate of \$8,141,700.

The Attorney General said:

Madam Chair.

Madam Chair said:

I recognize the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Chair. In terms of what the Honourable Premier raised in terms of the details, the supply vote details, it would be necessary to make the adjustment in the supply vote details, which is the first schedule. So, part A, supply vote, the supply vote details, the Vote 5, the

program, the adjustment needs to be made there also in terms of the adjustment for the withdrawal.

Madam Chair said:

So that would be made accordingly. The \$81,300 would be changed to \$60,000.

The Premier said:

Madam Chair, although it has not been done and it was not the manner in which it has been done previously, I think the supply vote details should be approved. We can go through them very quickly before we go to the summary. It's necessary that this form part of the records.

Madam Chair said:

But wouldn't that be reflected in the summary? So, we'll go through the summary. Because what is over here is reflected in the summary and would form part of the schedule eventually.

The Premier said:

Chair, not wishing to be pedantic, but the supply vote details actually provide the details which are reflected in the summary. So, we need to have in the record of this House the supply vote details being approved. We can go through it very quickly rather than going through it line by line.

Madam Chair said:

So, looking at the supply vote details then, we would have an adjusted amount of all the total figures down here would change as well. The total, What's the total? Please don't have a calculator.

The Financial Secretary said:

Thank you, Madam Chair. The total, the new total, would be \$9,871,400. \$9,871,400. And the revised estimate total would be...

The Premier said:

Before you go to the revised, could we then seek the concurrence of the House that with that amendment that the supplementary vote details be accepted and approved?

Madam Chair said:

Okay, so it has been so moved. Are we in agreement? The summary? Okay, just bear with me for one second. Let me write this down. Yes, the \$9,871,400. And therefore, the total supplementary would change as well. Honourable FS, reduce it by \$60,000. The overall...

The Financial Secretary said:

Sorry, so where we go? So, we've changed the police vote. We're going to go line by line, and then we do the revised total.

Madam Chair said:

We're looking at the summary now.

The Financial Secretary said:

Summary, okay.

Madam Chair said:

Yes, because the change in the details has...

The Financial Secretary said:

No, so we've changed the details in the supply vote. So, I'm talking about the... So, we've changed the, in the summary, we've changed the police to 60 and the revised estimate. Are we going to go line by line for each?

Madam Chair said:

In the summary.

The Financial Secretary said:

Yeah.

Madam Chair said:

In the summary, yes.

The Financial Secretary said:

And then we will do the revised total.

Madam Chair said:

The revised total. Yes, but I did not get the amount for the total.

The Financial Secretary said:

So, the revised total would be \$9,871,000.

Madam Chair said:

Yes, I've got that.

The Financial Secretary said:

Oh, you're talking about the revised. For police.

Madam Chair said:

No. No, the overall. The revised estimates.

The Premier said:

The revised estimate, which is the one on the right-hand side. So, it's 157,538,400 plus 9 point whatever million, which will give you the new...

The Financial Secretary said:

So, it's 167,409, sorry, 167,409,800. 167,409,800.

Madam Chair said:

Okay, thank you. So, Honourable Members, are we happy, are we happy to approve the overall figure, or do you want us to go through them line by line?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

If there are, if there are other adjustments line by line, if there's no other adjustment, then it remains the same.

Madam Chair said:

Right, with the figures that were just provided.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yes. So, I'm saying we're happy if there's no other adjustment on any other line; then we're happy that that's the only adjustment, and we're happy to just approve it.

Madam Chair said:

Are there any other?

The Financial Secretary said:

There are no other adjustments, just that, yeah.

The Premier said:

So, may I therefore suggest that we approve the supply vote summary as amended?

Madam Chair said:

Okay, it has been moved that we apply the, we accept the supply vote summary with the amendment. Could we have a seconder for that?

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

I second the motion.

Madam Chair said:

Okay, so it has been moved and seconded that the supply vote summary with an overall estimated, authorized estimate of \$157,538,400 supplemented by \$9,871,400 for a total revised estimate of \$167,409,800 now form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

So, we will now move over to the development fund vote.

The Premier said:

Chair, may I suggest a similar process? FS, any adjustments? Chair, since there are no adjustments to the development fund vote details, unless the Members of the Opposition have any queries, could we just approve the development vote details, please?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Well, the FS said there are no adjustments, so we have no problem.

Madam Chair said:

Can I have a seconder?

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

I second the motion.

Madam Chair said:

Okay, thank you. So, it has been moved and seconded that the total development fund amount, supplemented amount of \$16,194,200 form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Just for the completeness, if you could, I know I could add it myself, but if the FS could provide the total supplementary now, so we could make the adjustment here.

Madam Chair said:

That's it.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

That's the total of the supply and the development.

Madam Chair said:

That's the \$26 million?

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

He already had \$26 million, whatever. Now that we have made the adjustments, he just provides.

Madam Chair said:

So, it will be \$26 million and...

The Financial Secretary said:

So, for the development, it would be 20...

Madam Chair said:

The total.

The Financial Secretary said:

Or the two supply votes together.

Madam Chair said:

Yeah, right.

The Financial Secretary said:

It's \$26,065,600. \$26,065,600.

Madam Chair said:

Okay. So, the question, therefore, the authorized estimates of \$106,388,800 with the supplement of \$16,194,200 for a total revised estimate of \$122,583,000 now form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

The Premier said:

So, this, I think, gives a response to the Honourable Romeo, who was asking for the revised totals. So, you have the \$122,583 plus the \$167,000, whatever it is.

Madam Chair said:

Okay. And we will now look at the overall summary. And the question is that the supply vote of \$9,871,400 and the development fund vote of \$16,194,200 now form part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

So, the total supplementary now stand part of the Bill. Other question is that clauses 1 to 3 stand part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

The Attorney General said:

Madam Chair

Madam Chair said:

Sorry.

The Attorney General said:

Madam Chair, in relation to the adjustments that were made, clause 2 will now need some adjustments. So, in terms of 2 (1), it will now read the various sums of money set out under the schedule, totalling \$9,871,400. And the sum would be changed also there. In addition to the sum of \$157,538,400 granted under the supply vote by the Appropriation Act 2024, No. 11 of 2024, and by the Supplementary Appropriation Act 2024, No. 16 of 2024, are declared to be charged upon and made payable from the Consolidated Fund. So, the numbers would be changed there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair said:

Okay. So, with that adjustment, the question is that clauses 1 to 3 stand as part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clauses 1 to 3 now stand as part of the Bill.

Enacting Clause and Long Title

Madam Chair said:

The question is that the Enacting Clause and Long Title stand as part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

The Enacting Clause and Long Title now form part of the Bill. And the final question is that the Bill, as amended, be reported back to the Assembly.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

With that, the Bill will be reported to the Assembly.

RESUMPTION OF ASSEMBLY

Madam Speaker said:

The Assembly will now resume its sitting. I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Third Reading – Supplementary Appropriation 2024 No. 2 Bill 2025

Madam Speaker, I rise to move a motion for the third reading of the Bill and wish to report that with minor amendments to the Bill, the Bill has had the support of the entire House, and I commend the Bill for a third reading.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al. said:

I second the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved that the bill, shortly entitled Supplementary Appropriation 2024, No. 2, Bill 2025, be read a third time and passed in this Honourable House.

The question was put and carried

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will be read a third time.

The Clerk read the Bill a third time.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill has been read a third time and is accordingly passed.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

12. ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yeah, the Clerk is going at full speed but I had my light on.

Madam Speaker said:

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yeah, any other business I'm speaking on actually. Yeah, I just wanted to ask whether or not in keeping with the good governance, transparency and accountability of the House, what time frame do the government have in mind or the House have in mind to establish, appoint the Public Accounts Committee, which is a standing committee?

Madam Speaker said:

We will look at that for maybe the next sitting. I cannot tell you definitely, but we will look at it.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Thank you.

The Clerk said Adjournment

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I rise in my place to move for a motion of this Honourable House sine die.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion for the adjournment, sine die, of this Honourable House.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that this Honourable House stands adjourned sine die.

The question was put and carried

Madam Speaker said:

This Honourable House now stands adjourned sine die.

Assembly adjourned at approximately 1.39 pm.

Sgd: Judith Baker

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Dated this 8th day of April 2025

Sgd: Marjorie Smith

Speaker

