



Hansard No. 5

of the

18th Parliament

Tuesday, 8th April 2025



MONTERRAT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

ORDER OF THE DAY

Meeting No. 5 of the 18th Parliament
Tuesday 08th April, 4:30 p.m.
Conference Room, Cultural Centre, Little Bay

1. PRAYERS

2. OATHS

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Minutes No. 2 of the 18th Parliament, dated Tuesday, 21st January 2025.

Minutes No. 3 of the 18th Parliament, dated Tuesday, 25th February 2025.

4. PAPERS TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE

(a) Financial Secretary

(i) Draft Estimates of Revenue & Expenditure and Development Fund 2025/2026-2028;

(ii) Schedule of Virement #2 of April - March 2024/2025;

(iii) Montserrat Port Authority Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024.

(iv) Reallocation Warrant No. 2 of 2024 -2025

S R & O No. 7 of 2025	Customs Duties (Wayne Murrain) (Exemption) Order;
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S R & O No. 8 of 2025	Customs Duties (Keri Matthew) (Exemption) Order
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S R & O No. 9 of 2025	Income and Corporation Tax (Peter and Lucy Ryan) (Exemption) Order;
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S R & O No. 10 of 2025	Customs Duties (Peter and Lucy Ryan) (Exemption) Order;
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S R & O No. 11 of 2025	Customs Duties (Kenneth Greenaway) (Exemption) Order;
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(c) Attorney General

S R & O No. 4 of 2025	Plant Protection (Amendment of Schedules) Regulations;
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S R & O No. 5 of 2025	Police (Disciplinary Tribunal) Order;
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S R & O No. 6 of 2025	Passport (Exemption) Order;
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5. MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

6. GOVERNMENT NOTICES

7. UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

8. QUESTIONS

9. MOTIONS

(1) The Premier and Minister of Finance and Economic Management to move:

The Introduction, First, Second, and Third Reading of the Bill –

‘Appropriation Bill 2025’

(2) The Attorney General to move:

The Introduction and First Reading of the Bill:

(i) Seventh-Day Adventist Church Incorporation
(Amendment)
Bill 2025

10. OTHER BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

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**MONTSERRAT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEETING**

**Minutes No. 5 of the 18th Parliament (Cont'd)
Held on Thursday, April 10, 2025, at 9.00 a.m.
Conference Room, Montserrat Cultural Centre, Little Bay**

PRESENT:

Honourable Marjorie Smith	Speaker
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 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

Prayers were said by the Honourable Madame Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I crave your indulgence and the indulgence of this Honourable House to correct an error which has been made in the Order Paper. Although the documents have been circulated, we were remiss in not submitting the draft estimates of revenue and expenditure for 2025/26 to 2027/28. So, Madam Speaker, I wish to lay this on the table.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder for that?

The Minister for Infrastructure Et Al said:

Madam Speaker, I stand to support the amendment to the Order Paper for the draft estimates of the revenue and expenditure 25/26 to be laid.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Order Paper be amended for the laying of the draft estimates of revenue and expenditure 2025/2026 to 2027/2028.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Order Paper will be accordingly amended.

I recognize the Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Financial Secretary said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in this Honourable House to lay the following paper, the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure and Development Fund 2025/2026/28.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. Members, we are back today to debate the Appropriation Bill 2025, and so I now open the floor for debate. I recognize the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, et al said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thoughts and words are the raw material with which we build our reality, our future. Retard or progress, imprison, transform or liberate, a budget speech can do all of these things. Madam Speaker, we have a nation to build, a country to mould, one Montserrat, a five-star premium destination, and our excellent Premier has presented to us what we will do as your government, the people of Montserrat, building together and striving together.

As I stand in this Honourable House, I am indeed humbled and pleased to be a part of the United Alliance Government, your government, to represent the Ministry of Building, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour and Transportation, Ecclesiastical Affairs, our addition. This is the same ministry, Madam Speaker, with a different name, in which I once served as a young public officer and acting minister, to now lay before you, in humility, for to lead is a sacred responsibility that I take seriously. I stand, Madam Speaker, on the work of former Ministers, giants, technocrats, trademen, cleaners, women, engineers, planners, road crews, MUL and Montserrat Port Authority workers, management and leaders. Those who quietly, Madam Speaker, with dedication, shaped our infrastructure and systems that support our daily lives. I thank them all, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our Premier told us, although we be small, our brain is not small, and as I prepared, I thought constantly of Sir Howard Fergus, educator, poet, historian, one of Montserrat's beloved sons. Sir Howard often reminded us that building a nation is not just about building, but about social impact, creativity, Madam Speaker, that the nation is not the soil, it is the soul. Madam Speaker, our Ministry is deeply committed to nurturing that national soul through community, partnerships, and private and public service collaboration, Madam Speaker, supporting the infra-

structure system that respects our history and prepares us for the future. I see and my Premier said he did not remember that youthful face when he received the licks that has made him a part of who he is today from Sir Aral Howard Archibald Fergus, our own poet laureate, statesman, churchman, intellectual giant, educator, preserver of culture, the architect of national pride and identity, commanding me with these words from his antique fountain pen like ancient calligraphy liberate, liberate, liberate, arise and build, one Montserrat a five star premium destination.

With fire therefore in my belly, no doubt like professor George Irish and the pride and passion and love for the country of Dr. John A. Osborne and the two excellent brothers, our world-renowned the most excellent Alfonso Cassell and the Rt Honourable Justin Cassell. The determination, dignity and strength of the Rt Honourable Annie Dyer Howe and Teacher Duke. The vision of most excellent William Bramble and former Honourable Chief Minister P. Austin Bramble, my ancestors and all those who fought for our liberty, my liberty and the liberty of generations to come. They were builders and liberators. Free education, better quality of life. I am able to stand today as a member of parliament and your Minister beside our esteemed leader because of Jehovah, the Almighty God, the prayers, support, and love of the people of Montserrat, including those abroad, and I thank God. Firmly grounded on God's word, write the vision, make it plain. Perhaps it tarries, wait, it will come to pass. This national vision, Madam Speaker, was formulated by the people of Montserrat again during the tenure of our esteemed leader the Honourable First Premier of Montserrat now my current leader Premier, Minister of Finance Honourable Rueben T Meade and I permit you, Madam Speaker, not in a messianic way at all, but to acknowledge him as a builder, a liberator, changing lives, changing communities. A healthy, wholesome and prosperous Montserrat, he charges us to find, oh Lord, Madam Speaker, and to build a modern, thriving economy with a friendly, vibrant community in which all our people, that one Montserrat that he speaks of today, to enterprise an initiative and fulfil our hopes in a truly democratic and God-fearing community.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry is committed and still remains green, connected and thriving, but we are also, Madam Speaker, on a journey to transform Montserrat into a five-star destination that residents are proud to call home and visitors long to experience. Our Premier have already told us in his speech that we must recognise and value the tranquillity, the natural beauty, and safety in community spirit. These were not merely

accolades; they are the foundation on which we can build. Madam Speaker, whether through infrastructure, excellent public service delivery, or private sector social protection, our Ministry is working to amplify and embed those very qualities that make Montserrat shine. Madam Speaker, we want our buildings to be resilient and beautiful, our environment to be clean. The aesthetics, wow factors, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I remember going to this place, a beautiful island called Paradise Island, a five-star destination where Madam Speaker, I didn't have to worry about the reliability of access to this country, the utility system, Madam Speaker, the excellent, healthy food that I received. Madam Speaker, I do not speak of the excellent service that I received from the time I landed at that airport to when I got to the hotel. Madam Speaker, we were there for business as a young trade unionist of the teachers' union at that time. But there were many activities, and so Madam Speaker I know under our leadership and the team Madam Speaker we will be able to build that five-star premium destination with all the people of Montserrat and those living abroad. And so, I'm confidently with faith and trust in God, I recognize that as a people, we must arise and build. Every boy, every girl, every woman and man residing in Montserrat and Montserratians living abroad, I call upon you to let us arise and build. Acknowledging our history, we are proud of being Montserratian but we are also British, a territory of the United Kingdom. Our connectedness brings benefits, and you can see that from our uplift in our budget and the work and the contribution they have made over the years.

In spite of our history, with the love of God in our hearts and with gratitude and thanks for the continued contributions and support, we move forward, working as brethren, colleagues, respected partners, and with all our regional brothers and sisters. We cannot change our history, but we can change our future. We must arise and build and I register my thanks to the United Kingdom Government, and it may not be appropriate, but I must also thank Mr. Adam Pyle, who has led the team over the years that I have been here as a representative of the people of Montserrat. As Premier said, we have suffered enormous losses, but today we recognize that out of every challenge comes an opportunity. Something dies, so something lives and once there is life there is hope. This budget gives hope but today we have to decide as Hamlet says to be or not to be. Today we choose to be, to become one Montserrat a five-star premium destination and so I stand, I stand Madam Speaker with unwavering and strong support for the budget presented by the Honourable Minister of

Finance. This budget set out a clear pathway for Montserrat's continued growth, sustainable development, resilience, progress, prosperity and transformation. This budget heralds a new day, new hope, new opportunities. A budget that will put money in our people's hand to enhance their quality of life. A budget that will restore, that will be impactful, bringing positive changes to the lives of the people, a better quality of life, liberating and transformative.

Last year, Madam Speaker, the Ministry was allocated some \$22,987,800 and we achieved a total spend of \$22,128,520.71, representing 96.26% of our budget. This included, Madam Speaker, our recurrent budget and our capital budget. Where we experienced shortfalls on the recurrent side, the Ministry of Finance stepped in with the assistance of the United Kingdom Government to support delivery and for this we are grateful and Honourable FS we register our thanks and for your continued hard work in helping us to progress our island. This year we are allocated \$49,535,900 and for this we are grateful. Although of course we would always want more, but we intend to build on the record of delivery and stewardship. We have also secured increases in our human resource and capacity and we will continue to work with the Deputy Governor as we seek to improve accommodation for our mechanics and airport workers.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has developed seven strategic focus areas. One, advancing government's critical building maintenance and accommodation strategy; Advancing critical utilities rehabilitation for safety and well-being; Enhancing energy reliability, security, and investment opportunities; Strengthening critical transport infrastructure for safe, affordable, and reliable access; Road rehabilitation, improvement, and beautification; Human development and empowerment and ecclesiastical affairs, promoting social well-being and wholesome and cohesive community and well-being. Madam Speaker, we have a staff that is committed, hard-working, innovative, united and are ready to support the Premier and the rest of the team and the public service. We are ready, Madam Speaker, to arise and build, not to just manage but to transform and so as I said, our seven strategic focus areas are not just headlines, they are the framework from which we will drive economic development, workforce empowerment, national resilience and social cohesion.

Advancing government and critical building maintenance and accommodation strategy. It has been recognized that our facilities are inadequate for central government and delivery of government service.

Many have outlived their useful lives, some require upgrading. Our courts, our parliament needs a home and our Premier is helping to accommodate us. Our airport staff, the Montserrat Secondary School, I can't forget Madam Speaker, although I'm not in that ministry, I am still here to support my Minister, the Minister of Education. We need a cafeteria for our children, as well as improving the school. But we will continue what the previous government has started. This, Madam Speaker, will impact staff morale, service delivery, and national pride.

Madam Speaker, we are also, Madam Speaker, undertaking what we started before and prioritizing our health and safety of our people. And so this includes ongoing structural roof repairs at Brades Primary School, the Registry building, Madam Speaker, and we are going to continue work on the police station and the fire station. Premier has already spoken about that. This is for the dignity of our public servants and citizens who rely on our services daily.

Madam Speaker, as we build, we must be sustainable, for we are conscious of climate change and so we are reducing risks, losses from climate change and other hazards by utilizing risk mitigation strategies and management to ensure resilience and social and economic development. Premier, Madam Speaker, has already spoken about our town centre remains undeveloped. We are ready and able with our competent, innovative and trained staff to develop with our Premier a strategy to move this forward. Advancing secondly our critical utilities rehabilitation for the safety and well-being of our people. We are working on the Fogarthy and Hope Springs and we are finalizing the procurement of a reservoir for increased water storage and resilience in times of storms. We continue to rehabilitate our water distribution lines network to reduce leakage and to ensure that we have safe water as well. Our goal is to ensure safe water security, reliable and climate resilient water and wastewater systems across Montserrat. Madam Speaker, enhancing our energy strategy for stability, affordability, security and investment opportunities to foster economic growth and healthy living. Currently, we are almost totally dependent on imported fuel to meet energy demands, energy bills. Madam Speaker, the cost of living is impacted by high fuel charges. Foreign currency is exported and we recognize that dependence on fossil fuels is economically and environmentally unsound. So, as we transition to a green economy, we are committed to a mixed energy supply building energy independence. Planning and design work continues on our proposed 2-megawatt solar PV system, and we are also conducting preventing

maintenance on our geothermal wellheads, including critical repairs, protective coatings.

Alongside these efforts, we are deepening our community engagement to assist our household through solar incentives and energy efficiency. Our long-term goals remain a clean, affordable, secure and resilient energy future, green, connected and thriving. Having harnessed our renewable energy source, we intend, our Madam Speaker, as our energy policy commitment reads, that we will use it effectively and efficiently to contribute to an ever more wholesome, prosperous and friendly lifestyle, supporting food, sovereignty, tourism, reducing cost of living and improving quality of life. As I always say, we live local, we think local, and we act local and so we strive to meet United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number seven, affordable and clean energy.

Madam Speaker, as we strengthen our critical infrastructure, we also, Madam Speaker, will move to strengthen our critical transport infrastructure for safe, affordable, reliable access, road improvement and beautification. We also, Madam Speaker, work towards moving and expanding opportunities for employment. We recognize also that an efficient and well-connected transportation network is essential for economic growth, development, progress and prosperity, creating that five-star premium destination.

We support our access vision through investment in air, sea, land and travel infrastructure. Madam Speaker, strengthening access and connectivity into and out of Montserrat, security as well, access to external markets and strengthening overall Montserrat's link to the region and the world. Madam Speaker, a modern, safe and efficient transportation network is vital for our economy. My Honourable Minister Osborne needs that for trade. We need it for the daily movement of our people and goods and this government, your government, remains committed to enhancing Montserrat's air, sea and road infrastructure, ensuring reliable connectivity and long-term sustainability.

In aviation, we will complete outfitting and commissioning of the new airport control tower – thank you to Dr. Sammy who started that work – including our communication integration and operational readiness to meet international regulation. We are also working and doing that Madam Speaker with great urgency, yet with sensibility, developing a feasibility study of our medevac services, night operations in line with safety

regulations and infrastructure needs, giving peace of mind to our travelers and our people, reduce cost, travel experience improved. Madam Speaker, I know my Honourable sister will be very pleased when we turn on the lights at Dr. John A. Osborne Airport and we know that our Minister has already shown and brought back our Twin Otter service. So we are hoping and we are working together that the overlays, we love our sister island Antigua, but our people want to come home when they leave for home.

We will, Madam Speaker, commit to our Little Bay Port development project. Madam Speaker, expanding passenger and ferry facilities, improving again visitor experience and regional transportation links. Premier has spoken to that regional ferry and other private opportunities, boosting economic growth by ensuring Montserrat is competitive in trade and tourism sectors, improving cargo handling efficiency to support business operation and food sovereignty. We remain committed, Madam Speaker, doing all that we can for the completion of the Little Bay Port and working with partners to resolve our legal and funding issues. Madam Speaker, we promise to be honest with the people and so I will be honest, our port is in difficulty and I received a communication that the central workspace would be closed but Madam Speaker when I said before it was not closed it was not closed until today. The office remains open and Madam Speaker, our task force consisting of our own people, UKCIF team, CDB and members from United Kingdom team are working, Madam Speaker, to resolve this issue. Madam Speaker we cannot and we will seek to do all we can to continue our port project. Remember Madam Speaker that we cannot achieve everything at once. We are going to take a systematic approach. And so road network improvement, we will continue to enhance our road quality to targeted repairs, reinstatement and resurfacing. Investment will focus on the A road corridor with improved drainage systems and road safety measures.

Madam Speaker, we also are going to upgrade our secondary roads and crossings. Roads leading to our beaches, sporting infrastructure, our residents are all a part of the plan. And we will continue with our Madam Speaker, competent road crew and the private sector, our beautification enhancement of verges. We ask landowners to work with us. We ask for your support. Madam Speaker, we are always boasting about a clean Montserrat and so I say today, we are going to operate under zero tolerance on littering. We will not throw and dump our garbage irresponsibly. Madam Speaker, let us work together to keep Montserrat clean. Carry a

bucket, carry a bag in your car, in your truck when you're going to work on the construction site and put your garbage in it and take it to a proper dump site. Let us work together to keep our Montserrat clean and healthy. Our name is Montserrat but I do not want to see the rats running around in our country.

Madam Speaker, our sixth strategic focus is our workforce development and empowerment. Our people are indeed our greatest asset. A strong skilled and fairly compensated workforce is the foundation of economic growth. Neither government nor the private sector can deliver without private... Sorry Madam Speaker, neither government nor private sector can deliver without people. We reiterate our commitment to putting people first and the development of our workforce. And I know Madam Speaker, that the Honourable Mulcare will work with us a strong advocate for the rights and development of our people. Madam Speaker, it's the Mulcares' day perhaps because I must also thank her husband, Mr Mulcare, who is tenacious when it comes to protecting workers' rights but balancing that that as well with the rights of employees. And so, Madam Speaker, we will focus on skills development. We know there's a shortage of a number of critical areas so it is important that we put in place or continue our training in this way. Training and capacity development we must Madam Speaker want our people to be work ready and to work steady. As Honourable Hixon would say, no mouth must be left unfed. We will address competence, work attitudes and ethics with our professional development work ethics training.

We continue to work with our sister Ministry, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs. We are expanding our HYPE program and on my brother Madam Speaker since that Ministry has been severed, we will continue to expand the HYPE program and collaborate with the Montserrat Community College and other training institutions to boost our T-VET offering. The Labour Department will introduce our pilot short courses to address urgent skill gaps while national workforce demand analysis and guide must be taken. We will monitor, Madam Speaker, the application of our legislation to ensure worker protection, fairness and effective dispute resolution even as we continue to collaborate with our union, employer, employee representatives, private sector recognition of employer, employee rights and responsibilities, leading to a more harmonious and equitable, safe working environment, strengthened, fair and just society, decent wage and working environment for economic growth, sustainable development, United Nations No. 8.

Madam Speaker, we continue as a government to honour our word. And the Honourable Premier has already told you that we are committed to implementing the work exemption policy for persons living in Montserrat in excess of three years. We also will complement this Madam Speaker by our no immigration extension after three years living on Montserrat. Madam Speaker, we go further Madam Speaker and say that we are going to honour the labour advisory work Madam Speaker and implement the wage, the minimum wage and that is you can pay more but you must not go below \$12.50 per hour. We will work, Madam Speaker, with employers and employees and the unions to implement our policy. It must be a balanced approach, protecting workers while supporting business stability. We remain committed to ensuring that our labour market policies are fair, practical and sustainable. Madam Speaker, we also celebrate the fact that we are truly working towards a one Montserrat for we have already through our Premier announced that our children will receive medical attention free at the hospital and all other persons residing on Montserrat will pay the same fees like we who are Montserratians pay.

Madam Speaker, our seventh strategic focus is ecclesiastical affairs and community well-being. As custodians of ecclesiastical affairs now, we are charting a fresh course and together, Madam Speaker, because I am by no means dictating what should happen. Madam Speaker, our churches, faith-based organizations, NGOs, have a critical role in national development, social, economical, spiritual, psychological and cultural development. Our faith plays a central part to our culture, our aspirations, our identity and so we will continue to work with the Montserrat Christian Council and other faith groups and NGOs to explore avenues for economic empowerment, youth development, Madam Speaker, national identity and social healing. Madam Speaker, I just want to say, because we were once young and we seem to forget. And at the Freedom Concert, I remember that drama piece by the young people and one young lady was telling the mom, they want to go to Stratify. I no doubt some of them wanted to go all white. And so, we must deal with the human nature of our young people and work with them. I did not say I'm sending them to stratify or to all white but they may have their glorified night or their all-white night. We can work with our youths.

We are also exploring the development of cultural festival, celebrating sacred music, theatre, and creative expression and I know, Madam

Speaker, no doubt, Honourable Buffonge would tell you about the seven festivals and the volcano. It does not cease to amaze me that our two major festivals have grown out of Christian festivals. St Patrick's Day from St Patrick's and our Christmas festival now Carnival, Madam Speaker, from our Christmas celebration. Madam Speaker, we will work to build. We can have two festivals coming out of the church. We can have our own music fest. There's so much that we can do to stimulate our economy. Conferences, retreats, camps. This is the perfect island for these things. Ecclesiastical affairs, Madam Speaker, is not a passive function. It is a living ministry that supports a healthy and wholesome Montserrat through unity, dialogue and action. We will deepen our collaboration with all, leveraging our roles together to build strong and caring families, promoting social cohesion and community resilience. Healthy and strong families contribute to a healthy and wholesome Montserrat.

We continue, Madam Speaker, to depend, Madam Speaker, upon our church or faith organization to develop and strengthen desirable attitudes and values on which a long-term development and safety of our island can thrive. Respect for God, self, others, and the environment, stewardship, resourcefulness, responsibility, industry, initiative, commitment to integrity and honesty, tolerance and diversity, respect for differences and the uniqueness of each, and excellence and love. Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with all. Economic impact through faith and works and I must say that love of money is evil but money answers all things says the good book, Ecclesiastes. And so let us work together, Madam Speaker, making our contributions for our communities, shaping a stronger Montserrat, a better Montserrat, a one Montserrat. And so, we are committed to working with all. A whole of government integration and good governance.

Transformation must be grounded in good governance and so we strengthen our inter-ministerial coordination frameworks, improving our procurement discipline and embedding accountability across our ministries. In the coming year we will help pilot infrastructure services standard deepen stakeholder engagement and continue to work with professional manner. A more transparent, responsive and citizen-focused BUILT is our commitment. Let us be clear. The Premier has set out a decisive and bold agenda. And BUILT is ready. Whether it's pouring our homes sustainably, moving peoples and goods efficiently, upskilling our workforce, we are ready to deliver. Where this Premier speaks of transformation, we commit to taking action to our seven-point strategic focus.

We are connecting the dots between infrastructure, people, growth, development and prosperity. We are not just laying roads, we are paving the way to opportunity. We are not just installing solar, we are building a green and thriving Montserrat. We are proud to support the national efforts on education, labour, working alongside our colleagues in Human Resource, Ministry of Education, Youth and Agriculture, ensuring that the infrastructure and the opportunity go hand in hand.

Our theme, Green Connected and Thriving, is more than a slogan. It's a commitment to sustainable development, to bringing government services closer to people and to the future where no one is left behind. And Madam Speaker, we know that there's a concern as well about tinting so we will be reviewing that. The Premier has rightly challenged us to build better, but BUILT is not just rising to that challenge we are helping to shape the solutions for one Montserrat, a five-star premium destination. Psalm 127 remind us, unless the Lord builds the house the builders labour in vain. Let us not build, not just with our hands, but with our heart together and as the Premier said we go further together. So I call on us all across Ministries, communities, generations and Montserratians and friends residing abroad, to embrace the spirit of the one Montserrat, a five-star premium destination united in purpose, shared destiny. And I heard a song, yes, I was listening, on Little Lenny where we spoke about one people. And so together, with art and skill and sacrifice, we will rise to make this country great. One Montserrat, building together, striving together, healthy, caring, friendly, wholesome, safe, and prosperous, our five-star premium destination. Together, we will make this vision a reality, transforming our island into a place that inspires, uplifts, a Montserrat that is truly thriving and connected. Let us arise and build, make our country great with art and skill and sacrifice, with mass and drum we celebrate triumphant masters of our faith.

Let us sing our land in harmony, may God continue to be our eternal God and make Montserrat a house of hope, a haven in the Caribbean Sea. God bless Montserrat and God bless us all. If it pleases you, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to address this Honourable House and I take my seat and cede the floor to the next Honourable Member of this Parliament.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on April 8th, the Honourable Premier presented Montserrat's 2025/2026 budget under the theme, "One Montserrat, Build Together, Thriving Together. built together, thriving together". This emphasizes this government's unified approach to propel the island's development, aiming for a self-sufficient and thriving economy. Madam Speaker, I also hope that Opposition appreciated the message on the cover of the budget presentation and if you look at the top left-hand corner, I think they'll understand what I mean. Madam Speaker, as I stand in support of this budget, I want to just paraphrase something the Honourable Premier said in his speech. The Honourable Premier said, this budget presentation must focus on our people and not merely on figures. Madam Speaker, as a new parliamentarian, I take this saying even further. For me, it is not just about figures, but it's about the work we put in to make sure we deliver for our people and Madam Speaker, as the youngest Member of the Assembly, I take it quite personal that the future of Montserrat is even more vested and dependent on me setting an example for all youth of this country.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that we deliver for them. I will again reiterate the words of our Premier by saying the budget is how we communicate our policies and plans. Madam Speaker, I will therefore use this opportunity to elaborate on some of the plans that we at the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, Environment and Youth and Sports have for Montserrat. And Madam Speaker, I say we, because as a government, we are a team and at the Ministry, we are a team.

Madam Speaker, allow me to just use this opportunity to thank members of my team. My Parliamentary Secretary, who I also call my co-minister, the Honourable Dwayne Hickson, who so ably helps me to set the directive of the Ministry. My permanent secretary, Mrs. Daphne Cassell, and the whole MALHE's team, who I can message at even 10:30 p.m. in the night and get a response, and who are so passionate about the work that we do at the Ministry. My director of agriculture Mr. Selvin Maloney who even on the weekends takes the opportunity to visit farmers with me and whose office I spend many hours in so that we can better plan for the needs of our farmers and fishers. Mr. Melvin Lindsey, my agricultural officer, who does a lot of my research for policy changes and was very instrumental in legislative changes such as allowing the importation of

citrus. Ms Nicole Duberry and Jovarn Thornhill and their team who responds with the utmost efficiency on any land or survey needs. Mr. Sooparlie, the registrar, and his team who provides a wealth of knowledge for myself, especially when dealing with issues of Crown lands. Mr. Jerome Meade, Mr. Eddie Estwick and the team at Physical Planning, who I visit almost every week to discuss various planning issues, as well as how to chart a course for new construction methods in Montserrat. Ms Stephanie Tuitt and her team, and Madam Speaker, this is a very special mention, also because I have open days at the Ministry on Fridays, and the majority of the people I see are for housing-related issues. The housing team have worked assiduously, despite very limited financing left over in the last budget to help me solve as many housing issues as we could. So even with that very limited budget we have provided fixes to several elderly and vulnerable persons as well as providing housing to a few persons in need of housing. Madam Speaker, as I said before, housing is one of the biggest, if not the biggest concern for the people of this country. This is based off the level of complaints and queries we get at the Ministry. Madam Speaker, I could therefore not be here and not say thank you to Mr. Franklyn Greenaway and the LDA team because Mr. Greenaway has been willing to run with every project that I could brainstorm. And last but not least, Mr. Sjuen Griffith, who even at 1:00 a.m. in the morning will send me drawings for projects.

Madam Speaker, we're at the end of a budget cycle with very limited funds. An opportunity came up for us to visit Antigua to look at their housing projects. Madam Speaker, because of this young man's desire to see Montserrat move forward, and he actually wanted me to say this today, that I personally paid for his ticket to go on that trip with me because I believe in the upliftment of youth and I believe that we should provide them with any resources available. Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly believe that the youth should not have to start on the same level we start. I believe every successful generation of Montserratian should elevate the level of this island. Madam Speaker, one of the very projects we went to see is the low-cost housing initiative that you would have heard myself and the Premier mentioned in this very House. Madam Speaker, I am proud to say today that in this very budget, there is money allocated from the EU funds for this housing initiative. Now, I don't necessarily wish to compare but the information given to me is that previous governments only managed to build four houses over the last 10 years.

Madam Speaker with the money allocated we plan to start three houses in the next few months. Not only will this add to our housing stock, but will also serve as a pilot project to transfer skills and knowledge to our construction industry. Just to show you how ready we are at the Ministry, Madam Speaker, the surveys and the topography maps were done since the beginning of March and the physical planning team has already begun their work in anticipation of passing of this budget so that we can hit the ground running. Madam Speaker, you would have heard our Premier reiterate that this government plans to use creative means of moving this country forward. I know the Honourable Romeo, although not here this morning, often talks about getting the British to do more but Madam Speaker although I do appreciate all the British Government and the FCDO team have done for us, if waiting on them has resulted in building of only four houses in the last four years, I cannot see myself continuing that trend. Not when I have met a housing waiting list of over 120 persons looking for homes. Not when we have many Montserradians overseas waiting for initiatives for them to invest in their country.

Madam Speaker, what we have done as a team is to therefore reach out to the financial institutions on Montserrat and alerted them of our low-cost housing plans. And after providing and proving the concept with these initial three houses Madam Speaker, we will then work together to utilize private sector funding and private sector lands as a public-private partnership to continue this initiative. Madam Speaker, what this means is that persons of Montserrat both local and abroad will have the opportunity to invest in their home, literally speaking, Madam Speaker. Now, Madam Speaker, forgive me a little bit for my youthful optimism, but if this project is successful, and I use the example of Antigua. Antigua is building upwards of 20 of these homes a month and with the initial interest that I am seeing even from persons with available lands, I want you to just imagine how many I will actually try to build over the next few years. Madam Speaker, I will again reiterate that we are here to deliver for our people.

Now Madam Speaker, allow me to just change the topic from housing. The Premier has already said in his speech that there are some hard global truths which we must face. Madam Speaker, I'm sure we are all aware of the Trump trade wars currently happening in the world and as the Minister responsible for agriculture, I think it would be quite respect of me to not speak on this issue. Also, it is my responsibility to let all people know how it will affect Montserrat and the plans that our government will put

in place to combat this issue. Madam Speaker, this is especially to keep their faith, that we are being proactive with the ever increasing issues such as inflation and an increase in the cost of living. Madam Speaker, I was alerted by one of the shipping companies that the Trump administration plans to place a fee of up to US\$3 million on any Chinese made ship that calls into a US port. Why is this a problem for us and the Caribbean? Well, as the company told me, majority of ships transporting cargo and the entire fleet are Chinese-made ships and it just so happens that majority of cargo coming to Montserrat, they either come through the US or pass through, sorry, come from the US or pass through the US port before arriving on island. Madam Speaker, the company alerted me that this could add several thousand US dollars to the already high cost of container freight.

The Premier has already highlighted his solution, with that being to place a discount on the freight when using the calculations on the duty of goods being imported. But Madam Speaker, this issue also highlights now more than ever the need for food sovereignty on island. That is Madam Speaker, we need to increase the level of production locally because as long as our food importation remains at over 90% with a dollar value of 18 million and our agricultural production remains low with a dollar value of 2 million, we will always be fully subject to the global issues over which we have no control. Madam Speaker, I must thank the Premier at this point because his representation on a regional level has brought in an extra \$2.1 million from the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank for the purpose of ensuring food security on island. 1.1 million as he said, will go into a special arrangement for the securing of very low interest loans. The other \$1 million, Madam Speaker, will be used directly by the Ministry to support farmers and fishers to the use of modern technology, such as greenhouse and hydroponic production, drip irrigation for crop production, artificial insemination projects, improving the genetic stock of goat, sheep and pigs with a targeted outcome of increasing production of locally grown fruit, veg, meat and fish production.

Madam Speaker, at this point I want to thank the Honourable Crenston Buffonge, who was formerly in my position. He started an initiative with crayfish production on island. Upon taking office, he reached out to me about how well the production was going, and that this was a project that he hoped I would support because of the potential market for crayfish. He alerted me not only of the production, but that even the breeding of these crayfish was successful enough that he is anticipating that with some help

from the Ministry, this could be a very sustainable project. Madam Speaker, this is the one Montserrat project. So not only am I supporting him by continuing this project that he is so passionate about, but I have given the Ministry directive that if Honourable Buffonge wants to lead on this project that they should be amenable to taking direction from him, to which a team has also agreed. Madam Speaker, this again is the one Montserrat project and outcomes and delivering for our country is more important than who gets the credit.

Madam Speaker, recently I attended an OECS NDC forum, that's the national determined contributions forum. This meeting was in Grenada just over a week ago. What impressed me the most wasn't just the level of production in Grenada or the level of agro-processing but actually a level of buy-in that they had from their people on delivering a robust agricultural economy. Now Grenada is known as the Spice Island of the Caribbean, but as I said what impressed me the most is that this ideology is ingrained into their people and they do this to education of their young children. Madam Speaker, the songs that they sing in schools, the lessons that they are taught, all reinforce the ideology and overall economic goal of the country. So their children grow already with an almost innate idea of carrying their country's objectives. Madam Speaker, likewise we must encourage and support our children to do the same.

Madam Speaker, as youth affairs has now been added to the portfolio of the Ministry, the PS, directors and myself felt the need to revitalize agriculture in the schools. We plan to revitalize the two greenhouses at the secondary school and to also place at least one of those greenhouses into hydroponic production. We also plan to revitalize the various agricultural plots in the various primary schools in order to grow the interest of our children. Madam Speaker, it is my belief that if you really want to change a country, you start with education and the greatest change will come from the youth. I'm sure my colleague to my right would be happy to help also with an initiative here, and the youth are indeed our future. And in this process, Madam Speaker, perhaps we'll encourage more youth to be future entrepreneurs of tomorrow and start the journey of a less public sector reliant economy. Madam Speaker, while also in Grenada, I decided to reach out to the Minister for Agriculture there. While we had a brief conversation about the level of production in Grenada, the only downside to my trip became apparent, and that was that I would not have truly known the level of production that they offer in Grenada if I didn't actually travel to Grenada. I think as a Caribbean, and as Caribbean States, we

do a really bad job of marketing to our region and as such, inter-regional trade has suffered. As a matter of fact, I'll probably go as far as saying some of the products we buy, like chocolate for example, may have even originated in Caribbean islands, but we pay more for them because we purchase them further down the value chain.

Madam Speaker, going back to the topic of global trade wars, this is my call for even greater Caribbean integration. This is something that I plan to push at my next Caricom Agriculture Ministers Forum. Madam Speaker, while we can save money trading in the region, Montserrat must also be a part of the conversation, not only on importation, but also on export. The ministry will embark on the creation of various groves. Some of the plants currently in consideration are breadfruit and avocados, which one day we hope will jumpstart our agri-processing as we enter the value-added chain of goods. This is not an overnight effort Madam Speaker but as well as short-term plans we must have long-term solutions to create in a striving economy.

Madam Speaker, you would have heard my colleague the Honourable Hector Dorsette, or Dorsette Hector, talk about the plans to upgrade the water systems on Montserrat. Madam Speaker, throughout my various regional meetings, the one thing that is evident is that water is an issue for almost every other Caribbean country except Montserrat. Madam Speaker, what my colleague hasn't told you is that we have been actively engaging with companies who see the potential of the water industry in Montserrat and even more recently, I would have had conversation with my ministerial colleagues throughout the region those that are responsible for agriculture, who also are interested in providing quality spring drinking water from Montserrat. Madam Speaker, many of their drinking water sources are from desalination plants. This should show you the vast potential of our little island Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, last topic that I would like to talk about is sports, and I don't think I could have come here without addressing sports. Now sports has lacked the attention that it has so greatly needed. Matter of fact, the first time that I showed up at the sports department they were shocked and someone said to me that they hadn't seen a Minister in probably nearly 10 years. I soon learned that the department also lacked a director and hadn't had one for possibly about four years. Madam Speaker, the HR team will tell you that in my first few months as Minister I called or showed up at the department every week to get this rectified. I'm happy

to say that they have done the interview process for a director of sports and we should have one in place in the very near future to help me deliver the physical needs of our youth in the discipline of sports. Madam Speaker, in the interim however, we do recognize that the scope for training and competitions is limited on Montserrat, so it is imperative that our sportsmen travel to gain further exposure. They need to attend both regional and international competitions and that allows them and the teams to enhance their development.

Some individuals with the support of government of Montserrat are attending overseas institutions to develop further both physically and academically. Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that it was drawn to my attention just yesterday that the young Jordan Ryan was given a full scholarship to a state university in Texas because of his great performance showcasing the level of talent that we have here on island. Madam Speaker the government will continue to explore avenues to expand developmental initiatives with the aim of creating opportunities for others just like Jordan. Additionally, it is imperative that the department works in close partnership with various sporting bodies on island to enhance the overall performance and productivity of our athletes. The department has therefore prepared a draft sports calendar which will also soon have the input of all stakeholders to include both local and overseas events. The aim of this calendar is to strategically support athletic development and to allow the department to better forecast expenses and budget for the holistic development of the athletes going forward.

Madam Speaker, it is also paramount that we develop and maintain sporting facilities such as synthetic tracks and actually I have a meeting next week with a grouping who has funding and a desire for such. Also, and I know because it's me people might smile but we need to develop motor sports facilities and you would have heard the Premier say in his budget speech that there's almost half a million dollars allocated for this vested with my Honourable Colleague. We will also look into revitalizing our tennis and netball courts to better prepare our sportsmen and women for national, regional and international competition. I must also mention that there will be investment into new sports such as foosball and I must congratulate Mr. Shernyl Burns for his initiative on this and creating a structure for funding that needed very, very minimal government input.

In conclusion Madam Speaker, we are committed to offer and assist with more community programs and I should probably thank Anne Buffonge

at this point but more so in the various sporting disciplines to include athletics, basketball, football, rounders, cricket, netball, and the Honourable Hixon will be happy, golf, and to do so means an increased level of strategic partnering with stakeholders, financiers, and the community. Madam Speaker, I will end by saying this is the one Montserrat project and as a people, a community, and a team, we will all deliver for this country. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Parliamentary Secretary Hixon.

Mr. Dwayne Hixon said:

Good morning, Madam Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to address the budget debate. Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to rise in this Honourable House to contribute to the 2025/2026 budget debate, in my capacity as parliamentary secretary within the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, the Environment, Youth Affairs and Sports. Madam Speaker, at the heart of this Ministry lies the life blood of our development of our people, land, youth, and shared future. Let me begin by extending my thanks and congratulations to the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance for presenting a well-crafted and forward-thinking budget that balances fiscal discipline with social responsibilities. Madam Speaker, this budget is under the theme, One Montserrat, Building Together, Thriving Together. That charts a bold path forward for Montserrat, Madam Speaker and I am proud that the Ministry that I serve is playing a pivotal role in shaping that path.

Madam Speaker, as a small island nation, food security must be one of the highest priorities and this budget delivers on our commitment to strengthening the agricultural sector as a driver of both economic and social development. Madam Speaker, we are not just encouraging farmers, we are actually modernizing it. And we are modernizing it in a way that agriculture can once again be a stable and attractive livelihood for people, especially our youth. Madam Speaker, access to secure land and adequate housing remains one of the most pressing needs for both Montserratians and friends of Montserrat and this government, Madam Speaker, is acting decisively. And that's why we are expanding on our housing initiative programs, our land and infrastructure development, and shortly, as you heard the substantive Minister of Agriculture said, we will be introducing

a new low-cost housing system. And that, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that our lower income earners can afford to own a house; new technology, Madam Speaker. And this is about, and it's about more than concrete and steel. This is about dignity, stability, and creating generational wealth.

I cannot address without speaking about the environment because we know that climate change is real and it's a growing threat to our environment, our infrastructure and livelihoods. Madam Speaker, Montserrat is no stranger to natural disasters and we must now lead with vision and preparedness. We have inherited a beautiful island and this generation must be the one to protect it. To the young people of Montserrat, I say, we see you, we hear you, and we are investing in you. Madam Speaker, our youth are our greatest asset and when we invest in them, we invest in Montserrat's future.

Madam Speaker this budget is more than just a financial document. It is actually a manifesto of hope. It speaks to the dreams of the farmer in Salem, the aspiring athlete in St. John's, the young graduate in Davy Hill, the single mother in Lookout. As I stand here today fully committed to ensuring that this Ministry or any Ministry that I'm attached to continues to work with the people, for the people, delivering real and tangible results on the ground.

Madam Speaker, I would say even to, I'm not going to say Opposition, but I'll say Members of Parliament, all Members of Parliament, let us move forward united in purpose, firm in resolve, and faithful to our vision for a stronger, greener, and more inclusive Montserrat. May God continue to guide this Honourable House and bless our Emerald Isle. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other interventions? It seems not. If we don't have any other interventions, I shall have to ask the Minister of Finance to wrap up. I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on the budget debate to the 2025/26 budget, the government's first budget, consisting of \$175,883,300 recurrent and \$135,900,700 an overall budget total of

\$311,784,000. It's always an achievement when any government presents its first budget. Madam Speaker, in this budget, it's evident in the estimates an increase of approximately twenty million. Allocation for 25/26 for salaries shows an increase, as documented of \$5,698,300. Hearing this, that there is an increase in salary allocations of \$5,698,300, some may think it represents monies for a salary increase. It is important to provide clarification so that people will understand this is not representing a salary increase. This money covers TC salaries and general increments, to name a few. Allocation for allowances also shows an increase of \$8,911,500. Many may be waiting, anticipating an announcement of increased allowance and introduction of a cost of living allowance, but the United Alliance government did not make a cost of living allowance a priority in this 2025/26 budget.

It is also important to give clarity on increased allowances allocations, that there is no increase on allowances for workers. I look forward to hearing the Premier's explanation of what the amounts captured as increased allowances to the tune of \$8,911,500 actually covers. That would provide some transparency and clearer understanding of these allowances as captured. It is important that such clarifications are provided up front for those or so that those who may have false impressions after hearing of the increased allocations in those areas can have the correct explanation. Moving forward, with the salary at the same levels as the previous year and inflation constantly increasing, obviously with no salary increase, no cost of living allowance, no adjustments of the tax-free threshold, many workers in both the private sector and the public sector will need a second income to survive and pay the bills.

This brings me and my attention to what I consider a poor policy implemented by a particular department in the public service with a new policy where the head of department must give approval before a worker can do a second job on his or her own time. If they persist with that new policy and if it spreads across the service, insisting that permission must be given to do a second job in your own time, this will make life even more difficult on the public service workers, especially when the permission is not granted or the process is delayed, whether deliberately or otherwise. I am urging government to rethink and put an end to such a policy that encroaches on the workers' private time, especially at a time when salary levels are inadequate, no increase, no cost of living allowance, etc. People need to make ends meet. It is difficult to survive in Montserrat on one income, as the salary levels are not adequate to address inflation and the

general high cost of living. Government should not be implementing policies that prevent workers from making additional income on their own time. Government should instead create opportunities for additional income.

Madam Speaker, Montserrat's exports are minimal. However, given our reliance or over-reliance on imports, any increase in tariffs on products we consume will reflect a further increase in cost of goods, creating further hardship. These are challenging times for consumers and businesses in Montserrat. Most of us will find it difficult trying to absorb the financial shocks from the ongoing global trade war. The Premier, in his budget presentation, highlighted the following initiatives to stimulate and reduce cost of living, namely adjusting duties and consumption tax by reducing the freight component used in calculating customs duties by 50%. A parent being able to claim during completion of tax returns \$1,500 per child, or up to three children. The proposed standardization of import taxes for all basic building materials of 5% duty and 10% consumption tax. Providing a list of what is considered the basic building materials will be useful. Also announced is an initiative of one million loan facilities for small businesses. These initiatives we welcome. However, given the high cost of living and slow or sluggish economy as it exists at present, these are only the initiatives or some of the initiatives, or first set of initiatives to achieve the levels of relief that will have the desired impact on our people. It is necessary to implement further relief initiatives moving forward.

Madam Speaker, may I suggest additional initiatives such as a cost-of-living allowance, perhaps in the next budget cycle, an increase of the tax-free threshold from \$18,000 to \$24,000 if the Premier finds the money, \$36,000 annually. This will ensure, Madam Speaker, that workers whose salaries are on the proposed soon-to-be-implemented minimum wage, that these persons will not be disadvantaged on minimum wage and paying income taxes. Madam Speaker, these relief initiatives I am recommending will benefit both public and private sector workers as the government, if the government chooses to implement them. Government policy of giving lieu days after a worker has worked overtime and on call-out is at the point where workers cannot get those lieu days even when they request them. Having the management denying lieu days when requested by the worker does not provide an incentive to work overtime. It will be better served if workers are just simply paid when they work overtime. Every little adds up in this rather challenging time.

While there will be a loan facility to assist the small businesses, and we do welcome such a facility, the question is how many businesses are in a position to borrow and service such loans at this time. Madam Speaker, it would serve well for those businesses who are in a position to do so, and as I said, it's a welcome facility. Madam Speaker, my question, however, is what is in place or will be put in place for those struggling businesses who can't afford to access and pay even what is or will be a soft loan. Some businesses are really struggling, unfortunately. Madam Speaker, we do not wish to see any business close. Madam Speaker, population growth strategy is important. This brings me, Madam Speaker, to the question of the population strategy. Part of the reason businesses are failing; their customer base has reduced significantly through population decline, and the remaining customers have very little spending power.

Some small businesses have closed their doors, unfortunately. Others are reducing working hours. Every closure of a business is another loss to the private sector. The \$1,500 claim per child is on the back end, and although it is welcome, Madam Speaker, claiming can only be done during the completion of tax reform return form. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, in the past, as you are well known, even if that is done, some people wait forever for a tax refund, and there are times when refunds can't be paid because of shortage of funds. Madam Speaker, incentives to have children and build population are usually more effective when offered up front, for example, assistance with pampers, school supplies, and food. Creation of sustainable quality jobs would attract people to work and live in Montserrat. Madam Speaker, I do urge the government to take on board the suggestions of the Opposition as we debate and make our contribution to this Bill.

Foreign Direct Investment. Naturally, pushing for foreign direct investment is commendable. We must, however, first create the investment environment to make it attractive and conducive to facilitating ease of monetary transaction and the necessary fiscal incentives established and promoted. The banking issues at our only bank still remain unresolved. Madam Speaker, we need an urgent solution. An urgent solution, Madam Speaker, so that we can ease of transfer of money, ease, Madam Speaker, of doing business. The legal framework necessary to revive our financial services sector must be advanced as part of preparing the foundation. Many other Overseas Territories, Madam Speaker, are benefiting substantially from the financial services sector. Madam Speaker, I dare say

way back when, Montserrat was leading in this sector, but somewhere along the lines,

Madam Speaker, we have fallen way behind. But hope is not lost. It's not too late, Madam Speaker, for us to revive the financial services sector. So, I do urge the government to advance the necessary legal framework to start the process in preparing the foundation.

Tourism. The Caribbean must remain competitive to maintain its share of the tourism industry. To create successfully, the tourism dollar, Madam Speaker, we must compete, and we require adequate tourism infrastructure and maintenance are absolutely necessary. To stay relevant, the islands expand and increase new attractions. Madam Speaker, as I look and observe the draft estimates, it shows projected capital spend for this budget to develop visitors, attractions, and amenities as \$210,500, representing, interestingly, a reduction by half from the previous year. The funds to expand and diversify the tourism product were also reduced from \$304,600 to \$267,400. Madam Speaker, these figures seem to be going in the wrong direction. Given the great potential of the tourism sector in contributing to the GDP of Montserrat, and given the established fact of tourism being the mainstay of Caribbean islands, Madam Speaker, furthermore, given the importance to reduce reliance on budgetary aid, I do hope there is additional funds in the tourism subvention of \$1,164,000 to increase investment in developing visitors' attractions and diversity to diversify the tourism product. I am concerned when I see cuts in funds for tourism development and diversity, as this is one of our strongest potential for economic growth. We need continuous investment in developing our tourism sector. Tourism increases economic activity, influx of tourists drives up local businesses, demand for services and products, creating jobs, increasing revenue, and reducing poverty with direct benefits in accommodation, transport, and attractions.

Madam Speaker, our festivals are not just merely for fun, but Madam Speaker, our main festivals attract an influx of people bringing in much-needed stimulus to spend in the economy. We must take the stakeholders seriously, Madam Speaker. These stakeholders include private promoters and government organizers. And Madam Speaker, we do not wish to take them for granted. We must continue to work with them to invest in further development of our festival. Madam Speaker, the Premier's budget presentation mentioned MAC investing in a new international music festival and an African music event. The MAC budget, however, does not reflect additional funds for such investments as the budget remains the

same as previous years. This could mean those new proposed festival events will not be covered this financial year unless the Premier intends to finance it from funds within the Ministry of Finance or funds elsewhere that is not evident in the budget presentation. The Premier may wish to shed some light on that funding for the proposed new festivals.

Access. Access is still a thorn in the side of the travelling public. Travelers still experience challenges in booking, overnighing against their will in Antigua, flights not being available, and not receiving luggage. The RESA (Runway End Safety Area) remains an outstanding issue to be resolved to allow twin otters to take off with full payload instead of the limitation of passengers. Madam Speaker, this RESA should not even be there, as our John A. Osborne Airport is a non-instrument airport and therefore it's not mandatory to have a RESA. Recent events underscore the importance of both airlift and ferry services to get passengers in and out. We should not satisfy with our current airport facility, while it serves us presently, and in the medium term, we must start the process of moving towards an airport that can facilitate direct international commercial flights and private jets. Yes, some people and some consultants tend to limit us by using our population size as a deterrent. But may I draw your attention to the Barbuda newly completed international airport that has since attracted investment of US\$200 million in resort development on the island. Madam Speaker, let me remind you, Barbuda's population of less than 2,000 is smaller than Montserrat's population. The size of the population did not prevent them from making the necessary investment and reaping the rewards. Neither should the size of our population prevent us from making the necessary investment and reaping the rewards. We can start by funding wind and other preliminary studies at the two proposed sites suggested from previous consultants, Old Qua and Thatch Valley, or any other viable option that's available. Madam Speaker, an airport is not built overnight, but we can start the preliminary studies that will inform designs, etc.

Agriculture. Madam Speaker, everyone that's existing can relate to agriculture. Madam Speaker, to live, we must eat. The present global events remind us of the urgent need to increase agricultural production to be in a position to feed our nation. Madam Speaker, I look forward to the rollout of the \$1 million agricultural development program. I also look forward, Madam Speaker, keenly to reports on the level of agricultural production achieved as a result of this investment. Madam Speaker, I know this may not be an easy road at first, that you will meet hurdles, and therefore

Madam Speaker, I am not necessarily expecting a perfect report, but I'm looking to see that there has been some increase in production and if there are issues Madam Speaker we document lessons learned and built on that. We must strive to improve production levels and take pride in feeding ourselves. So, Madam Speaker, I wish the Minister success with his program, and I believe if he needs more money, he will find it, Madam Speaker, eventually.

Capital projects. Capital projects, Madam Speaker, spanning over several governments, will see the construction eventually, Madam Speaker, of the hospital project. Madam Speaker, with a 2025/26 allocation of \$50 million that's allocated, we look forward to a successful implementation of this project. Madam Speaker, I also wish and I hope that the training for staff is already ongoing, not only in the operation of equipment, but the maintenance of the equipment. If they are not maintained, they cannot give the correct results, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I also trust that although it is not in this present budget, that the government anticipates adequate remuneration. As you know, our nurses, doctors, and other health care workers are being headhunted because they are in great demand all over the world, and we would like to know that we have a new hospital and we have our staff to work within that hospital.

Madam Speaker, from the content of the Premier's presentation, where he stipulated or stressed, or highlighted the cultural centre doubling up as the Parliament building and cultural building, it would appear to me, Madam Speaker, that the United Alliance is cropping the Parliament building negotiated by its sister, MCAP's previous government. This assumption is based on the observation that the allocation of capital funds for this project shown in previous years, is not allocated in this budget, and the statement that the culture will double up as a Parliament building and cultural building made by the Honourable Premier. Since government is continuous, why did this government stop the Parliament Building and Project? I trust the Premier will explain the rationale when he speaks.

Madam Speaker, **A1 Road, Phase 2.** There was mention of the A1 Road, Phase 2, in the budget presentation. However, at least in the copy I had, there was no funding allocated for that project in the capital expenditure under BUILT. Again, I urge the Premier to explain when he gets up to speak.

Port. Madam Speaker, the port allocation for this financial year of \$34,557,500. Madam Speaker, while this figure seems large, bear in mind that, government would have already paid out 60% of the money for the construction of the port. And as you can see, the project is plagued with implementation issues. Some serious intervention is required urgently to bring it back on course. Madam Speaker, I really do wish this project well, Madam Speaker, as it sits presently in the state of hell. I do wish for a successful implementation of all projects and programs, hoping to see economic stimulation. I trust, Madam Speaker, that the government will take on board the input from the Opposition side as we present and make our suggestions in attempt to gain maximum effectiveness and impact for the Montserrat and its people.

Madam Speaker, I do wish the government well in its implementation of the 2025/26 budget. Madam Speaker, I do wish to also remind the government that we'll keep their feet to the fire as they implement this budget. So, Madam Speaker, let them remember that today's presentation is not necessarily a sign of that fire that may be put under their feet going forward. Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the government on its first budget. As I said, every government finds pride in presenting its first budget. Thank you.

Member Arrival – Honourable Donaldson Romeo

At approximately 10:46 a.m., the Honourable Donaldson Romeo entered the Honourable House and was recorded as present for the Budget Debate proceedings.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Parliamentary Secretary, Buffonge.

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning, everybody. Good morning, those on the radio, wherever you are listening or viewing. Madam Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to this budget debate, on a national budget. As always, I do so with a sense of responsibility and in the spirit of one Montserrat, which is part of our theme for this year's budget, where progress is not just the prize of one administration but the shared mission of us as a people committed to building a better future for Montserrat. And that should be the goal, Madam Speaker,

of every politician or aspiring politician: building a better future for a better Montserrat. Government is not like a relay. It's not a point that you try to get to. Let me rephrase that. Let me start over, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker government is like a relay not like relay but like a relay, not a reset button. It is about building on what has been done before, fixing what doesn't work, and in the same breath, try to introduce new ideas because government changes, but in the same breath, governance must continue. Madam Speaker, I am delighted to see or hear the range of initiatives that will be continuing, not like some who cancel or ostracize or cast aside, but more so, building on what's there and taking them forward.

Madam Speaker, I stand here with the hope that the theme, one Montserrat is about moving forward together and not just a slogan but a genuine call for collaboration across all sectors, across all parties per se. and a reminder that this island is small enough that if we all do our part, no one will be left behind. Let me first acknowledge that there are some areas of progress in this budget. A lot of areas of progress, and I want to congratulate this UA team on bringing a timely budget, one and one that has some initiative that people would benefit from. Also, I want to thank the Minister of Finance and all the persons who would have worked tirelessly in getting this budget here, and I heard the Premier say that he would adequately. I don't know if he uses the word compensate, but he would adequately look after the staff who made this possible.

Madam Speaker, I want to start with a 4% growth that was projected for the upcoming year. While on the surface this sounds very encouraging, it is important that we understand what is the driving force for that figure. It wasn't stated, but I'm sure the Premier will enlighten us. Is it the port project? Is it the \$2.1 million in Agriculture? Is it the housing drives or the energy? For a small population like Montserrat, we have to understand that even the modest shift in percentages can seem very significant for our beloved country. So, I believe it's fair to ask what is this projection based on? What sectors are expected to drive this growth, and how will it translate into real or tangible benefits for our people?

Comrades, we are operating in a very uncertain global environment. We know of the geopolitical tensions. We understand the tariffs and the trade wars, and the supply chain and Honourable Osborne spoke to the issues with our supply. These factors will not only affect the bigger countries, but they will also affect our tiny or our small economies as well.

Madam Speaker, from the budget figures, I noticed what appears to be approximately \$8 million increase in allowances. I am not a mathematician nor an accountant, but based on my limited scope, that's a significant amount of money, and it's not very easy to assess where the funds are or what they will be used for, so some clarity, please, Premier, so the rest of us can understand. Similarly, there is an increase of \$20 million, but it wasn't stated where. I see it attached to salaries and other things. Let me use that word so it's reasonable to ask where these monies are going. I didn't hear an increase in public service salaries. Previous governments would have promised, but as the Premier said, this is one step in the right direction, and we're hoping to hear those conversations going on, and we will continue to lobby. I'm sure everyone here would love to see people take home more money.

Madam Speaker, youth and sports have been moved to the Ministry of Agriculture, and I think this is a very strategic move as we need to encourage our young people to get involved with things of agriculture and that nature. So, we are welcoming, and I note the statement said pledge. The ECCB has pledged. They didn't say they will give us yet. I don't know when that money is coming, Premier, but we are welcoming, we're waiting and we're anxious to see how these funds can benefit our people. Madam Speaker, being a sportsman myself, and yes, I'm over 50, but I still consider myself a sportsman. I still believe in the benefits of sports and everything it can do for our people so I would have loved to see it, and I'm not sure if I missed it, a dedicated line for scholarships in sports. The Minister spoke of Mr. Jhordan Ryan, and I would love to see, and I am lobbying here where we could have a dedicated line solely for awarding sports scholarships. Madam Speaker, the young man is doing very well, and we wish him all the best as he is representing all of us here on Montserrat. Of course, I understand the restraints of budget. I understand the implications of finding the monies so that we could do everything we have to do, and persons who are listening, no matter which governments come here, we cannot do it all in one breath.

Madam Speaker, we've heard of the rehabilitation of the sports complex, and while I'm on sports, I want to applaud the efforts in getting that facility back to top notch. It's been a while since any major and I want to lobby again, hopefully, I'm not sure what the scope of works are, but if we can replace the floor and add some much-needed extraction fans to make that facility just a little bit better for persons that are using it. Of

course, there are some other issues with the facilities, so I'm grateful, and while I'm lobbying, I know the Minister said he would extend to the outdoor courts as well at some point or another, but those are in desperate need of repair.

Madam Speaker, beyond infrastructure, beyond events, we have to take a broader view. We have to now figure out how to integrate our sports fully into our education system, and not just an after-school or something of that sort. Of course, I'm lobbying again for the sports policy. Minister Osborne, you have a lot of work to do. We really need that policy up and running to govern how. Without that framework, of course, we risk losing our talented persons, and we cannot afford that to happen.

Madam Speaker, there is an additional \$500,000 in the budget allocated to the police. Now, any funds that could benefit our police, I am grateful for. They are a very intricate part of our society and they play a very vital role in keeping our country safe and of course administering justice when the case arises. Madam Speaker, maybe it's time we got a Minister of Defence, Premier, I don't know how we'll get that one to work. I'm putting up my hand, I'll probably be the first one if it happens for someone to actually represent fully the needs of our armed forces, our uniformed personnel, and bring their cases to Cabinet, and not just depend, of course, on the Constitution and where it lies at the moment. Madam Speaker, I'm equally happy but before I get to that. The previous administration of which I was a part have already passed through Cabinet the awarding of medals to persons who would have served during the volcanic crisis, his own military personnel and I'm lobbying again for us to start working on that so when national honours and awards comes around next year we will be ready to give these people their due medals and commendations for their service.

Madam Speaker, the Cudjoe Head Police Station again is getting some much-needed review, some upgrades. Minister Kirnon will be happy for that. But in hindsight, and I dare say in hindsight, while I'm happy for that funds to be made available to fix that station, Salem Police Station, given the distance where it's at, and the funds that have already been committed, I would love to see that station be fully serviceable to carry out the needs of the persons on that side. Of course, given that Cudjoe is really close to Brades, that's the only reason why I'm saying that.

Madam Speaker, there are some changes in our immigration policies, and I know our non-national community, our CARICOM nationals, welcome those changes in terms of their time, and it's none too soon. I was fortunate enough, on the Premier's request, to attend a meeting in Grenada where the whole conversation surrounded integration of our Caribbean CARICOM nationals in our countries. Equally so, given them full education, full healthcare, and the conversation surrounding social security is still ongoing. Madam Speaker, free movement of people in this day and age is very important, and given the global context and what's happening outside, we have to now look at our own Union, the Eastern Caribbean Union, as an avenue for growth for ourselves. Again, we cannot depend on external markets, so we have to create our own. Not sure where the external forces are headed. Madam Speaker, this policy has the potential to help us to achieve our goals for economic growth and, of course, the diversification we need in terms of the skills that we can offer.

Access has always been a challenging situation, and again, commendations to the government for all the strides that have been made. Some work has been done before, and of course, seeing the twin otters running in Montserrat again is a welcome sight. I think all of our people would welcome that as opposed to what's there, and we are happy for the interventions that have been made. Of course, in the long term, we still need to look at the limitations of our airport, we still need to look at what the future of travel in Montserrat will look like, and how do we either lengthen our runway or move to a different location. Of course, that's capital funding and a conversation we need to have with our aid donors.

Madam Speaker, I'm equally happy for the reprioritization of the micro enterprise loan for the development of our small entrepreneurial sector. I'm encouraging those persons who are in that space to reach out and benefit from the funds that will be available. Mark you, it said loans. I'm not sure if there are some grants somewhere around, but it does say some small interest loans so persons can benefit in getting their business up and running. Of course, I prefer grants. The economic situation right now is tough, but we understand.

The only ask I have, Madam Speaker, is that whatever policy we put in place around this funding, that we make it easy, we make it seamless for persons to benefit and cut some of the red tape that would hinder the access to those funds. Of course, there was the Enterprise Development Scheme and other initiatives, but this is what's here and what's now.

Madam Speaker, agro-processing has been one of the biggest things we've talked about for years previously, and I note that this is a shift towards the micro side of things. And I understand why. It might be a quicker fix, but I look forward to a time when Montserrat can be producing a sufficient quantity for export. Now, food sovereignty is a word that we've tossed around for quite some time. I don't want us to look at it as just a buzzword. The idea, of course, it came from Major Joseph Lynch; good morning, sir, if you're listening, where he says, listen, forget about security. Sovereignty means you're Montserratian and you must be able to eat what's grown here. Of course, the \$18 million that was quoted by the Premier in terms of our import bill, what he didn't say that he included things like ketchup that are our food sources as well, but it's the overall import bill on cornflakes and things like that so it's not everything we can produce, but what he's trying to say and I support him fully with that, anything that we can grow locally, any food and we've already, Minister Osborne would attest, identified the crops that we are working on and we should be able to have these in sufficient quantity that we do not have to import or depend on the external market. Of course, any percentage of 2 million staying locally in our pockets in a small society such as this would be beneficial.

While I'm pleased to see that some of the products, the projects that I have championed, like the Shade House, aquaponics, youth involvement in agriculture, tissue culture, they are gaining traction and they are happening. I want to be clear that this is just the beginning. These are steps in the right direction but we need the buy in. We need our stakeholders, we need our farmers, we need our fishermen to jump on board and women too. Not, there's no segregation here, to jump on board in getting and moving this one Montserrat project forward. No need to stress the uncertainty of these times.

Madam Speaker, I also applaud the effort of the Premier and this administration to cut the service recruitment times in a third, from 60 days to 28 days. Really ambitious and we're asking for the buy-in, of course, of our public sector in getting these timelines done. I know there are persons who would have applied and not even gotten a response, and we cannot continue this way. We already have a small population. We already have persons who are leaving. And every effort must be made in retaining, first, the people that we have by offering them jobs, not because they ran in the election. We need to find jobs for these persons who have applied

and are still waiting, or even worse, some of them are overlooked for that same reason.

Comrades, we are frustrating our own people out of the system and out of the country. We are losing our talented Montserratians who are eager and ready to contribute. In other countries, Madam Speaker, you will not even be considered if you are not a national of that country. Needless to say, that, fixing these issues would enhance our delivery of the services. It's one thing to have an ambitious budget, and this budget is very ambitious, but it's another thing to have the people to carry out the intent of the budget.

Madam Speaker, on culture, I'm very happy for the allocations to MAC. Of course, MAC never gets enough money, and I'm saying it here. If we want culture, if we want festival, if we want this very important part of our country, especially a new role in managing this building, they need the funding. So, I'm happy for whatever funding they get, and we'll be continuing the work there to see that we can be proud of our festivals, be proud of our carnivals, and be able to market our offerings to persons overseas or better market to overseas personnel. Of course, this is a huge piece of work and we will need the participation of all our stakeholders. We have already started to merge culture and tourism because if we have a good vibrant culture of course your tourists will come naturally for it and the synergies between those two departments or authorities will bring benefit to Montserrat. Of course, the conversation surrounding St. George's Hill is a major attraction. We want to see that happening and extend, of course to other parts of our country that have not been looking at or developing attraction in those countries. We understand of course tourism will create jobs among other things.

Madam Speaker our diaspora. This will continue to be a work in progress. We will not have all the answers right away but what we are encouraging Madam Speaker, is that persons who are willing, persons who are ready, find your way and come home. We will try to accommodate you. We will be putting some initiatives in place to benefit you. We understand you cannot move right away so you want some time in getting here and some of the concessions as they stand do not adequately benefit you and of course we will be working on those to get those to get you here as soon as you're ready and that we can.

Madam Speaker, I have to speak about the funds that were associated to the Parliament building. While I understand the reallocation to the Cultural Centre. I do understand the reallocation. We have to also make a note of the work that has gone in. You yourself would understand the work that the clerk would have played in getting those funds here and while the cultural center is in dire need of repair, it's actually a health and safety concern at the moment the way it is, the need for a building or a facility such as a Parliament building. We understand the implications for our nation and we have to have a Parliament building and of course those conversations will continue. Madam Speaker, sometimes we need to find creative solutions to our problems. And I applaud again the work of this government in challenging our local banking institutions to step up to the plate and making funds available to address whether it's housing or parliament buildings, it's our monies, let's put them to work.

Madam Speaker, time and time in this House, Honourable Romeo, and I must give him his credit for this, will be championed more or less because of our underprivilege, of our social recipients, and we were lobbying at one point even for a hundred dollar increase to bring that nine hundred dollars to a thousand dollars, sort of matching the six percent that we gave, last administration. Madam Speaker, if it's not too late, Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary, if there's any way that we could give that extra \$100, people would appreciate it, especially in these times.

Madam Speaker, this budget contains a lot of seeds. Being the farmer that I am, I understand the need to have seeds, but they have to be planted. Some will lie dormant for a while, some will germinate immediately. And this is the nature of this budget. Some projects will get up and going right away, and some will take some time. What I hope is that at the end of this financial year, when we come back to this House, is that we can say that we would have implemented, if not 100%, near to 100% of all initiatives here.

Let me also carol, for want of a better word, the attempt or the plan to reduce the application of freight to the calculation of duty. In these economic times, in these rising prices all over, especially with freight, Madam Speaker, any reduction, and from what Minister Osborne said and from what I've been hearing on the street and in the news, these prices are only going to go up. So even if we take off that 50% off the freight as planned, prices will still remain high, so a lot of interventions will be needed going forward in bringing the cost of living down.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of this budget, and like I said, while some seeds will stay dormant, some will grow immediately, but let us remember that our people are watching. Persons look to budget for a sense of hope, for a sense of direction, and this is what they are waiting to hear. But they also want more than pronouncements. They want progress. I don't think we're asking or the country is asking for perfection. I think what we're asking for is real movement. Not excuses, it's not the time for that, but effort. I'm imploring the Members of this Government, I'm imploring the Opposition, and those in the private sector and our keyboard warriors, a new phrase I've learned recently, to do justice to the country. Let us promote Montserrat. And while I'm on promotion, let's stick a pin for content creators. They, too, have a part to play in marketing Montserrat and getting us out there simply by what they do. And of course, I'll be speaking to the Minister of Finance about some concessions to support that little small sector. Madam Speaker, while I take my seat, let us rise to the occasion. Let us move Montserrat, this one Montserrat forward. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Education and Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the best political decision I have ever made and the best decision for the future of Montserrat that I have ever made was to run in the last election with this incredibly dynamic and progressive team, the United Alliance. A team that has the people of Montserrat at the center of everything that we do. In conversations with persons since the reading of the budget, the mood of the people of Montserrat can only be described as hopeful and enthusiastic. The people of Montserrat are very happy that the United Alliance is the government of the day. I must thank the hard, must thank the government workers in all the Ministries for their hard work. They have worked together with this new government and have contributed to keeping us inspired and motivated. I would like to specifically thank the hard work of the Ministry of Finance, led by our FS, Mr. Kenya Lee, and our Premier, the Minister of Finance, and I must thank of course, the UK Government for its continued financial support for Montserrat.

I stand today to support our Premier and the Government of Montserrat at large with the present budget. To briefly confirm our specific plans in Education, Health, and Social Services. In education, repetition is good for the soul. In education, our intentions are a strong and fully funded program which provides technical subjects to all students on Montserrat. This program will ensure that all students are excellent at something. Madam Speaker, if a student does not have academics as a strong point, we will have something for students, for this student to excel at. We intend to keep students who would prefer technical subjects, we intend to keep them occupied, engaged and productive. When these students leave the Montserrat Secondary School, they will be either ready for the world of work or ready to carry on what they have learnt at college and at university. We intend, as previously stated, Madam Speaker, a fully supported special educational needs program for those who are academic or for those who see themselves as academic but have some deficits in areas of learning that we can support. Through this program, Madam Speaker, we shall turn three subject passes into five, five subject passes into seven, low or borderline grades into high ones. We know that students with special educational needs are fully supported in international universities, and our job in this Ministry is to help our students to get there.

Safeguarding Madam Speaker, we intend to ensure that all children on Montserrat are safe and that they are not subject to any form of abuse not subjects of neglect, verbal abuse, financial abuse, or sexual abuse. To protect our students, our children, we have started a safeguarding board, and we are adopting essential policies in this area. We are also presently developing after-school programs and summer programs in which our children are not only protected but are also engaged in academic work, in sport, in games, and career-focused activities. To the children of Montserrat, Madam Speaker, we see you, we hear you, and we, the United Alliance, are fully there for you. We shall be leaving no child behind. Learning loss has been a concern of the new Ministry of Education, led by a new government and a new, diligent and dynamic Permanent Secretary. We intend to retain teachers so that our students are not deprived of teachers, a situation we met when getting into office. We intend to ensure that our teachers have the supplies they require, which is presently a huge problem. We intend to fully dive into the problem of curriculum that our teachers have had to deal with. This, for us, Madam Speaker, will be a huge project, but an essential one.

To deal with the learning loss that we have met on coming into the Ministry, the Ministry has already provided funds for extra classes for persons writing exams this year. So, students of the MSS who are in need of extra classes and are unable to afford them can contact the principal of the MSS, who will direct them to these classes. The Ministry is also working closely with the Human Resources Department to ensure that we secure teachers in their first specific roles and to ensure that our teachers are fully aware of the details of their contracts beforehand so that they can be comfortable when here. Our teachers must be able to plan their lives, must be able to have comfortable and happy lives on our island. We are also working diligently with the OECS to ensure that teachers on Montserrat have all that teachers in the region have access to. Access to tertiary education and awareness of career opportunities have been a problem even for bright and enthusiastic students who live on Montserrat. We intend to ensure that even on entry into the MSS and throughout the course of their experience that our students are aware of career opportunities and how to get there. How to access student finance in the UK, for example. I had a conversation a couple of days ago with a bright young golden student. Her enthusiasm for starting a project to do this will be supported by the Ministry of Education. It is an honour to see our young persons wanting to give back to students on the island. This young lady has just graduated from university in the UK with a first-class and truly golden honours degree. Well done.

In summary for Education, Madam Speaker, we will be over the course of this financial year doing all that we can to protect our children, to improve literacy and numeracy rates, to improve exam passes, improve awareness and access to tertiary education, improve the quality of students that we put into the working world, and we will be helping our students to help us to build this island nation. We have the assurance of our Honourable Premier that all we desire for education will be provided under a special project labelled Education Transformation, a funded project that we in Education are fully ready for.

In Health and Social Services, I continue to be excited. The new hospital project; this week, Madam Speaker had the most amazing experience of assisting with ground breaking for the new hospital. With the permanent Secretary of Health, the Governor, and the previous Minister of Health, and a representative from the new contractors, we dug away into the dirt in a symbolic gesture of ground breaking, which gave all present and all watching a very good feeling. This new hospital, Madam Speaker, which

is a multi-government project, has taken many years to come to fruition. This is a one-Montserrat project which shall bring us a \$102 million new hospital. During the building process, we are glad that there will also be work provided for persons on the island who desperately are in need of work. Persons interested in working on the new hospital project should contact the Labour Department. This department is creating a list of contractors, of workers for the contractors, so that as many people as possible on Montserrat can take part in the building process can secure work. And this is at the insistence of our Honourable Premier, who is passionate about job creation and about the survival of people on Montserrat. Madam Speaker, many thanks to our Premier for this.

In other plans, while we build this new hospital over the next two years, we, the United Alliance, and we in the Ministry of Health, Education, Health and Social Services, shall continue, based on budget allocation, to provide the people of Montserrat with all that we have promised. Health Transformation, Madam Speaker, which began three years ago, has brought us fruit in health that we could only have dreamed of. Through Health Transformation, we have received CT scanning, essential in the management of stroke, major trauma, pulmonary embolism, and assisting in cancer diagnosis, along with many other things. ECG machines for the clinics for the diagnosis of cardiac problems, which is essential in our diabetic and hypertensive population, who are at high risk. And the electronic medical record system which we refer to as HIS, Health Information System which allows for excellence in patient care through the sharing of medical information, the linking of the district clinics with the hospital, and will also allow for the data collection that is essential in order for us to understand our population's health and thus essential in planning for health. It is essential that the initial investments in Health Transformation be maintained and developed. This requires ongoing funding, and Health Transformation has the support of this budget as we go forward.

Although an average economist might see this as more money being required, our Premier, not the average economist, and this government, see faster diagnosis, reduction in medical evacuation costs, better patient outcomes and long-term reduced costs in health. Funding in this budget has also been received to maintain and improve our visiting specialist program. Over the next month we will experience the visit of a team that will be providing upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and colonoscopy for the diagnosis of gastrointestinal conditions including cancers. I must

thank Debbie Rochester who heads this team and I must thank the persons in the Ministry of Health who are preparing for the visit and supporting the visit of this team. We are also expecting this year, again new to the visiting specialist program, the visit of a vascular sonographer and vascular surgeon fully supported by the Ministry. After several years of having one of the highest amputation rates in the region, Montserrat will be going full speed ahead in tackling this through our project. Our patients will be able to have their blood vessels assessed for poor circulation, and if there are blockages, the problem will be targeted at the level of the blood vessels through medication or through surgery.

This government fully intends to bring our amputation rate to zero and plans to be trendsetters in the region in this area. As you know, Madam Speaker, diabetes and high cholesterol and their complications are on the rise in the region and on Montserrat. Many of our patients, unfortunately, are in denial about this reality. Many of our clinicians have dreamt of the day when major circulatory problems in our population can be adequately addressed. We want to keep persons in the workplace, we want to keep them well, we want to make sure that they continue to support their families financially or otherwise, rather than allowing them to become dependents on the state. The visiting specialist program, Madam Speaker, will also continue to provide the usual specialties, the cardiologist, for example, who will continue to visit Montserrat. I would like to also thank Dr. Perry Ryan. This gentleman from the east of Montserrat, now an oncologist and haematologist in the US with many years of experience, visited Montserrat last month with the help of Mrs. Anne Buffonge-Thomas and the Ministry of Health, and was able to run clinics and talks, and has been able to increase our awareness, and going forward will assist us in adhering to best practice in his specialty.

The budget also includes money for special projects, Madam Speaker. This government intends to start a dialysis program on Montserrat to finally be able to manage patients with end-stage kidney disease on island. Please note, again, I'm sure we all know this by now, that on this island and in the region, diabetes and hypertension contribute to the largest proportion of the cases of end-stage kidney disease and the rates of these conditions are unfortunately rising on island. We have allocated money and we will be asking the UK Government to support us with expert staff as we embark on this project. Timely and effective medical evacuation must be mentioned. I am pleased to announce, Madam Speaker, to the people of this island that a paper is about to be brought to Cabinet, an

MoU with Guadalupe for our time-critical emergencies. Also, I must note that we have multiple options for Medivac carrier craft and also multiple locations where we can send our patients. Overall, Madam Speaker, the impact of fine-tuning the medical evacuation service on the budget will be cost reduction. Sending only the patients we need to send and sending them in a fast and effective way that allows for better outcomes and less wastage in resources. Again, keeping our patients alive and well and allowing them to continue to be present to support their families.

I must mention the recent visit of PAHO, Pan American Health Organization, to Montserrat a couple of weeks ago. Montserrat has embarked on a special agreement with PAHO, and over the next few months, we'll be embarking on an extensive data collection process with the project, with the assistance of PAHO, that will help to inform us of exactly what conditions we are dealing with on island. And moving on from this, we hope, PAHO will assist us in health financing meetings and finalizing decisions in health financing how we pay for health going forward. This is extremely important. The Social Services Department has been working hard to help persons on Montserrat. The dedication of the director and her team does not go unnoticed. I would like to ensure the team that they will continue to have our full support as they continue to care and support for persons on island. For persons on Montserrat seeking financial assistance for urgent medical conditions in the past, if they were non-nationals, by policy and by law, the Government of Montserrat wasn't able to help them, we would like to assure such persons that we are diligently working on adjusting laws and policies to ensure that we leave no one behind. In your medical emergency, we will be able to help you.

In summary, Madam Speaker, and in almost closing, just to say that in the Ministries to which I have been assigned, there are firm plans for progress, and our promises to the people of Montserrat shall be kept. I would like to congratulate our Honourable Premier for not only bringing us to the point of passing a useful and hopeful budget, but also for his genuine love and support of the United Alliance team and the people of Montserrat. To Ministers Osborne and Honourable Dorsette Hector, to Honourable Crenston Buffonge and Parliamentary Dwayne Hixon, thank you so much for your hard work, for your personal support to me and for your support to the team. I can truly say this to the people of Montserrat that, for me, my United Alliance experience feels like family. I look forward to continuing to work with the team and also, I look forward to continuing to work with the Opposition. Madam Speaker, I must thank the

Opposition. As we go forward, I expect them to not only hold us to account, but I look forward to us incorporating their ideas to having their input as we go forward on this One Montserrat project. And my last word as we go forward as usual is to hope that Montserrat can find ways of having a significant income that allows us to afford more and allows our people to afford more. There is hope coming as we go forward for the financial services sector, hope for investments in other areas and hope for investment in festivals which will allow our people the dignity of living on an island that has a viable economy. Thank you again, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other? I recognize the Honourable Donaldson Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to say clearly this morning, congratulations on a well-presented budget and also presentations by the other Ministers and Members. I wish I had a little more time so I could comment on some of their statements, but I'll try my best to do what I can. You wouldn't be hearing much of a formal speech from me but I'll be making comments and asking questions so I hope that will satisfy you.

On Monday the Honourable Premier said that he was the new kid on the block. Well, we all know that this is his third time at the helm as Chief Minister and Premier. In addition to being in Opposition and being a Minister several times, not many people get a second chance, never mind a third one. I must also join him in congratulating the public servants, the PS's, directors, the Honourable AG, FS, all of those in the Ministry of Finance and other public servants who have worked so hard to put this budget together. And before I forget, I meant to do this last, let me take this time to thank the Honourable Jermaine Wade, our one and only member of staff, willing and able at all times, all times. He's not here right now, but he would have been. I know he's attending an important meeting. I can't emphasize how helpful that one individual has been, having to do so many different tasks. At the same time, I want to thank the FCDO for the additional \$75,000 given to the Opposition. The Honourable Premier says, let's get the record straight. We made a presentation to the FCDO and they responded by giving us \$75,000 and the Honourable

Premier and Finance facilitated that agreement. I am actually told that more than \$75,000 was allotted to the Opposition and by the end of this session, I hope the Honourable Premier will tell us what the total we receive will be. So, I had to take care of that home business first, house business first.

Now, I honestly say from listening to people in the public, listening myself, that the budget as presented seems to have given many hope. I would not want to appear, therefore, to be throwing cold water on people's hopes at a time when many had lost hope. And indeed, this budget, the way it's presented, and much of what's in it, gives reason for some hope. As you know, it is my duty to comment constructively, to congratulate the government on key achievements, for following up on the work established by previous governments. It is also my duty to remind you of your promises, shortcomings, and also to make suggestions. Isn't that correct, Madam Speaker? You're looking at me. Isn't that correct? Yes, I know you agree. So, I just, today, somehow, I'm a bit cautious and careful about my presentation because I want to make sure I encourage an environment where we can work together, and this is an important start. I decided to wait until budget time. Normally, they give 90 to 100 days, whatever number of days, before I begin my serious scrutiny of government. I decided to wait until budget time, which means after this budget, as I take the time to review it and the circumstances around us, you'll be hearing more from me. Today you're just getting some comments and questions.

Now, according to your figures and your budget, the estimates given to us, you're presenting a total budget estimate of \$311.78 million to this Honourable House for approval; \$175,883,300 for the recurrent and \$135,900,000 for the capital. So, as I start, one very good thing is that local revenue, the estimate, the estimated amount which people and businesses will pay this year in taxes, duties, and other charges, has not been increased. In fact, it's been decreased by just \$106,700. Not a huge amount, but certainly decreased. So, the local revenue contribution to the budget of \$175.88 million is \$ 55.64 million, while the UK Government's contribution is \$120.24 million. Now the second piece of good news is that the UK Government's contribution to the recurrent budget has increased by EC\$20 million. That is good news. And I like the way the Honourable Premier said in his speech, and this and I'm quoting now, this \$55.64 million is, and I quote, 'bolstered by HMG's recurrent budget support of \$120.242 hundred million.' So here he is saying that our

\$55.64 contribution is bolstered by HMG's recurrent budget support by \$120 million. Bolstered. Strong word. The Honourable Premier goes on to say that with this budget, this government, and I quote, 'which I have the honour of leading, will be taking a substantial investment in Montserrat's future in terms of physical and social infrastructure as well as capacity building for our people'. Let me repeat. The Honourable Premier said, 'this government, which I have the honour of leading, will be making substantial investment in Montserrat's future in terms of physical and social infrastructure as well as capacity building for our people'.

Clearly, the Honourable Premier is making the point, not only does he appreciate the aid from the FCO, but we are in need of a substantial amount from them. I wonder if you understand where I'm coming from. Clearly, in this budget, there's been little or no mention of private sector funding towards this budget or contribution. Very little. And I understand you've been in office for four months, three months, and we have to start with what we have, but this is what we have. So, I expect that there will be no more thinking that it is mendicant to be receiving or asking for significant aid from Her Majesty's Government. That I think will end today. And to make the point more clearly, and this is what concerns me, speaking today. I wish, I wish that this will come home to us today because I understand. I learnt from Honourable Crenston a while ago that he said this is an ambitious budget. In a sense, it's ambitious being your first budget, but certainly in relation to the needs of the country right now, I know if the Honourable Premier had the resources and the backing, he would be even more ambitious in this budget. And I'm very concerned after COVID, especially, having gotten just regular budgets since COVID, that we're in a more serious situation for our businesses and people than we want to admit. So, let me just make, repeat a statement I've read many times since I've been in Parliament in 2009, and I'm reading it again, and I hope you hear it clearly. It's written by DFID itself, 2005. It says, '*without substantial external support, there is no likelihood of Montserrat achieving its ambitions. The population will decline further, and more people will become more heavily dependent on public services that the government would increasingly struggle to fund and implement. This will lead inexorably to the collapse of the island's social, economic, and governance structures.*' And we all know, this is 2005, ten years ago; things have gotten worse since then and the substantial external support is only beginning to bear fruit. Had it not been for COVID and the delay in putting the hospital in place and the port and others, thank God we have the fibre optic in place; we'll be ahead but we face the COVID crisis that was

not addressed. And there's no way I'm expecting the Honourable Premier and government to address that fully today. There's no way they can do it. It would be unfair of me. But I want us to really face the fact that we are in a much more precarious situation than we think if we begin to celebrate too much about the achievements of this budget.

And to help to give you context of why I'm saying that. I'm going to convert the extra \$20 million to 5.76 million pounds. And the reason why I'm doing that, I want to ask a question. Do you know that the UK Government spent 50 million pounds on less than 60 people, prisoners, one of which of whom, is in Montserrat right now? 50 million pounds on less than 60 people within a year. Asylum seekers, you know how much 50 million pounds is? Just to give you context, EC \$173 million. The exact almost amount of our recurrent budget. The exact amount of our recurrent budget. So, we're down here celebrating large sums and somebody up there must be laughing at us, because I've had so many Ministers tell me, to my face, that these sums are peanuts to the British Government, Ministers in the United Kingdom. So, let us be real. We need substantially more, and we need it now. We needed it last year, we needed it five years ago, and if you will, I hope you appreciate where I'm coming from.

Now, what is this 20 extra million dollars going to do? Remember, the \$20 million is less than 6.5 million pounds. Twenty million, according to the estimate figures, is split up between salaries, 5.7 million extra. Allowances, \$8.9 million. And \$7.4 million for services rendered to the public. Benefits have been reduced by \$1.4 million, that gives us \$20 million approximately \$20 million. That's where the \$20 million has gone. So, the big question is, how is this extra money really going to have a significant impact, according to this budget, on our economy, on our people? As it stands, people who are picking up and leaving because of economic hardship, not hardship that this government has brought on people. Please, I'm not blaming you. Hardship. So, let me follow the Honourable Premier's account of some of the things; what he refers to as the capital and recurrent initiatives that will have an impact on our quality of life. That's quoting him directly. He said, "I have chosen to highlight some of the amounts allocated to important recurrent and capital initiatives because of their level of impact on our quality of life."

So, let me just go through a few. EC\$1 million for agricultural development, and in the statement, it says, 'it is our goal to double our agricultural output in selected crops, livestock, and fisheries'. Now from the

documents we received and the speeches so far, we don't really have details of how this will be achieved, what the plans are, or how it will be achieved so I cannot assess whether the \$1 million can do it or not. That's fair. What I do know, that \$1 million is a very small amount of money and I know the Honourable Minister of Agriculture understands money very well. \$1 million to address water and infrastructure challenges and to address pest, agouti, iguana, goat and sheep and fowl challenges. I heard the Honourable Dorsette speak about rats. Well, one of the challenges are two footed rats in Montserrat, it's not just agouti and them. And \$1 million is not a lot but I know it's what you have and I know you're going to do your best with it, but I have to emphasize. Why? Because it is simply a small amount, but I know you will do your best with it.

Then he speaks of a million dollars in very low interest loans available to our farmers for agricultural development to supplement the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts to double our output in selected crops, livestock and fisheries. And he says this will be a revolving fund so people borrow money, repay it, and they're revolving funds. So, you're intending to revolve the \$1 million. I want to suggest, Honourable Minister, to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Premier, that we take the risk of making these monies more grants than loans. We have to take the risk and believe that we can raise more for next year.

Farming and fishing are more risky businesses than most. Fishermen don't have any insurance for their boats. They would have to pull them in every day. They leave them out in the rough seas; they lose their boats, their engines, no insurance. How many of them have lost 20 or 30 or thousand dollars' worth of boat and engine with no assistance to replace them? They had to find money to replace them. No insurance. These are not people that you burden with loans at this time. When we have a safe harbour and there's a place for boats to be parked, and they can insure their boats, they're in a better position. And again, when it comes to farmers, no matter what, after rain comes, and you pull out a bit, weed grow, you have to go clear the land, plant again, you have to find water, and if you're going to have water, if you're going to do anything serious about doubling your agricultural produce, you have to have water all year long. And I know the Honourable Minister of Agriculture also delved in agriculture. And he understands the importance of water all year long. That is probably the most important ingredient to effecting change for farming. So again, for the farmers, help them to clear their lands. Help

them to get their crops growing with grants. It's just a small amount. It's not a lot. Let's take the risk, and next year we will find more money.

Madam Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to also mention, so that we realize that the argument was already made, as has been made by the Honourable Premier in his previous term, for access. The argument was made in 2018/19, when the British Government considered EC\$14 million for a challenge fund for businesses 14 million. It was on the table. The only concern was capacity to carry it out. We need to revisit that and tell them, look, it was needed then, it's even more needed now, 14 million. And listen, it's going to take more than \$14 million to do something serious for agriculture, from the government's point of view, not the private sector. I've suggested to the Honourable Minister, or to others I've said it publicly, that what we need is a project where we clear 50 to 100 acres of land, water works in the north above here. Clear it, get rid of the stones and the trees, fence it, and provide adequate water, whatever form of supply, so that the farmers are guaranteed water. Then when you put them to work, you're able to influence the cost of what they produce. To help them to be more effective and really controlled. That's what you do overseas. That's what Britain would do. If their farmers were moved from the danger area to this side, from the start 25, 30 years ago, they would have done that. It was never done, and it needs to be done.

I'm not gonna say a lot today about everything in this budget, but I hope I drive home the point that we're going to have to be far more ambitious over the next year to help our people and to save Montserrat from decline as described by the 2005 statement by DFID. And to help me make that point, and let me not get off track. In the budget speech, he also said, in order to develop the micro enterprise sector, we are providing \$1 million to fund low-interest loans of up to a maximum of \$50,000 per loan. This again will be a revolving fund. EC \$1 million. And I know the Honourable Premier would not let me get away with this. He would not let me get away with this, so I have to ask him. I remember he promised from his salary a certain amount for microbusinesses. Is this part of the million? Or is it going to be in addition to the million? I have to jab you too. You would have told me the same thing. But again, \$1 million when we have nearly 400 registered businesses. Not all of them are qualified, not all of them need it, but certainly most of them need help. And I know Honourable Hixon is nodding his head; he knows he's in the private sector. People desperately need help.

Honourable Lewis spoke about businesses closing. Let's face it, some businesses just open for formality, for show. They can't pay their staff; they're struggling. And it's not the fault of this government, so I'm not blaming you. So please don't take it. Don't accept the blame, but this is the reality. And it's not the blame of the previous government alone. It's a combination of challenges over the years. So, I'm not excusing myself, Honourable Crenston. I'm going to be very generous today, because we're talking about one Montserrat, right? Good. Now, again, as I said, it was \$14 million for a challenge fund, and I guarantee you that was not going to be in the form of burdensome loans once we make the argument properly. And why am I saying this? And I have to use this opportunity. If I don't say much more today, it's just to open the minds of our people because when I did this during COVID, I was accused of referring to the UK budget and not this budget. Look at what the British Government did for its people during COVID. Some whole long list of things to help businesses and people. Job retention scheme, 80% of wages of up to 2,000, they paid for private sector people. Self-employment income scheme, even if self-employed, got assistance, whether you're employed by somebody or not, you got help. 80% of your profits considered; universal credit, welfare enhancements increasing, universal credit by 20 pounds a week. That's a lot for those people. That went directly into the hands of people. Mortgage and rental support, local housing allowance; small businesses could reclaim losses for COVID-related absences, stamp duty. A whole lot of things done, mortgage relief scheme; Guarantees to loans that banks give, 100% guarantees. Can you imagine if you were able to give 100% or even 50% guarantee for housing loans with the Bank of Montserrat's money? That's the sort of thing they were doing in the United Kingdom five years ago. But what happened here from then until now, little or nothing. Not your fault, but I'm describing the environment that banks, businesses, social security, our key institutions suffer from, not to mention the people in our community. And the reason why I'm saying this, we need to find a way over the next few months to get money directly into the hands of people.

Claiming tax credits after a year, and then you wait for tax returns, that's great. But what happens between now and then? When your salary is less than 2,500, how much can you claim in tax for your children? Not much. So those people need help. Honourable Crenston just stood and spoke about welfare increase from 900 to 100. Lord have mercy. I believe that if in fact one Montserrat is a reality and you're united with the Opposition, we will achieve far more than depending on the Governor to help

you negotiate. Far more. \$100? And Honourable Dr. Buffonge spoke about getting rid of amputations? Let me tell you the reality. Let me tell you the reality. I've had to deal with a young man in his 50s who already had parts of his foot cut off and I witnessed him go to this grocery store. I made sure he had some money and I watched him purchase the goods. I encouraged him to go to welfare, and they've been very kind. They cannot afford the food necessary to prevent the amputations. Honourable Dr. Buffonge, am I correct? A hundred dollars more than \$900 cannot buy the kind of food needed to prevent amputations. Not to mention, it's not just complications affecting all of your organs in your body. Please, I guarantee you if we unite, there is no way \$100 will be what's considered. I guarantee if we unite, many of the things I mentioned that are done in COVID can be done in Montserrat for the people of Montserrat. And you know why? I want to refer to something Honourable Dorsette said this morning. I was listening and I wasn't here but I was listening.

She spoke about the stalwarts. She spoke about the fact that we're British. But let me say this, this is not part of my speech, you know. But let me say this while I'm on the floor, Madam Speaker. We are equal to any British person in Scotland, in Isles of Scilly, in London, Birmingham, anywhere. Do you know that? Whether we are in, under overseas aid, or whether we are having to fight for aid from within Britain, we are equal. We are equal. So, anything I mention here that's done in England can be done here for us and this is something I've struggled to explain in this House for too long. You know why we are equal, Honourable Dorsette, you're a lawyer. Go and read the United Nations Charter, Article 73 quoted by the British in our face repeatedly. They have an obligation to provide to the best of their ability, to the utmost for the well-being, politically, economically, for education, you name it, it's in the Treaty. If Mia Mottley could go before the world and challenge the world on a moral basis to help small islands. What do you think we can achieve if we unite in this House and challenge Her Majesty's Government to treat us as equals, not mendicants, not beggars, to give us what you would give the Montserratians who go to England, to give us what we deserve, what you promised, to get us out of dependency on you? What do you think will happen? So that is the unity we need, Madam Speaker.

Speaking about unity, let's look at the issue of this 20 million. I don't know the details, but does it address a salary increase for public servants? Maybe Honourable Mulcare knows more than me. The civil servants asked for 10% and Her Excellency said it was unreasonable. Yet, the

Honourable Deputy Governor's Office and the Government of Montserrat put out a report in 2020, November and this is what it said. 'Inflation accumulated by 21% between 2005 and 2020.' 21% between 2005 and 2020, not to mention till now. And what did these civil servants get? A 3% increase twice. I think somebody promised them seven. So, isn't there at least a 1% increase in here for the civil servants? I can't tell by looking at the figures but I believe there are going to be some pleasant surprises in the weeks and months to come. I know the Honourable Premier is going to go back to finance and he's going to review this budget, and he's going to respond to the appeal by Crenston and other appeals, and he's going to find money to put directly in the hands of people who need it, not just people on welfare. The single mothers who don't get a salary increase need some kind of help. Could it benefit the 1,005-tax credit? Won't help. Only people who earn larger sums of money. Very little. There has to be a way, otherwise, we're going to lose our people.

This is what the report said. 'The annual increase in the wage bill has been marginal as public servants have not had a meaningful increase in salaries over the past 15 years.' That's up to 2020. 'The majority of allowances which form part of the remuneration for some 250 civil servants have also been kept constant for the past 10 years prior to 2020.' Page 3 of the November 21 Government of Montserrat Salary Review. Do we need another study? No. There are enough studies done for us to act, this Assembly to act. Act not just to help the public servants; we must find a way, put forward the case just as we put forward the case for an increase in the Opposition money and got 75,000 and a bit more. A case can be put forward. I'm confident. So, let's look back at the budget. You see, I'm getting excited. I didn't plan to do this. I was going to be just cool and calm.

So, let me get back to housing. And I do admire the ambition of the Honourable Minister. I listened to him this morning. I wasn't here, but I was listening. Unfortunately, there's only \$500,000 to provide training in the use of new technology, which I think is going to make a difference unfortunately. And, as you said in your budget speech, Honourable Premier, as you visited the homes, you realized there are so many abandoned houses that need to be brought up to a suitable standard, and you came up with \$900,000 and I know if you had more, you'd put more. \$900,000 is less than the cost of three low-income houses in Montserrat, less than three. So, try and imagine how far that can go to upgrade houses that are abandoned. It's a valiant effort, but I want to suggest, Sir, don't just try to split

it up between 200 people. Fix the houses that need to be fixed, set a standard, and ask for more. Seek more and we can get money, if this House is united, from more than the United Kingdom, for grant funding. And we can inspire the private sector, too, and banking if we're united with a clear, ambitious vision going forward. Our Minister of Agriculture said this morning that there are 150 households on your list. You need to go check again. Nuttn tarl go so. The force ten houses in Lookout are 100 households alone. Some of them have taken their own money and brought their houses up to a standard that they're hurricane worthy without any help. Many of them. Some of them have been improved. Congratulations to the previous government. Congratulations. One government talk. But guess what? The houses are still not hurricane-worthy. They need to be rebuilt. And some of these people are 50, 60 and more, after waiting 20 odd years. They're too old to go to the bank. They live in a house that they can pass on to their children, but the house is not hurricane-worthy now.

So, Honourable Minister, it includes all the houses in Davy Hill that are not up to hurricane-worthy standards, all the houses in Lookout that are built by the government that are not up to hurricane standards, and please, it's not your fault, so you don't have to defend anything. The T1 11 houses are in Friths, in Hope, in St. Peter's, in Cudjoe Head, in Banks, in Sweeney's, in Davy Hill. Please trust me, you go back and check. I know, but I'm saying that's on paper, but the number of people waiting for hurricane-worthy... notice, the Premier of bringing them up to a certain standard. The number of houses is far more than that, bruds and I'm arguing for the government, not against the government. Please don't say Don Romeo arguing against government today. I'm arguing for the government. Fittest man on my left here, live in one of the houses them and he retired. He knows what I'm talking about.

Now, the Honourable Premier spoke about custom duties being reduced to 5%, 10%. I congratulate that. I wish it was duty free altogether. I understand he's protecting CARICOM duties, you know, we have to be careful but in an urgent situation, I would think, believe it or not, we have to do as much as we can, make it duty free if possible. But the important thing the Honourable Premier said is that it's for all, you don't have to apply for it. Lessen the bureaucracy and the red tape so whether you are in the diaspora, whether you're local, whether you are, you have small money to build a small house or money to build a big house, or you want to build a villa, same. You don't have to apply. I asked for some information

from the Ministry of Finance a bit late yesterday, but I wish I had it to show you how much governments can give in concessions, in Cabinet but I'll use it later. I didn't give them enough time. It's a lot of research. Madam Speaker, I hope that the public and the government are joining me in being ambitious with our plans going forward. Madam Speaker, Honourable Premier spoke about reducing the freight component of the charges on goods imported and he gave the example of the gas going from 225 to 175, \$50 off. That is something tangible in everybody's hand. That is what we need, something tangible in everybody's hand. But that's the gas. You can control the gas, easy. You can monitor Delta, easy. You'll get the price. But what about the other concessions that are needed for food and other areas mentioned by Honourable Lewis in our manifestos, all of us, on the platform, all of us talk about what we're going to do. What about all of that?

If you even reduce those duties, how can you be sure it's going to get to the people? But guess what? If you give support to the businesses that they need, if you can help them, you can influence that transfer more. Am I correct, Honourable Hixon? You don't think so? No easy, but you have to find a way. Competition is the best thing, so somebody goes and gives the people the reduction, the others will follow. People order for themselves; they will follow because the concessions are open to all, whether business or not. Correct? So, I also want to support the removal of work permits for non-nationals, and if you look in our manifestos, you're going to find it in our manifestos. I don't know if it was in your United Alliance manifesto, but it certainly was in ours, and again, I was listening this morning. If you didn't notice, on the page of the budget presentation is a picture in the top right-hand of the PDM symbol. Although I didn't hear the Opposition mentioned in the budget speech at all. Yes, Honourable Osborne mentioned it. It wasn't mentioned in the budget speech. The Opposition didn't do a search. I don't think they were mentioned in there. But we've been mentioned by the Ministers. So I know it may have been a mistake but the Ministers certainly recognize and want to involve the Opposition. But definitely on this document is the PDM symbol. Yes, and in your budget, presentation are some of the things that we promoted in our manifesto, including the removal of work permits and of course, it is only fair that all of us pay the same amount at the hospital. When a non-national gets a British passport and they go to England, they're treated equally. Let us start to treat one another equally here, with or without passport. Let's start it here. Because guess what? We need one another. And I want to take it a bit further, Honourable Premier. There are non-

nationals who are over 60, who may not have their passport and I think they should qualify to get the medicine free, they should also qualify to get the medical care that they can get and if they run broke and desperate, after we've been here 15, 10 years supporting the economy, working to the, they didn't leave, that you actually qualify them if they get desperate for welfare assistance to whether they have the passport or not. It's just a few of them. So, of course, everybody will be means-tested, and they're not giving anybody who is able-bodied they can help themselves unless it's an urgent situation. So, I'm not promoting mendicancy here, Honourable Premier, neither are you by offering work permit waivers. You're not. No, no, no, no. You're being fair. So that's a PDM promise. Yes, health care, medical care, dental care. Wonderful. Did I miss that? I missed that. Well, I'm in full support, Sir and thank you for the PDM symbol. It shows that you've been, you now, join us in taking, putting people first. Although you may have been doing it before but you symbolized it. You put it in the thing there.

We also recognize that you inherited a messy port project, no question about it. No need to blame anybody, it's messy. I don't have the information you have, and I don't expect you to tell the public everything while you're negotiating and trying to resolve it. But I was told that the previous government gave the company \$10 million to help them get through a difficult period just before they came out of office, and that there was another 40 million to continue to support the project and the question is, why did nothing happen once they got the 10 million? I'm asked that, and I am asking you. I'm supposed to ask questions that I don't have the answers for. But I'm asking you. We need some more details about what's happening with that project. We need to be more transparent. Dollars and figures are figures that speak for themselves. We need to know how much money is left. We need to know more of what's happening there. We can't, for negotiation's sake, hide too much. I can't hold you accountable if I don't know what's going on. So, I'm saying today, as the weeks and months go on, Honourable Premier, when the Opposition asks you questions like this, questions that are not easy to really want to answer, that we will get the information, not just for us, for the public, get thorough answers, Madam Speaker, that will help to hold them accountable, hold the company accountable. The media and the people of Montserrat and the Opposition need to have facts.

Madam Speaker, access. I wanted to share with the house a document, and I'm going to do it before the end of this session, whenever it's possible. I don't know when we're going to end. No, no, no, right? I'm going,

good man. Yeah, check the time. You said that predictable and reliable access is not a mere luxury, but a fundamental prerequisite for all economic activity. An island without access cannot build a sustainable economy. And then you said to that end, previous governments' underinvestment in the key public service has led to diminished access, unreliable services, and higher consumer prices. And you also said that the government, the U.A. government, with the support of the Opposition, will continue to place the highest priority on securing a diverse mix of reliable access services to ensure adequate connectivity for residents and visitors alike.

Now let me make this clear point. I've been lobbying for twin otters for years, and I fully support any effort to get twin otters coming to Montserrat and both airlines and not just merging with Winair and SVG. I think we need to consider merging with the Prime Minister and the Government of Antigua in some form of venture. There are many advantages that can come from that. Consider it. Think about it. And savings, support that the Antiguan Government can give because of their location and the assets they have, and the works. Let's consider going that far. Let's consider having a buy-in to the ownership of these aircraft. We can't run them, we can't operate them, but have a buy-in so that we can influence prices. Honourable Premier, I want to say that the worst and most serious thing about access right now is the cost by air. Some people will not travel by ferry. There's no ferry, so we have no choice. Good gracious me, man. Over \$1,000 return? I know that the subvention for access is smaller, 3 point something million, as shown in the estimates, than the 5 or 6 million we used to have. But now it's only for air access, mainly. No. But it is, well, you'll tell me. But more is there for air access. Let's put it that way. Much more so, we not only need a regulatory body, as you said in your budget speech, to influence the price or to take control, we need to control the price through the subsidies that we put into the cost of the airfare. Honourable Premier, I'm challenging you to bring the airfare down to under 500 EC.

I heard the Honourable Minister of Agriculture say you pay somebody a ticket to go, piece of cake man, you just pay and he go, no big deal. You know? But some people can't even afford the one-way ticket to Antigua. Never mind to go to get medical care when they told that they have only \$8,000 in their account, they can't get no help from government and the medical care costs so much. Remember Honourable Premier, I know you're good friends with the Prime Minister. When we lost the ferry, he

contributed \$100,000 from his treasury at a time when things were bad in Antigua to help pay the taxes that we're paying now, \$200. So, I know the Honourable Premier will cooperate. You can't get it from the airport owners. He couldn't take it from there. Took it from the treasury in Antigua. \$100,000. People were telling him in Antigua how you could be giving Montserrat \$100,000 and you can't pay salary? Can you imagine? He saw the value of bringing down the cost of airfare to Antigua by putting in \$100,000. You know how much money Antigua makes from us going there and coming back? Medical care alone?

So, if the Honourable Premier, Prime Minister of Antigua, could see the importance of reducing the cost, good gracious man, I'm challenging the Honourable Premier and government to bring the cost down to less than EC\$500. We got it to around \$400 back then, under 500. And the greatest tragedy over the past few weeks during St. Patrick's is, guess what? Some people paid and arranged tickets, turned up in Antigua, and I was there to witness 12 people, two flights at 5:10, who missed their flights by four minutes, five minutes, and were told they had to buy a new ticket the next day and still overnight in a hotel. They booked tickets, they had booked tickets. They got there just at the nick of time, and instead of the airline, we're not allowed to call the names, but I'm sure everybody knows what it is. Instead of holding the flight a little bit, they told the people they gotta pay again. You know what's worse? Two flights left at 5:10 to Montserrat with just a few passengers. But guess what? They were carrying a lot of luggage, I'm sure. I like to get my evidence, you know. So Honourable Premier, I like to investigate what those two planes brought down. They came down and didn't have to return to Antigua, so they could have waited. The other airline left at 5.26, and the airline had to return to Antigua and they were trying to help me to get those passengers to Montserrat, but they couldn't. So if the other airline could arrive at 5.26, why couldn't the other airline, which I won't name, give the people a little more time, and they would have left before 5.26. That really enraged me, Honourable Premier. I had to call the owners and challenge them. On the next day, they did not charge them the full airfare; they charged them a change fee. They should not charge them nothing; they should have paid for the hotel room too. And Honourable Premier, I'm saying to the people out there listening, if you've travelled back to England and you have concerns about this matter, please contact me, Don Romeo. I want to discuss this matter with you. I think you need to take action about it. There's some refunding that needs to take place. So I'm just mentioning it here.

Y'all know how to find me, and I won't advertise the name here a number but you know how to find me.

Honourable Premier, we need a ferry all year long. The people want a ferry. You are the one who was instrumental in getting us a ferry before I came into office. I did not kill it. So, don't go down that road. I fought hard to get it back. And if you really want to deal with that subject there, trust me. The Governor didn't help me. I had to go to England and fight head to head with the director to get the ferry back. Governor didn't help me, Honourable Premier. So that's another matter. We got it back, Honourable Premier. So, we need a ferry all year long. Some people, it's no sense to get it. You know, you made the argument for tourism purposes and otherwise. We need a ferry. And let me try and round up here on access by simply saying that, Honourable Dorsette said we're equal. Let me tell you how equal we are. The Isles of Scilly, 2,500 people, a Crown dependency, was offered 48 million pounds for ferries last year, 48 million pounds. And in the end, the private sector in the Isles of Scilly argued, and they had to pull back the 48 million to say, well, you're gonna kill our business. So, they actually had a private sector with ferries, and they offered 48 million pounds to buy new ferries to 2,500 people, and we down here squabbling over two little pieces of dollars. Man, we need to buy a ferry that can carry cargo and you name it, a proper ferry, owned by us. Partner with an operator. We can't operate a hot mix, never mind, sorry, you know we have trouble with the hot mix, never mind a ferry. Partner with an operator. The British Government can provide the funds to own a ferry, giving us a fishing rod to fish. Honourable Premier, I know you can stand at the high stage and make your argument. We need a ferry, man.

Tell you more, an island off the coast of Scotland got 90 million pounds for a ferry project. Probably more than that. 5,000 people. So why do we think... do you realize that when I mention these things, we say, oh, that are them. We can't get it. We actually have trained our people to believe that we cannot get this and we are wrong. And I want to challenge the government. I'm happy to be on this side. Wherever God places me, I'm happy because I challenge you, if you genuinely work with the Opposition, that you will see change beyond your imagination. The whole country will unite around us, national, non-national, diaspora, Caricom, African countries, even the British media and British organizations I've already spoken to, who fight for rights will join us.

Honourable Premier, and if I were to, oh, I can't miss geothermal. Did I hear you say you're not going to invest in geothermal? And you're going to let the private sector do it? Okay, good so you didn't say that. Okay, good. No, no, no, I just asked. I didn't say you did say so. So hopefully we can get investment just as we get in the fiber optic to put a generating plant in Foxes Bay in Cork Hill, two little hate me dollars, not no money to talk about. The British will do it if we make the case strong together. Put in a generating plant private, partner with the private sector who can operate it. Because we cannot afford, no matter what, say one Montserrat. One Montserrat, Honourable Premier. Say what you like about me. Today is one Montserrat. This is your budget. If you want to change it and start a war, it's up to you. But I'm not starting a war today.

Yes, we can have a geothermal plant, too, partnering with those who can operate it. Just like we have the fiber optic, we didn't have to pay for the fiber optic. That's why we can afford it. The British Government has made the argument themselves in the business cases for the fiber optic, for the hospital, for everything, saying because of the size of our population, because of the size of our private sector, because of the crisis we've been through, that we cannot come up with the funds to provide the infrastructure needed. But this is where I'm closing.

Honourable Premier, you spoke about the SDP, Sustainable Development Plan. You said you're an expert, you've been there before and I believe so. You know more than me, on SDP. But the contribution I'd like to make is this. The suggestion, Honourable Premier, that we make the SDP a very detailed and researched and evidence-based plan to get us out of dependency on the UK Government. But guess what? The only difference is, the SDP needs to have funding attached to it. We had SDP, it sounds good, but no funding attached to it to do the things we need to do. We need to have a commitment for funding for the SDP. Of course, private sector investment has to be involved so the private sector needs to know that there is a commitment to the public sector side of funding for them to join. You know that's how private sector operate. They're not building a hospital for you, they're not building a road for you, unless they could make money from it. But you put in the road and the hospital and the fiber optic and the other things, they gladly join in to make something out of it.

So, the SDP needs to be a very detailed plan supported by this entire House, supported by the people of Montserrat, that the British Government agree to fund their part of it, to fulfil the agreement under UN Charter Article 73. Let's stop making fun of it. It's an important Treaty on which we can stand because that's what the Treaty's all about. It gives us the right to get the assistance from the British Government, to put such a plan together, get funding for it, to get us out of dependence on the British Government, and if we choose to be independent 15, 20 years down the line when the plan is completed, it's up to us. If we want to stay with Britain, we stay with Britain. Whatever we want. So please, Honourable Premier, this SDP needs to be approached in a different way. That's my suggestion. I'm no expert. We need to have a legal basis to support this SDP. We need to have funding that's definite to support SDP. We need to have a timeline established, just like a business plan, a timeline established to achieve it. So, we won't be in here squabbling; we'll be working together to put together a plan that we will see executed during our time and beyond. That Honourable Premier would be ambitious. That Honourable Premier, you have my full support for. That Honourable Premier is great.

And along with the other initiatives, which I, for the private sector, which I won't bother you too much with right now, but one I must mention, that we can make summer a heritage camp festival, which I'd like to propose, that's bigger than St. Patrick's. Simple tax reforms will bring middle and high-income Montserratians to Montserrat if we have some tax reform, simple things. Just those two I throw out to you, along with the SDP, Honourable Premier, and you have my full support against the mendicant mentality. And we won't have to bite our tongue like was done on Monday. That's why I didn't speak, you know. You don't want to hear that part, but today is not the day. We don't have to bite our tongue because the Governor, the British Government will join us in our fight instead of us begging them, as some people think. Those days will be over. Thank you, Honourable Premier. Thank you, Honourable Speaker. That's all.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Mulcare.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the 2025/2026 budget debate and begin by acknowledging the hard work of the public servants who laboured to prepare the 2025/2026 estimates of revenue and expenditure. I especially recognize the efforts of those in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management who continue to navigate the complexities of fiscal planning in a time of great economic strain. I also express my sincere thanks through you, Madam Speaker, to the Honourable Premier for his well-presented budget. I also wish to acknowledge and appreciate the provision of a copy of the budget statement to the Opposition during its delivery. This allowed for more informed and engaged response in keeping with the principles of transparency and good parliamentary practice. As we continue to raise the standard of governance in this Honourable House, I trust that this same level of courtesy and accountability will be consistently extended, especially during question time, as provided for under Section 25 of the Standing Orders.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I respectfully call upon your good office to ensure that these procedural standards are observed and upheld in the interest of robust and meaningful parliamentary discourse. Madam Speaker, Montserrat is currently in an economic crisis, and much is required to revive its economy from every angle, within every sector and of course, a holistic involvement from all Montserratians, citizens and friends of Montserrat, both locally and around the world. While doing so, I call for a totally people-focused agenda at all times. We cannot be in development mode with only some individuals benefiting while others suffer. Every single individual must be safeguarded and allowed to reap the benefits. In agriculture, I note the aim of food sovereignty as a priority and I fully support this direction. It requires deliberate investment and strategic support. We can also upgrade and improve agriculture by strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ministry and ensuring that our services are properly staffed, resourced, and receive constant skills development. I noticed that support will only be provided to selected farmers, but all farmers need access to reliable water supply, road access, storage facilities and modern equipment.

There's a must for the investment in climate-smart farming practices and better land-use planning to protect our agricultural zones. With these actions incorporated, food sovereignty can certainly become a reality. Moreover, as we seek to revitalize both agriculture and fisheries, we must confront the uncomfortable truth about how we treat our technical per-

sonnel. For example, our veterinary officers who have given years of dedicated service to Montserrat have been consistently overlooked and undervalued. These are professionals who have worked under trying conditions, offering critical support to farmers and livestock owners across the island. Yet instead of being recognized or meaningfully supported, they are too often the target of unfounded criticism labelled as lazy without any proper investigation. No effort has been made to review the performance reports over the years or to collect feedback from the very people they serve before decisions are made to sideline them in favour of appointing individuals, for instance, in the chief veterinary position, who have only recently arrived. These decisions are not only unfair, they are demoralising. They send a clear message that loyalty, experience, the service to Montserrat do not matter. And worst still, this contributes to brain drain and the quiet depopulation of our skilled workforce and, by extension, Montserrat. If we are serious about food sovereignty, we must also be serious about supporting and respecting the people who are working on the front lines to make it possible. There's also a need to ensure that all fishing vessels are fully equipped to guarantee that we save lives at sea.

Madam Speaker, I hear the call of night flights, which we fully support. However, I'm still to hear if there will be a further proposal to fight for the airport security workers. Most recently, due to the lack of night security during the St Patrick's season, they had to work late hours and were left behind by the bus to face walking in the dark. Also, at the airport, we know that there have been several reports produced indicating that some buildings are infested with rat droppings, holes in the side of buildings, and workers are being subjected to working in less than acceptable accommodations.

At the Public Works Department, we know of the electrical issues on the building and the need for more health and safety equipment. A further subjection of workers to work in less than acceptable conditions. We have to ensure that our workers are well taken care of and appreciated. I hear the Honourable Dorsette Hector sing the praises of the Mulcare that falls under her remit. Again, another brain-drain on the way because of the lack of appreciation, disrespect and being unwanted. As it relates to the port project, Madam Speaker, it is my hope that in resolving the port issue that it will be redeveloped to incorporate a greater impact to benefit our local economy and, by extension, our citizens.

Madam Speaker, in the field of education, there is a great and urgent need for the development of the education system to allow our children to derive their full potential. That is, recruitment and retention of teachers, improved salaries, and the incorporation of other subject areas that meet the needs of our children in this modern-day society. There's also an urgent need to address the travel allowance for the early childhood professionals. The current travel allowance is \$50 per month, which is provided to the early childhood head teachers or senior nursery nurses. This does not reflect the actual cost of transportation. You have high cost, petrol, vehicle parts, maintenance, etc. Many educators are left to cover the difference between their allowances and their travel expenses, which is both unfair and unsustainable. Their travelling entails paying in school fees on a weekly basis to education headquarters, attending meetings at the education headquarters, gathering items for school fundraisers, collecting items for specific learning topics and other activities to make sure that the environment for our children is conducive for learning. I challenge for an increase in the travel allowance structure to ensure that it accurately reflects current transportation costs.

I am more than overjoyed to see the building of the new hospital on the way. However, in the meantime, it is important that we get ready. We cannot wait until the hospital is complete to send staff off to train or purchase equipment, or fix the ills within the hospital sector. For example, the on-call allowance for decades for the laboratory and radiology or x-ray departments has been at a \$105 after tax per week for just about 64 hours per week. In some instances, like for the radiology or x-ray division, \$105 is paid every two weeks, and in the case of the pharmacy, it's per month. Much inconsistencies in the system as well. These are some of the reasons why we cannot attract our citizens into these roles or attract our young persons to venture into these professions, and over the years, we have seen that our nurses and other health officials have migrated to the UK because the salaries there are much more attractive. We have to do better. Madam Speaker, through you, I challenge the Honourable Dr. Buffonge to get this done with urgency and Honourable Dr. Buffonge, do not allow them to tell you that there has to be a central allowance committee in place. I have championed the increase of sessions for the nurses, and they did receive that increase and there was no central allowance committee. So, Honourable Dr. Buffonge, it can be done.

Madam Speaker, also under the health system, they have moved the shift for the drivers to 12 hours, and now it is being stated that they are unable

to revert to what was once used to be. This is because the current conditions are unfavourable. Drivers have no place to rest during the 12-hour shift, but can only resort to the very bus that they drive. Madam Speaker, they are also expected to work these long hours for meagre salaries and 12-hour shifts that come so fast that they are unable to get proper rest, spend quality time with their families, or make a hustle. As we know, one hand cannot clap in this country. Once again, Madam Speaker, I challenge the Minister of Health, the Honourable Dr Ingrid Anne Buffonge, to fix these ills.

Persons with disabilities and social services. The British Government has signed on to this convention, and therefore it is easy for Montserrat to seek an extension. So, Madam Speaker, I also challenge the Honourable Dorsette Hector to have it done. Otherwise, our people will continue to suffer, and we will be unable to receive funding in this regard. Furthermore, in the meantime, we also need to ask for an increase in the quota of the number of persons we can send to the UK for treatment, as well as that they be allowed to receive benefits in the UK as soon as they land. Currently, we have Montserratians in the UK going from hand to mouth.

The police, fire and prison services also have to work long hours for meagre salaries, and then we hear that policies are being put in place for them to request permission to try to make ends meet. Nonsense, Madam Speaker. As far as I'm aware, slavery days have been abolished. These are just old colonial habits creeping back in, and we need to stamp them out. In addition to working these long hours, they are also disadvantaged as it relates to public holidays. For 8 to 4 workers, once a public holiday comes, it is automatic; they get it but, for police, fire and prison, if a holiday falls on their rest day, they don't get it as a lieu day, they only get it as lieu when they work on that day, which is totally wrong. So, this class of workers are being disadvantaged, and it needs to be fixed. I am happy to hear that the fire station is on the list to be fixed. As we know, it's like Fort Ghaut coming down when it rains, and so far, I know of at least one officer who has slipped and fallen. We cannot afford for our essential workers to be at risk. I know I'm referred to as Lady Striker because they say I like to call the people out to strike, but we need to fix these ills with urgency.

In closing, Madam Speaker, the Opposition has a mandate in this parliamentary democracy for ensuring good governance, accountability and democratic balance. Therefore, we will scrutinise the actions and deci-

sions of the ruling government through questions, challenging policies and the exposure of any mismanagement or corruption. This helps to keep the government transparent and answerable to the people we serve. We will provide an alternative vision where necessary with respect to policies, solutions, and strategies for national development in order to guarantee that our people receive the very best. We will help to ensure that laws are just, balanced and in the best interest of the public. Madam Speaker, even by this very critical debate and dissent, the Opposition safeguards and strengthens democracy and encourages political accountability, therefore, working for the best interest of Montserrat. It is important that the sitting government is able to see the true benefits of our role in service to the people of Montserrat in this regard. Madam Speaker, I have often heard of the term one-Montserrat which makes sense, however, outside of a role as Opposition Members as previously outlined, I'm yet to hear solid and or receive written expectations or being invited to discuss this vision of a one-Montserrat agenda, but I await. Madam Speaker, I wish the sitting government all the best in their future endeavours as they strive to move Montserrat forward in the execution of this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move for an adjournment of this Honourable House for lunch. And it is now one o'clock. Could we look at returning at 2:30 this afternoon?

Madam Speaker said:

We have a seconder? I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion for adjournment for this Honourable House until 2:30.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that this Honourable House be adjourned for lunch to return at 2:30.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

This House now adjourned for lunch until 2.30.

LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT

RESUMPTION OF ASSEMBLY

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank all of the Members of this Honourable House for their kind responses, and I say kind and supportive responses to the budget presentation. But before I go into the budget presentation, Madam Speaker, I'd like to just make a couple adjustments to the development fund and the total allocation. However, we will formalize this in committee stage, but I thought it important. For the ODG, the BIOT program, an increase of ninety-seven point five thousand dollars and this represents a recently approved amount for equipment for the prison subsequent to the estimates being sorted and sent to the Legislative Assembly. For BUILT, under airport upgrading an additional \$279,000 and again this is for the airport control tower and these funds are approved subsequent to the estimates being sent to the Legislative Assembly, thereby increasing votes 12 from \$6.2 million to \$6.3 million, vote 35 from \$35.4 million to \$35.7 million, to bring the overall development fund revised amount to \$136.3 million and it gives a revised overall budget figure of \$312.2 million.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I just wish to very briefly and I the emphasis on briefly but cogently respond to some of the questions and comments which were made. Favourable though they might have been, some of them require explanation. Your Honourable Lewis asks a ques-

tion about why the increase in the emoluments, benefits, and allowances line. Under previous administrations, TC funds were always ring-fenced. We're bringing those into the budget for transparency so that it becomes part of the budget, so that persons who apply for those jobs, be they Montserratians or otherwise, are paid from these funds rather than having to go back to get permission. So, that explains that one, I hope. So that covers emoluments, benefits and allowances. So that's the rationale behind that. It has nothing to do with salary increases. Government workers seeking permission for extracurricular work. It is not seeking permission; it is a matter of informing so that if there's any conflict that the conflicts are understood by the senior officers first. So, it doesn't stop anyone from going to do extra work, but with the person to whom you're reporting should at least know where you're doing the extra work in case there's a conflict which could arise. Okay? So that's the very simple explanation. The other element is one in relation to this building. Madam Speaker all of us walking into this building cannot say that we are proud of what we see here. The tiles are lifting up, there are problems in the main arena, the bar area is in shatters, the windows, the air conditioning system, name it. We have to focus on getting this cultural center up to a quality that we can all be proud of.

Additionally, the promise which we have made among our colleagues is that the Parliament building, the funds which were allocated, were insufficient for a proper Parliament building and if you're building or constructing a Parliament building, it is something that we should all be proud of. The funds were insufficient, and rather than losing the funds or building something less appropriate, we have reallocated those funds, and the Parliament building will then move up to the number one priority in discussions in next year's budget allocation. Okay, so I hope that answers that part of the question.

The loan facility for small businesses. I think it is very important for persons to have some skin in the game, and I'm not speaking about any single person because somebody accused me of going into the yard, see something and talk about it. This is a very general comment. When we give things away, two things happen. One, people believe you only give to those to who support you politically. Secondly, because it is free, even if I don't want it, I come and look for the grant. The soft loan scheme is a combination of grant and loan, so that people have as what we call it, skin in the game, but they will not need to go through the process of writing business cases, going through very complex issues in order to get a

loan. This is a simple loan facility, so if a fisherman, for example, wants to buy a boat or wants to buy an engine, they walk into the institution, make the application, have the discussion with the loans officer, and can walk away with a loan immediately. It simply means that that individual now becomes someone who, rather than not having a bank account, will put something away in a bank account, so that they now start to see themselves running truly a business. It is important that we wean ourselves away from gimme, gimme, gimme, to that help me to help myself. Good.

There are small business persons who have come to me already to say, when are you gonna start the scheme because I want to buy a fridge, I want to buy a stove, etc. because they themselves are saying they have applied many times under the grant program and some persons have benefited two and three times but they have not benefited and they still waiting so they much prefer a very simple loan scheme. Additional to that, would be training programs in very simple bookkeeping and monitoring by an officer who will visit them, see how their business is going and help them along. They don't have to mortgage their house for the loan. If you buy a fridge, the security is the fridge. If you buy a stove, the security is the stove, etc. etc. Very, very simple program. As it relates to whether or not it's the repayments that will keep this scheme going, I'm sorry if you misunderstood that. It means that every year this government will put in additional funds to keep the scheme going be it half a million dollars a year or an additional million dollars a year to keep the scheme going. Micro enterprise development, and let's work together on getting that done.

The issue, as it relates to banking and the ease of money transfers, we're working on that. We're having discussions with the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. We're having discussions with other institutions who will facilitate us being able to move money. It may seem as though Montserrat is special, but this is not a Montserrat case. This is something that has been foisted on us by the OECD and the G7. They may not be doing the same things that they're asking us to do, but because they're bigger than us and they can control what we do or what we don't do, we have to follow their rules. FATF, you understand FATF. You understand all the other anti-money laundering things; they don't money launder, but we money launder. So, for example, a bank in the United Kingdom, or I transfer money from a bank in the United Kingdom to Montserrat, coming from a bank, I really do not see why we now have to ask you where

that money came from. It is the responsibility of that bank in the United Kingdom to do that due diligence, but we are asked to do it on their behalf, and if we don't do it, we are punished. But we are working on it. So, I think I've pretty much covered what Honourable Lewis wanted me to respond to, but just so that we understand how we're going forward. I very informally over drinks after the previous session agreed with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that we will, at least once per month, have a sit-down with the Opposition to discuss any issues, hear what you have to bring to the table and let us work together as one-Montserrat. We don't have to wait until we come here to be asking questions. Yes, we know that we do that sometimes, so that we're talking to our constituents, but you can get the information, you can make your suggestions, and I implore you, use that opportunity so that we can work together. Let's share views. We are one people with one cause, the One Montserrat project.

The Honourable Romeo mentioned agriculture, and that one million, which is being loaned to the agricultural sector, is not enough. But I suspect he was not listening, or he did not read the budget speech. One million is being given directly to the Ministry of Agriculture, and one million used for soft loans. Just want to make it clear. We cannot, at this stage in our life, be just taking money and saying, here, here, take it. We also want to establish the discipline that even farmers and fisherfolk understand the need to borrow money to grow their business. And this deals with other businesses. Okay, so the 1 million, which will be strictly for agriculture, there's another 1 million strictly for microenterprise.

The development fund to which the Honourable Romeo spoke, if I can remember, that was pre-2014, am I correct? No, you mentioned that we had a development fund, and you hope that we can replenish those funds and get it going. That's what I heard. So, let me respond to it this way. Yes, there was in fact a development fund which was being created for small businesses. This was supposed to be operational through the MDC, and I say no more.

As it relates to housing, I know that the Honourable Member has a passion that we must fix all the houses in Montserrat because there are many, many houses that need fixing. There are many, many houses that need to be built. The Chinese have a saying: 'Every long journey starts with the first step.' Honourable Osborne and his team are starting that first step, and within the next few months, they will be rolling out that

program to start building houses. Secondly, of the almost \$1 million, they will be using that not to rebuild but to upgrade some houses to make them affordable for persons who need housing solutions, whether it be in Salem or anywhere between Salem and St. John's. That brings some of these dilapidated housing or abandoned houses back into operation, where there will be a sharing between the property owner and the Government of Montserrat until the money spent on fixing the houses is repaid from the rent. Madam Speaker, while we are on housing, and given the passion that the Honourable Romeo has on houses, like houses in Davy Hill, I'm asking him at the conclusion of this session to walk with me or drive with me into Davy Hill to look at a house that has been under construction for the past 20 years. The gentleman is now 80 years old. This gentleman has been working on that house diligently, but cannot install his windows simply because those windows were paid for over 20 years ago and still have not been delivered. So, I would like for him to walk with me so we can have that discussion. I'm not saying where the windows were bought from, I'm just saying it was bought from a local establishment.

The Port project and transparency, Madam Speaker, just like in any case before the court, one cannot bring to the public information during the negotiation stages. The Honourable Hector-Dorsette has indicated, once we have concluded those negotiations that information will be made public, and additionally, if government is putting money, additional funds, into that port project, we are obliged to come back to the Legislative Assembly and make it known and approved in the Legislative Assembly.

Geothermal wells were drilled and tested sometime in 2014. 2014, Madam Speaker, but yet we're hearing, oh, this is what you need to do now. Some of us were in government after 2014 through 2019. Did they not have those answers and could figure out how to do it? But all of a sudden, this is what you need to do; they have the answers, he has the solutions. Madam Speaker, talk is cheap, but one of the things which I'd like for us to take away from here is that we as Members of the Legislative Assembly and based on the responses I've had on both sides of the aisle, it sounds as though we're willing to work together and that's a very good sign. After we finish the walk into Davy Hill, we'll still continue to work together.

Madam Speaker, in closing, because we'll go through the estimates and some of the other details which are requested in terms of the money and

the movement of money that will be dealt with in committee stage, so that we can go through those with the technicians supporting us.

Madam Speaker, while I'm on my feet, if you'll permit me. Last night I heard the news of 60-odd persons dying in an accident in the Dominican Republic, and I wish to extend my sincere condolences on behalf of all of us to the people of the Dominican Republic for such a tragedy. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Teresina Bodkin my school mate from primary school has left us and I am recommending to this Honourable House and we can do it again in adjournment where the recommendation could be solidified, that we have a special sitting of the Legislative Assembly so that we can all express our condolences and our memories individually on the passing of our former Speaker, Teresina Bodkin. So, Madam Speaker, with these few words, I would like to rest, and I commend this Bill for its second reading.

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Members, the motion before us, which already has been moved and seconded, is for the Appropriation Bill 2025 to 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:

At this point, the House will move into committee to consider the Bill in more detail.

COMMITTEE STAGE

Appropriation Bill 2025/2026

Madam Chair said:

So, we will start with the schedule, looking at the developmental fund votes, Vote 12, the Office of the Deputy Governor, in the amount of \$6,247,000. Sorry, I recognize the Honourable Financial Secretary.

The Financial Secretary said:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we would like to make an amendment to the schedule for vote 12. The sum should now be \$6,344,900.

Madam Chair said:

Okay, Members, the question is that the amount should be adjusted to \$6,344,900.

The question was put and carried.

The figure will now be adjusted accordingly. So, if I repeat vote 12, office of the Deputy Governor, \$6,344,900 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 12 - Office of the Deputy Governor \$6,344,900 forms part of the schedule.

Vote 15 - Office of the Premier, \$833,300, and the question is that that amount should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 15 - Office of the Premier \$833,300 forms part of the schedule.

Vote 17 - Cabinet Secretariat, \$1,080,000. The question is that that amount should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 17 - Cabinet Secretariat in the amount of \$1,080,000 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 18 - Department of Communications and Digital Transformation, \$438,400 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 18 - Department of Communications and Digital Transformation in the amount of \$438,400 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 20 - Ministry of Finance, in the amount of \$35,436,500, should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 20 - Ministry of Finance, in the amount of \$35,436,500, now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 30 - Agriculture, \$4,393,800 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 30 - Agriculture in the amount of \$4,393,800, now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 35 - Ministry of Buildings BUILT, \$35,440,300 should form part of the schedule. I'm sorry. Recognize the Honourable FS.

The Financial Secretary said:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, another amendment to vote 35. The sum should now read \$35,719,300.

Madam Chair said:

Okay, so vote 35 BUILT \$35,719,300 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 35 - BUILT in the amount of \$35,719,300 now forms part of the schedule.

Moving on to vote 40 - Education, \$912,000. The question is that it should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 40 - Education in the amount of \$912,000 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 45- Health and Social Services, in the amount of \$51,119,000 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 45 - Health and Social Services, in the amount of \$51,119,000 now forms part of the schedule. Thank you.

So, we now move on to the total development fund votes in the amount of \$136,277,200 that that should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Total development funds in the amount of \$136,277,200 now forms part of the schedule.

And we move on to the supply votes. We begin with vote 5 - Police \$8,494,800 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 5 - Police in the amount of \$8,494,800 form part of the schedule.

Vote 7 - Legal, \$1,829,800 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 7 - Legal \$1,829,800 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 8 - Magistrate Court. \$418,800. The question is that this amount now forms part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 8 - Magistrate Court in the amount of \$418,800 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 9 - Supreme Court in the amount of \$1,434,700 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 9 Supreme Court in the amount of \$1,434,700 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 10 - Legislature \$1,638,200 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 10 - Legislature in the amount of \$1,638,200 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 11 - Audit Office \$1,292,400 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 11 - Audit Office in the amount of \$1,292,400 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 12 - Office of the Deputy Governor, \$38,474,500, should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 12 - Office of the Deputy Governor in the amount of \$38,474,500 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 13 - Public Prosecution, \$787,700. The question is that this amount forms part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 13 - Public Prosecution in the amount of \$787,700 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 14 - Financial Intelligence Unit \$935,700. The question is that those amounts form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 14 - Financial Intelligence Unit in the amount of \$935,700 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 15 - Office of the Premier, \$11,382,200. The question is that this amount forms part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 15 - Office of the Premier in the amount of \$11,382,200 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 17 - Cabinet Secretariat in the amount of \$1,040,700 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 17 - Cabinet Secretariat in the amount of \$1,040,700 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 18 - Department of Communications and Digital Transformation, \$2,559,200. The question is that it should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 18 - Department of Communications and Digital Transformation, in the amount of \$2,559,200, now form part of the schedule.

Vote 20 - Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, \$47,055,600. The question is that this amount should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 20 - Ministry of Finance, in the amount of \$47,055,600, now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 30 - Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, etc. in the amount of \$8,871,900 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 30 - Ministry of Agriculture in the amount of \$8,871,900, now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 35 - BUILT \$14,095,600 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 35 - BUILT \$14,095,600 now forms part of the schedule.

Vote 40 - Ministry of Education \$10,082,300 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 40 - Ministry of Education in the amount of \$10,082,300 now form part of the schedule.

Vote 45 - Ministry of Health and Social Services \$25,489,200 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Vote 45 - Ministry of Health and Social Services, in the amount of \$25,489,200, now forms part of the schedule.

Total supply votes in the amount of \$175,883,300 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

Total supply votes in the amount of \$175,883,300 now form part of the schedule.

And we move on to the summary of the votes so we had an adjustment So, a combination of the development fund votes and the supply votes for a grand total of \$312,160,500 should form part of the schedule.

The question was put and carried.

So, a grand total of \$312,160,500 now forms part of the schedule.

So, we move on to the clauses. Clauses 1 to 6. The question is that clause 1 to 6 stand...

The Attorney General said:

Madam Chair.

Madam Chair said:

I recognize the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as a result of the adjustments made to the development fund votes, some amendments are required to clause 2. I'll start with Clause 2 of the Bill. The total will now be \$312,160,500. So, the clause will now read, *"there shall be and there is hereby granted to His Majesty the King for the service of Montserrat for the year ending on 31 March 2026, the sum of \$312,160,500 to be issued and applied as authorized in this Act."* Thank you, Madam Chair. Oh, sorry, Madam Chair, since I'm on the floor, you had said clauses 1 to 6, so there is also an adjustment required to clause 3 sub 2 to make a similar adjustment in terms of the development fund total, which is now \$136,277,200. The clause will now read, *"the sum of \$136,277,200 is authorized to be issued from the development fund and expended as set out in the schedule."* Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair said:

Thank you. So, the question is that clauses 1 to 6 as amended form part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clauses 1 to 6 as amended now form part of the Bill.

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

The question was put and carried.

The Enacting Clause and Long Title now stand as part of the Bill.

Madam Chair said:

And finally, the question is that the Bill, as amended, be reported to the Assembly.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

The Bill as amended will be reported back to the Assembly.

RESUMPTION OF ASSEMBLY

Madam Speaker said:

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

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to report to this Honourable House that the Bill, shortly entitled Appropriation Bill 2025, No. 3 of 2025, with the appropriate schedules, has successfully passed through the committee stage with a few amendments. And I'll just summarize the amendment in that the total of the supply votes now stands at \$175,883,300 for a total of \$312,160,500. Madam Speaker, may I request for a suspension of the appropriate Standing Order to facilitate a third reading of the Bill.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved that the... I recognize the Honourable

The Minister for Buildings et al said:

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I support the motion for the suspension of Standing Order No. 53 so that the third reading could take place on this money Bill.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that Standing Order No. 53 be suspended to facilitate the third reading of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

The Standing Order No. 53 has been duly suspended.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I beg to move a motion for the third reading of the Appropriation Bill 2025 No. 3 of 2025.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved that the Appropriation Bill 2025 No. 3 of 2025 be read a third time.

The question was put and carried.

The Appropriation Bill 2025 No. 3 of 2025 will be read a third time.

The Clerk read the Bill a third time.

Madam Speaker said:

The Appropriation Bill 2025 No. 3 of 2025 has been read a third time and is accordingly passed. Recognize the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to move a motion for the introduction and first reading of the Bill shortly entitled *Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025*.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for Buildings et al said:

Madam Speaker, I stand to support the motion for the introduction and first reading of the Bill *Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025*.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that the *Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025* be read a first time.

The question was put and carried.

The Bill will be read a first time.

The Clerk read the Bill a first time.

2. OTHER BUSINESS

3. ADJOURNMENT.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, there's a small matter which I'd like the Honourable House to have a discussion on, and I crave your indulgence for us to go into committee stage for a brief moment to discuss that.

COMMITTEE STAGE

The Premier said:

(No audio on recording) or Wednesday the 16th.

Madam Chair said:

I recognize the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Yeah, I myself do not have a problem with Tuesday, and other members don't have a problem with Tuesday.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I ask this because the rule of the House requires that we give 7 days' notice before sitting, and I'd like to thank the Honourable co-Premier for his indulgence.

The Attorney General said:

Sorry Premier. Just clarification. At what time because I have a bit of a challenge and I would like to be here for that sitting.

The Premier said:

If we could do it at 9 o'clock, would that be able to get you out of here on time?

The Attorney General said:

No, my appointment is at 9 o'clock. It shouldn't be long though. Can we perhaps meet at 10?

The Premier said:

Yes.

Madam Chair said:

You think you would be free by 10?

The Attorney General said:

Yes, I anticipate that would be the case.

Madam Chair said:

Okay. So, Members are we all in agreement for 10 so we will have a special sitting on Tuesday at 10 o'clock to facilitate tributes for the former Speaker. The House will now resume its sitting.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognize the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move a motion for the adjournment of this Honourable House sine die but I must also report to you or through you that coming out of the committee stage discussions, we have agreed to have a special sitting of this esteemed and Honourable House on Tuesday, the 15th at 10 o'clock for tributes for the Honourable Teresina Bodkin.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder for the adjournment? Can we have a seconder for the motion, please? Recognize the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for Infrastructure et al said:

Madam Speaker, I stand to support the adjournment of this Honourable House sine die.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that this Honourable House be adjourned sine die.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

This Honourable House will now be adjourned sine die.

Assembly adjourned at approximately 3.22 p.m.

Sgd: Judith Baker
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Dated this 28th day of July 2025

Sgd: Marjorie Smith
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

