



Minutes No. 1

of the

18th Parliament

Friday, 8th November 2024



MONTERRAT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Opening of Parliament

Meeting No. 1 of the 18th Parliament

Friday, 8th November 2024, 9:00 a.m.

Auditorium, Montserrat Cultural Centre, Little Bay

ORDER OF THE DAY

1. Prayers
2. Oaths of Allegiance – Members of the Legislative Assembly
3. Election of Speaker
4. Oath of Allegiance – Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
5. Address by The Speaker
6. Election of Deputy Speaker
7. Address by the Deputy Speaker
8. Adjournment
9. Address by the Honourable Premier
10. Addresses by Other Members of the Legislative Assembly
11. Address by A Member of the Youth Parliament

MONTSERRAT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEETING

Minutes No. 1 of the 18th Parliament
Held on Friday, November 8, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.
Auditorium, Montserrat Cultural Centre, Little Bay

PRESENT:

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Honourable Marjorie Smith | Speaker of the Legislative Assembly |
| Honourable Reuben Meade | Premier/Minister of Finance & Economic Management |
| Honourable Veronica Dorsette-Hector | Deputy Premier & Minister of Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure, Labour, Transportation, Energy, & Ecclesiastic Affairs |
| Honourable Ingrid Buffonge | Minister for Education, Health, & Social Services |
| Honourable 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 René Morgan | Attorney General (Ag) |
| Honourable Kenya Lee | Financial Secretary (Ag) |

ABSENT:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Honourable John P Osborne | Minister for Agriculture, Land, Housing, Environment, Youth Affairs & Sports |
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TERRITORIAL SONG

The Clerk said:

The House will remain standing as the Oaths are administered.

1. OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE

The Oaths of Allegiance for elected and ex-officio Members of the new Legislative Assembly were administered.

The Clerk said:

Members, before we have the election of the Speaker, we're going to acknowledge the presence of the Lord, and so we'll have the prayer at this point.

3. PRAYERS

Prayers were offered by Reverend Everal Galbraith.

4. ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Clerk said:

We will now have the election of a Speaker. I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Clerk, I rise to seek the support of all Members of the House to nominate Ms. Marjorie Smith to be the Speaker of this honoured Legislative Assembly.

The Clerk said:

Can I have a seconder, please? I recognize the Honourable Deputy Premier.

Mrs. Veronica Dorsette-Hector said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion that Ms. Marjorie Smith be elected as the Speaker of this House.

The Clerk said:

It has been moved and seconded that Mrs. Marjorie Smith be the Speaker of this Honourable Legislative Assembly.

The question was put and carried.

The Clerk said:

Mrs. Marjorie Smith is now the Speaker of this Honourable Legislative Assembly. The Honourable Speaker will now take the Oath of Allegiance.

5. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE - SPEAKER

Mrs. Marjorie Smith takes the oath as Speaker.

6. ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The Clerk said:

The Honourable Speaker will now address the House.

Madam Speaker said:

I begin by acknowledging the work of Almighty God for bringing us to this point in Montserrat's history, accepting that, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it." Permit me at this juncture to recognize the attendance of Her Excellency the Governor, Mrs. Sarah Tucker, Mr. Joseph Farrell, former Premier, and all other distinguished parliamentarians among us who have previously given of their service in this Honourable House. Ladies and gentlemen seated in the gallery and those viewing on social media, welcome.

Secondly, I congratulate the Honourable Premier for securing the mandate to lead this our beloved country and its resilient people,

irrespective of their political affiliation. Congratulations are also extended to the Leader of the King's Most Loyal Opposition, Honourable Paul Lewis, who I am confident will once again make every effort to diligently perform his responsibilities.

To all Members, congratulations on your victory at the polls, and to those of us who are first-timers in our roles, it may be uncomfortable starting something new. Let it be uncomfortable, we will learn quickly together. Honourable Members of this Honourable Legislative Assembly, I thank you for the respect and privilege of electing me as Speaker. My strong faith in God compels me to believe in the divine orchestration of this motion. Through this election, being the sixth Speaker to be so elected in this Honourable House, I shadow in the legacy of those who have previously functioned in this capacity. The will of the people continues to be the muscle of our democratic parliamentary process as outlined in our Constitution. Its contents, when appropriately applied, enable us to enjoy consistency in government.

The evaluation of this island's parliament is demonstrated by the people through their general analysis of the performance of government and by their ultimate participation in the electoral process. Those elected to represent the people in Parliament must therefore respect and understand the confidence and responsibility placed upon them. Every Member is expected to operate with propriety and to always respect other members of this Honourable House. It is anticipated that Members on both sides of the House would recognize the meaning of and commit their parliamentary energies to the cause of the people they have been elected to serve.

The Speaker's role is to ensure that the business of Parliament is conducted in an orderly manner and that at all times, fairness to all parties represented in this Honourable House is guaranteed. The age-old dictum, the government will have its way, but the Opposition must have its say will be used as a guide in unity with the Standing Orders of this Legislative Assembly. I trail in the path of many Speakers, most notably the late Professor Sir Howard Fergus, the longest Speaker to have served in this Honourable House. He most certainly left a set of standards that all those who followed him may be guided by. His firm, impartial nature was combined with dignity and even temper. To covet good gifts cannot be considered sinful; therefore, I will endeavour in my deliberations to be

a respectful successor of such values. This, to provide the Parliament and the wider Montserrat community with confidence that the rulings of this Honourable House are made with balance.

As Speaker, I am grateful yet humbled at the gesture of entrusting this Honourable House to my charge. Once again, congratulations to everyone. Let us now together begin the work of providing loving, hopeful service to the people we care so much about, we being one Montserrat. Thank you kindly for your attention.

7. ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I move a motion and crave the indulgence of my colleagues to nominate the Honourable Mrs. Nyota Mulcare to be the Deputy Speaker of this Honourable House.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Deputy Premier.

Mrs. Veronica Dorsette-Hector said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to support the motion to nominate the Honourable Mrs. Nyota Mulcare as Deputy Speaker of this Honourable House.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Honourable Mrs. Nyota Mulcare be elected as Deputy Speaker.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Honourable Nyota Mulcare has been duly elected as Deputy Speaker.

8. ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE DEPUTY SPEAKER

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speaker will now address this Honourable House.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, invited guests and people of Montserrat. First and foremost, I give thanks to the Almighty God, whose grace has brought us all to this moment. I stand here today, deeply grateful for His guidance and strength, which sustains me in service to our beautiful and beloved island, Montserrat.

I also express my deepest gratitude to my family, my beloved husband, Philip Mulcare; my mother, Rachael Ann Daniel-Ryan; my son, Phion Mulcare; and my brother, Achlen Browne. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been the foundation upon which I stand. To the People's Democratic Movement, our supporters, and every voter who placed their trust in me, thank you. Your prayers and dedication have empowered me to take on this responsibility, and I am deeply humbled.

To my aunts, uncle, cousins, and especially my beloved grandfather, William Herman Ryan, better known as John Ryan of Farms Village, Montserrat, a former Minister of Agriculture, the man who helped shape me into the woman I am today and who for a long time believed that I would follow in his footsteps in service as a legislator. Now, at the blessed age of 99, and still in full faculties, he has held his breath with anticipation, supporting, guiding, and praying for me along the way. Thank you, Daddy John, for your confidence and unwavering love and belief in me.

As I step forward to serve as a member of His Majesty's Opposition and Deputy Speaker, I pledge to give my very best in holding this

government accountable and in advocating tirelessly for justice, equality, and opportunity for all. Montserrat deserves nothing less. We are at a pivotal point in our nation's journey, and we must work in unison to foster a society where every citizen is valued and has the means to prosper.

Let me remind the Members of this Honourable House that we are now the stewards of Montserrat's future. It matters not who voted for us or where the support may lie—every single individual living on this island, whether they voted for us or not, is our responsibility. It is incumbent upon the government to ensure that every citizen is cared for and given a fair opportunity to thrive. I further urge the government to make space for all those who stood for elections and were not successful, to allow their skills and talents to contribute to the progress of our nation.

Additionally, we must extend this engagement to our brothers and sisters in the diaspora. Their talents, experience, and love for Montserrat remain invaluable, and their involvement is vital for building a brighter future for all of us. Let us harness their knowledge and resources as we work towards a stronger, more prosperous Montserrat.

Today is also a moment of history for this House, as it stands as a testament to my family's legacy; of which I would like to make mention, that two great-grandchildren of Rachael Ann and John Edmund Daniel now deceased, sit here as Honourable Members of this Legislative Assembly, albeit on opposite sides; the Honourable Dr. Ingrid Ann Buffonge and myself. May this connection remind us that we serve as custodians of Montserrat's legacy and that the work we do here must be grounded in the spirit of unity and progress.

As I take this solemn duty, I draw strength from the words of Muhammad Ali, “Service to others is the rent we pay for our room here on earth.” I commit to serving this House with integrity, compassion, and dedication, holding always the best interests of Montserrat at heart.

Together, we will continue to build the future that Montserrat deserves. Thank you once again for this opportunity to serve. May God bless Montserrat and this Honourable House. I thank you.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker said:

I recognize the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move a motion for the adjournment of this Honourable House sine die. But before we second that motion, I'd like to say a few words if you would permit me. Thank you very much. I want to thank Almighty God, my family, to include the United Alliance team and the many supporters both in and out of Montserrat, as we progress on the One Montserrat Project. And I'm going to try to make it very brief and succinct. I also want to thank the Honourable Crenston Buffonge, who has bought into the Montserrat vision, setting aside any perceived political difference. We have all been elected to work on behalf of the people of Montserrat, and I trust that all of us will find an opportunity to work together. Of course, we expect the Opposition to do what the Opposition does, but our doors are open to your views, opinions, and suggestions, and we will always listen to you. We will always listen to the people of Montserrat wherever they are. Do not be afraid to make your suggestions to this team. It is a One Montserrat Project wherever you are.

I wish to apologize for the absence of the Honourable John P. Osborne, who is in the UK representing Montserrat, on a very important mission looking at investment possibilities for Montserrat. From all reports, he has been doing an excellent job, and I expected no less from him.

We have spent the past two weeks not only familiarizing ourselves with the various nuances of the public service, and I am pleased to say, however, that the response from the public service has been refreshing in terms of their willingness to get things done. Clearly, we will take a new and more team approach to governance that seems to be going down well with the various government units and officials. Already, we have unlocked many of the bottlenecks subverting project implementation, and the public will shortly see the benefits of that approach. The major project, for example, the Health Improvement Project, or as we are more accustomed to calling it, the Hospital Project, will have its contract signing within the next few days or the next couple of weeks once we have all the legal aspects sorted out.

A project management approach has already been developed, which is ready for Cabinet approval and should be submitted to Cabinet shortly, because we need to ensure that when we have funds and we have projects that we find a mechanism to move them forward in a transparent manner so that everyone can look at what we're doing and say, yes, they're doing it right. If we're doing it wrong, let us know. At this point, let me say that I am very pleased with the support that we've had from Her Excellency the Governor in terms of moving some of these projects forward, getting some of these bottlenecks sorted out, and I'll speak more to that later.

We made many campaign promises, and we shall update the public periodically as we meet those deadlines. If there are changes, we certainly will engage with you, the public, to let you know, and we will keep you informed at all times. Whether it's on "What's on Your Mind" or any other program, we will keep the public informed at all times. We are here as your representatives.

We promise improved air access, and I've already had discussions with both service providers who are currently operating, and we will also have a meeting with a third service provider later today. We are seeking to have the issue with the ferry sorted by making some modifications and exemptions, and we trust that we will be in a position to get those sorted out to be able to have a ferry service operating in Montserrat, whether it's a contractual service or it's a private sector service, always remembering that safety at sea is critically important. We're hoping to give a more positive and definitive report on this in the coming days.

Electricity generation - yes, we lost power today. I don't know who all lost power, but I definitely lost, so good thing I ironed my little shirt here last night. We anticipate having professional engineering support on the island shortly to work with and provide hands-on training for dedicated technical staff, and again, here I wish to acknowledge the support of the Governor and the FCDO team on this matter.

We have heard lots of talk about prisoner movement to Montserrat. Kindly allow us to have a dialogue with the UK team before we get into panic mode. No such transfer will take place until and unless there is an agreement with us. I realize that people have been panicking because of

our favourite book, Facebook and social media, but we will have those discussions when we are in the UK.

I shall be heading off island on official business to attend COP 29 in Baku, where I will be participating as a panellist representing the Caribbean islands on the subject “Empowering Energy Transition.” From there, I will attend the Joint Ministerial Council in London, where I will, in particular, be making special representation to seek to get the family arrangement that we speak about with the UK sorted out, where pensioners from the UK retiring to Montserrat are treated in a like manner as pensioners in the UK. I also had a meeting with the UK Energy and Environment Minister, and we have agreed to have a sidebar in the UK during the JMC to look at the possibilities of moving the geothermal project forward. Although we are having discussions with them, we will also continue having discussions with the private sector because there are some private sector initiatives that have been put on the table, so we are looking at all of those jointly. We will also be looking at many other issues pertinent to Montserrat.

I wish to say here, in closing, this is a One Montserrat project, and we must see it as a One Montserrat project. We must not see ourselves as just the nine of us. There are 34 of us who participated in the elections. Yes, the first nine got over the line, but the others who did not get over the line, we would like to engage with you as well. So, don't make yourself enemies. Don't feel as though, because you did not get over the line in the top nine position, that your views and opinions don't count. We want to hear from you as well. And here I recognize the presence of the former Honourable Premier, Deputy Premier and the former Minister for Education, Health and Community Services and the former Speaker Charliena White. So, thanks very much for your support and your continued support as we move forward.

Let us, let us look at Montserrat with a vision of a “one-Montserrat”. There are a few of us. It's too small for us to be fighting over peanuts when we can be working together. So, the urge here is to let us work together, and in so doing, we will make Montserrat the place where we are all happy and pleased to be living. May God continue to bless us all. May God continue to bless Montserrat. Thank you very much. Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Can we have a seconder for the adjournment, please? I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier.

Mrs. Veronica Dorsette-Hector said:

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would wish to speak on the adjournment.

Madam Speaker said:

We need to second the motion, please.

Mrs. Veronica Dorsette-Hector said:

And I second the motion as well for the adjournment, Madam Speaker. May I now be permitted to speak on the adjournment, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker said:

You may.

Mrs. Veronica Dorsette-Hector said:

Thank you so much, Madam. Madam Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor, Members of this Honourable Legislative Assembly, former Speakers and legislators, the clergy, distinguished guests and the people of Montserrat. This morning, I stand before you humbled. It is a great honour and privilege that you have afforded me the opportunity to serve you, the people of Montserrat, again in the office of Minister of Buildings, Infrastructure, Labour, Transportation, Energy and Ecclesiastical Affairs as well as Deputy Premier.

Madam Speaker, I wish to remind us that we have a nation to build and a country to mould. Unless the Lord builds, as you have said, those who labour will build in vain. Man may plan, but it is Jehovah the Almighty who executes, and it is he who puts down one and raises another. And so, I am indeed humbled, and I thank God for all he has done for me and for this, our country and people. Many times, I say, how can I say thanks? For I have faced many challenges like my own country, but God has

proven to be faithful, gracious, and merciful to us all. And therefore, let us put him first in everything that we do, yet recognizing the constitutional right of others to exercise their faith as they see fit. I commit that with God's help, guidance, and wisdom supported by this Honourable House, because it includes my colleagues and Members of the Honourable Opposition, all the ministries, the private sector, and the people of Montserrat, to work together to build this land.

I again reiterate my thanks to the people of Montserrat, my family by blood or by choice. The rest of the United Alliance colleagues, thank you for your immense support. And the children who inspired me, Zachai and his friends, Isiah and the Public Speakers Club at St. Augustine, Niana Sinclair, who has been a tower of strength, although a young girl, training leaders and raising champions, is what we do. Madam Speaker, there is a long list of individuals and organizations that have encouraged and showered me with love from all walks of life in Montserrat, and also those living abroad. I am incredibly grateful to all of you. If I were to call names, I would be in trouble, and I would be here as well for a very long time. So please accept my thank you and gratitude from the depths of my heart.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Premier speaks of the Montserrat Project and I support that for taking a twist of a vision to transform Montserrat into a premium five-star destination, embodying luxury culture and natural beauty and services that reflect our values, our island's unique character and heritage, safety, tranquillity and the charm of the island, the way the Caribbean used to be, yet leveraging technological advancement, a modern thriving economy where through initiative and industry, all our people can in this democratic society achieve their dreams, aspirations in a prosperous and Godfearing land. It is said, Madam Speaker, that where there is no vision, the people perish. So, we are told to write the vision, make it plain, so that even those who run can see it. And therefore, working on the Montserrat Project and creating this five-star destination requires all hands on deck. As my Honourable sister has said, we move in unison. All of you are included, and our diaspora brothers and sisters, partners, and friends of Montserrat, and we do so respectfully.

Our ministry's perspective requires investing in the infrastructure, building and maintenance, environmental services, and people are our

foundational backbone, and the benefits of this very vision and its investment, the overall image to create a world-class experience for our residents and visitors alike.

This transformation will enhance accessibility, human resources, infrastructure, and amenities, our electricity, and our water. This vision is guided by our ministry's motto: "Green, thriving, and connected" and supported by the principles set forth in the United Alliance Manifesto, which pledges a better quality of life, strengthened resilience for all our people. Our commitment to this vision is further rooted in Montserrat's identity expressed in our national motto, "A people of excellence moulded by nature and nurtured by God." Madam Speaker, with respect to our manifesto, as Deputy Premier, I was just about to say Deputy Speaker, as Deputy Premier, Madam Speaker, I will support the Honourable Premier and his team to ensure that our promises are fulfilled to the best of our ability and the resources available to us. Our Honourable Premier has already spoken of the need to truly create a five-star experience requires safe, affordable, and reliable sea and air access to and from Montserrat, which must be seamless.

Digital connectivity, we will address the current situation at the airport and will work towards enhancing the structure and grounds for travellers, our airport staff, immigration, fire, and rescue services. Our airport improvement plan is under construction alongside Madam Speaker, our ferry plans. It is an urgent need to bring our delayed port project to a successful closure, a lifeline for economic and social development. However, although our port is delayed, we will seize the opportunity to prepare, and I ask you to do so, my brothers and sisters. Let us train. Even as we speak, we already engage with investors to develop land-side infrastructure and services, and this includes our local investors and entrepreneurs. Delay is by no means denial, and where opportunity meets preparation, success is guaranteed. We will work with our suppliers for robust connectivity, which is critical to our digital age, ensuring that every visitor and we who live here, Madam Speaker, stay connected and work remotely should we desire that. And of course, to share our Montserrat experience, which I wish to submit is the best in the world. These enhancements will ensure that there is easily accessible, not only as a destination, but as a world-class connected island.

Infrastructure is critical to our vision, as highlighted by the United Alliance Manifesto. Accessible and well-maintained roads are central to connecting our communities and promoting economic growth. Our ministry will prioritize road improvements that withstand the challenges of climate change while enabling safe, efficient movement of people and goods across the island. Roads that are built to last are the pathways that link our people, our businesses, our visitors, showcasing Montserrat as a place of excellence and resilience, but also, Madam Speaker, keeping our people safe as they walk on these roads, and I'm sure you will agree with me, reduce the cost on maintaining vehicles, and by doing so, cost of living reduction as well. Plans are afoot, Madam Speaker, to expand our workforce in order to achieve this.

Buildings - public buildings, Madam Speaker, our physical spaces serve our communities and should reflect that we care and our values and vision for the future, and so our ministry is committed to ensuring that public buildings and facilities are well maintained, resilient, and accessible to all, the elderly, and persons with disability.

From schools to government offices, we will seek to make you safe and to work in an environment that stands as a testament to our commitment to excellence and inclusivity, again, the United Alliance Manifesto recognizing the importance of such public investment, which uplifts and serves our community. Madam Speaker, as I said before, what a beautiful island we have, and if we're going to have a first-class, Madam Speaker, destination, where we live and others visit to work, Madam Speaker, our strategic beautification plan is on the way. First impression is a lasting impression, and so we'll beautify the roads, create beautiful green spaces which my colleague and the Honourable Minister will speak of, and Madam Speaker, so that our people can enjoy what God has given us.

We must arise and build to regenerate and create some semblance of a town. The time is now, Madam Speaker, to transform and to move forward. Madam Speaker, we are determined to treat Montserrat like a five-star hotel and destination, as I said, taking care and protecting our flora, fauna, and what needs to be protected, while establishing standards for taking care of our verges. Madam Speaker, it is important that we be good stewards of the environment. No more littering, no more littering, especially when you see the dry weather comes, Madam Speaker, and so we shall remove, we are serving notice even now, all the old cars littering

our roadsides and the yards. We implore all to stop littering and dispose of garbage in a responsible way, as often it reaches the sea and destroys our marine life. And so, we will undertake a strategic clean-up of the entire land, and we will create a policy and legislation to sustain this. I remember my colleague saying peek-a-boo, but Madam Speaker, on a very serious note, and I know she was serious, a stable, resilient energy system is vital to a high quality of life and fostering sustainable development. And so, our green vision for Montserrat, in line with the manifesto, will promote renewable energy solutions, especially geothermal, and support an energy system which is not only reliable but also environmentally responsible. We will invest, we will ensure that every household and business have the energy it needs, creating a Montserrat that is truly green, thriving, and connected.

Water is the lifeblood of our community, and we are blessed with having a natural source of springs, on which we can both enjoy and share. And so, we remain committed to ensuring that administrations have access to clean, safe water, guided by our manifesto's emphasis on quality services. We will invest in infrastructure to enhance and treat our wastewater efficiently and safeguard public health. With our adequate water and waste management service, we not only provide for people's needs, but lay a foundation for long-term resilience, sustainability, and the children critical to the health and prosperity of our lands. We have already embarked on a critical water and wastewater, and sewage program, ensuring water resilience, rehabilitating our springs, transmission lines, and water sewage project.

We extend our gratitude to the United Kingdom Government, the FCDO, and the Governor and for strengthening our families and better lives for our residents and visitors in doing so. Critical to any project is the timely completion of projects with competent staff, and I can boast of the competent staff we have across the ministries and also in the private sector. But particularly now, I speak to a private sector that you work with us as we adopt smart working practices, timely completion of projects, and strengthen our governance and procurement framework, which prepares the way for further projects and investor confidence.

Human resources, how can we not invest in our people? Our vision for a five-star Montserrat begins with investing in our people, you, our workforce. The United Alliance Manifesto underscores this commitment

to fair, dignified working conditions where we care and we are essential to building a workforce that strives. Our Honourable Minister may share today another day, what we will be doing to enhance our people's lives. Our Labour Department will establish an equitable labour standard and extend our services, ensuring that working with ODG, HR, and the private sector, we will strengthen our labour protection, expanding services, employment, advisory services, training, and to create opportunities that empower our people to build meaningful careers here at home. Our standard of service is critical, and so our people will be consistent and exceptional staff, highly trained, friendly, knowledgeable, exceptionally attentive, and intuitive. Always we are human, but as far as possible, remain professional in our behaviour, dress, and a genuine pleasure to go the extra mile. We will measure, monitor, assess, and evaluate.

Madam Speaker, I'm coming to a close. Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore's Prime Minister for three decades, and he oversaw one of the most successful social engineering feats in human history. He's remembered for lifting millions out of poverty, and he said, "A nation is great not by its size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, and the discipline of its people and the quality of their leaders which will ensure it an honourable place." I am confident, Madam Speaker, that we, the people of Montserrat, possess all of these qualities, and so as we work together with our other ministries, we will seek to advance Montserrat. The time is now to rise and build, to rise and shine. My people, let us work together guided by the spirit of our motto. Our journey to becoming a five-star destination is one that we must take hand in hand, united in our dedication to improving the quality of life for all who reside here, one for all and all for one. Together, we will make this vision a reality, transforming our land into a place that inspires, uplifts, and prospers a Montserrat that is truly green, thriving, and connected. And as our national song advocates, "Rise up and make our country great, with art and skill and sacrifice, with masque and drum we celebrate, triumphant masters of our fate." Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we sing our land in harmony, may God be our eternal God and make Montserrat a house of hope, a haven in the Carib Sea. God bless us all. God bless Montserrat. If it pleases you, Madam Speaker, I take my seat and see the floor to the next Honourable Member as we continue to pursue the Montserrat project, creating a five-star destination. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Madam Speaker, permission to speak on the adjournment.

Madam Speaker said:

You may.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the people of Montserrat for making the right choice in their election of the United Alliance as the new Government of Montserrat, a team united by God under the leadership of Honourable Ruben T. Meade, a man who I've grown to know well and to love over the past year, a man whose experience, knowledge, and expertise surpassed all party leaders in the recent general elections. Those of us on this side, Madam Speaker, are truly honoured to be with him on this journey to achieve progress and development on this island. To my colleagues in the team, I am looking forward to working with them over the next five years. Certainly, the warmth, love, and camaraderie of the election campaign have extended into governance. I am incredibly proud and honoured to be a part of this team. To Montserrat, you have our solemn promise to work together and to work hard for Montserrat. As your political leaders over the next five years, we shall strive daily in the work of delivering all that we promised the people.

In healthcare, we are committed to the following: Input from emergency medical consultants, a full-time NHS-trained consultant in emergency medicine who has the role of clinical lead, or visiting NHS-trained emergency medical consultants who will train and guide. In either option, it involves the writing of guidelines and protocols and laying out the standard of care that will happen in our emergency department. We are looking for faster management of patients in three priority areas in emergency medicine, Madam Speaker, in stroke, heart attack, and major trauma. We are expecting faster diagnosis with immediate referral through fast and efficient services to predetermined tertiary centres that will guide initial management and will guide the need for medical evacuation to that centre. There will be zero tolerance for delays in medical evacuation. For certain cases, transfer from a helipad at Glendon

directly to a tertiary centre. You can get there within an hour. The ability to transfer patients at any hour is essential. Thus, immediate solutions to the absence of flying at night are needed and needed urgently. Our ability to provide you with first-world care should not be sabotaged by our failure over a 10-year period to figure out how to medivac patients by night. We are expecting 24-hour doctor presence at the casualty department, which, with any luck, will soon be called the emergency department, emergency room, or accident and emergency. The term casualty was coined in the 1960s.

Having a doctor who is off-site at times is unacceptable. There must be a doctor present on the compound at all times. If a doctor needs to leave the compound even for an hour, there must be cover arranged. Emergencies present to the hospital at any time, and patients in the hospital can deteriorate at any time. The delay of calling and waiting for a doctor is certainly a delay that we can address by ensuring 24-hour doctor coverage. Not having a doctor all the time has put a strain on our already strained nursing staff, expecting the initial presentation of the patient to be managed by a nurse only, or at times, only a nursing aide. I must say, however, that out of this scarcity of doctor cover, at critical times, we have produced some very excellent and capable nurses.

I must praise in this moment the excellent work of Sister Noleen “Cassie” Meade, Sister Lystra Fagan, Nurse Jeanette Lee, Nurse Jeanette Brade, Nurse Rita Hughes, Sister Charmaine Gray, and many others, all stalwarts in their profession. These nurses very comfortably manage patients independently. All of the nursing team deserves our love and praise. I must mention our very excellent new nurse practitioner, Nurse Nadine Sweeney-Duberry, who has fairly recently started her work and is excellent at it.

Audit and research, Madam Speaker, are priority areas for this government. The results of what we have done are feeding back into how we manage patients. We can only learn by assessing the areas where we went wrong, not in a punitive way, but simply as a part of the essential learning and improvement process. We intend to immediately commence training and weekly practice in the management of emergencies. It is essential that medical staff grasp and are well-practiced in resuscitation and in dealing with peri-arrest situations.

Coordinating these activities with the Fire and Rescue team is essential as these persons will be bringing patients to us and will benefit. Thank you. And we will benefit from such sessions. Teaching the public bystander CPR is essential in improving the chain of survival in out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. This is something that we must teach and preach. Improving on the management of peripheral vascular disease in diabetic foot to reduce the rate of amputations on island is something we have promised on the campaign trail. Attention and focus to attention of feet in the diabetic and high cholesterol population with 100% adherence to the guidelines of the Caribbean Public Health Agency, the introduction of vascular Doppler ultrasound on island for the diagnosis of circulatory problems, and the introduction of a visiting vascular surgeon onto the visiting specialist program are plans aimed at achieving an amputation rate of zero amputations per year. Let us keep our patients able-bodied and productive.

Dialysis, Madam Speaker, we aim to begin a dialysis program on Montserrat. With diabetes and hypertension being the most common causes of end-stage kidney disease, the high and rising incidence and prevalence of diabetes and hypertension in the local population, our failure as Caribbean countries to achieve control due to the Western lifestyle and the high incidence of kidney disease in trends that suggest a genetic predisposition and the passage of time have led to an increasing incidence of kidney failure. As Caribbean countries, we must see ourselves as being independently responsible for the management of kidney disease. Our end-stage kidney disease patients in the past have either had to die or migrate. Neither option assists with population growth, nor option contributes positively to the image of local health care, which significantly impacts repatriation.

Our neighbours, such as Antigua, have a waiting list for dialysis; thus, to rely on them is unfair and challenging, and not to mention costly. They offer dialysis at a rate of US\$250 per session, which is required three times a week. Why not provide dialysis locally and envision the possibility of cost recovery through taking some of Antigua's patients?

Cancer screening, Madam Speaker. We intend to develop an electronic database for cancer screening, a registry for cancer screening which will allow the health service to ensure that all patients on island receive age-appropriate screening, the priority areas being breast, prostate, stomach,

colon, cervix, and ovarian cancers. We do not want to be losing loved ones to prostate cancer, a cancer that we know how to screen for, we know how to diagnose, and we know how to treat. The aim of this boost in cancer screening is to ensure that our cancers are diagnosed early, resulting in the possibility of achieving a cure.

We have all had painful losses from patients with prostate cancer, breast, ovarian, and gastrointestinal cancers, deep personal losses, and losses to the economy. Our calls for help to the Montserrat Diaspora have so far, just within the first week, resulted in a plan for assistance from the Montserrat Diaspora, solutions with them coming to see us on the visiting specialist program, and helping.

We shall soon have a visiting team of endoscopists for upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and colonoscopy, additional gynaecology support, and an oncologist, Dr. Perry Ryan, who's been dying to visit us for the last ten years. This oncologist, also known as a cancer doctor, will help us in our cancer screening program, and he will support and engage our trained oncology nurse, Nurse Hercules, with the long-needed support and empowerment required. In terms of treatment, cancer diagnosis is becoming more common, and it is essential that we have clear pathways for their management. We cannot be surprised when a diagnosis is made. We must be ready if we are to save lives.

We intend an urgent review of medical laws on Montserrat, Madam Speaker, to identify areas that need to be adjusted. It is essential that our laws address the cause of death, with the above-mentioned solutions becoming a template for the writing of health policies that will help us to save lives. So, we intend that the writing of policies that will address the above will happen to ensure faster diagnosis, immediate referral, fast medical evacuation in the priority areas, provision of services to prevent amputations, the treatment of end-stage kidney disease, and policies that help us in the early diagnosis of cancer. Policy will direct funding, training, staffing, and focus. Policies are the process by which governments translate their political vision into programs and actions to deliver the desired outcomes. Our intended outcome is to reduce the rate of death and disability from emergency medical conditions and the complications of chronic illness on island.

We want to mirror what is happening in the United Kingdom. The UK's Faster Diagnosis Framework for coronary artery disease in 2000 was a health policy created to help health care professionals give better and faster care in the management of coronary artery disease, one of its achievements being the immediate treatment of heart attacks. It also instructed the Myocardial National Audit Program, which significantly improved the quality of care. The UK's National Stroke program in 2019, which came out of the NHS long-term plan, was designed to achieve a tenfold increase in patients receiving thrombolysis and thrombectomy in ischemic stroke, as removal of the clot that allows you to reverse the signs of stroke, an outcome that can only be achieved through fast diagnosis and early specialist intervention. In 2022, the UK's Faster Diagnosis Framework was a health policy created to deliver earlier and faster ways of diagnosing cancer patients, increasing capacity through efficient and effective pathways, providing more support to health care providers to reach the faster diagnosis standards, and improvements along all cancer pathways, regardless of type, with fast referral for cancer treatment.

In the healthcare of the people of Montserrat, Madam Speaker, is the responsibility of the Government of Montserrat, and this responsibility we take very, very seriously. I would like to recognize the recent successes of Dr. Abbie Kassim, a dentist and medical doctor, Dr. Maria Figueroa, and Dr. Stevika Foster. They have done us proud, Madam Speaker, and I am looking forward to helping them to incorporate themselves into the health service as we expand and improve the provision of high-quality medical care on island.

I won't be too long, Madam Speaker, but in education, I have found teachers, students, and parents whose cries for help have not been met by consecutive governments who may have had good intentions but have failed to have the required impact necessary to effect change.

Challenges with funding, focus, red tape, and inaction have left an education service desperate for relief. I must commend the extremely hardworking and extremely dedicated teaching staff that we have on this island. Despite the challenges with simply surviving financially with the low salaries and high costs of living, poor access to supplies, unruly or disinterested students, lack of classroom support, and rising classroom temperatures of 35 degrees yesterday, they remain focused on the cause.

Parents are truly frustrated with the suboptimal standards, not due to intention, but perhaps due to a lack of support from successive governments. We have some possible solutions. We have met the school without an English teacher. We have engaged a teacher, and we are awaiting her response. We intend to find money for after-school English classes for those students affected by this deprivation so that they can catch up and be ready for exams at the end of this year.

It is essential that we immediately explore electronic teaching options, a classroom manned by somebody to maintain order, but taught by an electronic overseas tutor. COVID has taught us that you no longer have to be in the room to have an impact. Although this is an expensive venture, the value gained through not failing a generation of students has a greater positive impact, Madam Speaker.

Teacher retention and recruitment are important to us. They leave or they don't come at all because the package that we offer them on the island is painful. We have so far promised teachers' salaries on par with those in the region, the free package of medical care offered to medical staff, fire and police, affordable housing solutions, and faster access to classroom supplies, and solutions to the disorder problem on the MSS compound. Next week, I will visit the primary schools, Madam Speaker, and hear their problems in detail to find some solutions to these problems that they face. In campaigning, we talked about the large numbers of students who were in need of special education or support, and it is essential that we meet these students where they are.

We need to ensure that these students, in particular those with profound needs, have what they need to thrive. Recently, I met with a special education teacher who struggled because of a lack of internet, a lack of classroom support, and a lack of supplies. The pathways for receiving supplies in the classroom seem to have generally broken down, and we intend to fix this. It is also important that yes, although we must recognize students with profound needs, that we recognize the broader group of students who are mainstream but have deficits in their learning. This government intends to, over time, assess all students, not to stream them, but to plan and arrange support for them so that they can excel. Many students could achieve so much more with the right educational support, and we would like to do this for them. I must acknowledge a team I met last week, the hard-working student leadership team at the

MSS, 40 students who maintain high standards of behaviour and general performance. They lead by example and provide a role for other students. Their present request for a refurbished school library with books and computers will be met by the ministry. They have also strongly recommended an extension of what is now the school lunch program to include breakfast. This team has a huge social conscience. They have recognized that some students start their day hungry and that this has a negative impact on their learning.

I must also recognize the hard work of the Youth Parliament of Montserrat, where I met last week, a group of young ladies and gentlemen whose focus is on supporting the local community. This week they donated books to the Brades primary school and inspired children to read.

Also, under education, Madam Speaker, the Public Library, it was an honour and delight to visit them last week, presently occupying two very accessible and very beautiful floors of the Barry Chalmers building. The library staff has created an appealing setting for readers and students. They presently have plans of extending their opening hours to the evening to ensure that the resources that they provide are available to a larger group of persons, students from all the schools after school, the Community College, UWI students, and the general public after work who are keen on reading and research. For this, they need two extra staff, and the Ministry of Education has every intention of making this happen. Congratulations to the library staff, a very impressive space and very progressive plans.

Almost finished, Madam Speaker. In social welfare, this government is set on ensuring that monies received by persons on social welfare meet their needs, that the elderly are not only cared for but are engaged, and that our children are safe. We shall leave no vulnerable person behind.

Under child safety, we have plans of expanding the use of community centers to include after-school clubs, and our very own Mrs. Anne Buffonge-Thomas will be taking the lead on the work that will happen in community centers to engage persons in all the communities to involve the various ministries in coordinating activities at the community centers.

Before closing, I must acknowledge the hard work of Mrs. Beverly Mendes, the Permanent Secretary of Education, Mrs. Camille Gerald, the Permanent Secretary of Health, Dr. Sharra Greenaway, the Chief Medical Officer, Mrs. Teresina Fergus, the Director of Social Services, and all the administrative staff who work under them. They must be applauded for the hard work they have done so far and for so many years.

I must acknowledge the hard work of those responsible for the Health Transformation Project, a very heavily funded project that gave birth to the CT scan machine, the mammogram machine, and many other pieces of equipment, and the start of training in health. The hard work of our outgoing Minister of Health, Education, and Social Services, Mr. Charles Kirnon, cannot be ignored. In our two-hour handover last week, I understood why he keeps getting elected by the people. He is a lovely person who has had a lifelong career in politics and is a resource for the country. I feel that over the next five years, I can call on him for advice and information during his semi-retirement. To my colleagues in Opposition, I look forward to you holding us to account. To my cousin, the Honourable Nyota Mulcare, Deputy Speaker, my Daniel bloodline. Congratulations. I know you have a great deal to contribute. On my right, and joining this government, the Honourable Crenston Buffonge, my Buffonge bloodline. I am looking forward to working with you. To Mr. Jenzil Skerritt, our Public Relations Officer, and MVP of the team, I cannot thank you enough for your help over the last two weeks. I look forward to working with you on this journey. A true champion, a brother, a protector, a resource. Much honour and respect to you, Jenzil. To you, Madam Speaker, congratulations. I know you will be very excellent in your role.

In closing, thank you again to the people of Montserrat for the opportunity to serve you once again. A more experienced and more determined Dr. Ingrid Buffonge, and I dare say perhaps a more mature one. Thank you.

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Madam Speaker, with your permission. Let me start by congratulating you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment to preside over this Honourable House. I have no doubt that you will rule with wisdom, fairness, and dignity. And may the Most High God continue to give you

the strength to do so. Let me also congratulate Premier Meade and his United Alliance team for their victory at the polls and extend a warm welcome to my friend and new Member of Parliament, Mr. Hixon.

Madam Speaker, I stand before you and the rest of Montserrat and those witnessing today in the capacity of Parliamentary Secretary to the Office of the Premier. The recent election was a defining journey, and I want to thank the public for their overwhelming support, which has deepened my commitment to serve you with the best of my ability. I am grateful for the trust you have given to me, and it is with that mandate that I stand here ready to serve.

For the past five years, I've had the privilege of being your Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, and the Environment. Together, we have taken bold steps to revitalize Montserrat's agricultural sector, providing real support to our farmers and fishers. Supporting their livelihoods and reviving the local industry. We've worked diligently to improve our housing options for families, ensuring that stable homes are within reach. We stood firmly protecting our environment, recognizing that a healthy and sustainable Montserrat is not only our duty but our legacy for our future generations. Thanks to the Permanent Secretary and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, for without them, none of our accomplishments would have been possible. Thank you very much. These were no small accomplishments. They were the foundational efforts that strengthened Montserrat and laid the critical groundwork for our future progress.

As I move forward in this new chapter as an independent MCAP member of government, I assure you that this decision reflects my unwavering commitment to the people of Montserrat and the pursuit of progress beyond party lines. In accepting this role, I recognize the weight of my responsibility to ensure that our people's voices are not only heard but acted upon. While I sit on this side of the House, I do so not as a retreat from my principles but as a strategic choice to bridge gaps, foster unity, and advance Montserrat's development. From this position, I will be able to hold the government directly accountable while also influencing policy and strategic decisions.

In this vein, I must express my deepest and sincerest admiration for my MCAP teammates. Some of the brightest and most committed minds I have had the honour of working alongside. Their vision, their integrity,

and their passion for Montserrat's progress are invaluable. These individuals who have stepped forward out of sheer dedication to Montserrat's future and their skills are needed, and we address the challenges before us. I have heard the government speak of a one-Montserrat agenda similar to Dr. Sammy's Montserrat project, and I applaud this commitment to include and to be inclusive in that approach. But, Premier Meade, I must challenge you today to ensure that my MCAP colleagues, along with the other persons, as stated by Honourable Mulcare, who have run in the elections, are not sidelined simply for their courage to put themselves forward, especially for leadership in this country. They must be put to work and, again, I am glad to hear you say that they are part and they will be made a part.

To my MCAP family and loyal supporters, while the election did not bring the outcome we had worked for, I say to you, do not be discouraged and no need to hang your heads in shame or otherwise. MCAP has built a legacy of progress, integrity and tangible achievements that Montserrat is benefiting from today. I remain deeply committed to these valuable principles, and in taking on the role of an independent Member, I bring MCAP's legacy and priorities to this side of the House where I can hold government accountable and ask the tough questions and ensure that the progress we made is not unravelled. I assure you that I am here unwavering and in full empowerment to represent your interests.

Madam Speaker, the road ahead will not be easy, but MCAP has left a strong foundation. We see it in the roadmap to improve trade with Montserrat, championed by the former Premier and Minister of Economic Development, Farrell, and now being actively pursued in the UK by Honourable Osborne. I wish him well. We see it in advancements in our power generation capacity, the UK financial commitment National Hospital project, our diagnostic capabilities with the new CT scan and mammogram machine, and also our new oxygen plant which has just begun. The new hot mix plant will finally allow us to fix our roads. The \$2.8 million will continue to fund maintenance and new social housing in Drummonds and the increased salaries and tax adjustments, just to name a few.

But let us remember, by majority the people voted for the UA's vision of real leadership and lasting development in agriculture, in housing, in social solutions, better health care, improved education systems,

economic growth, and greater access for all. My job is to hold this administration accountable to that vision and for delivering on the promises they made to our people. To my colleagues in the Opposition, congratulations on your victory and a special welcome to Ms. Nyota, Deputy Speaker Mulcare. I welcome you with open arms.

The role of the Opposition in this Chamber is invaluable as you carry the responsibility to scrutinize, to question, and to challenge in ways that will enhance our collective governance. I urge you to uphold this duty not just for opposing sake, but to ensure that every decision we make here is a step forward for Montserrat and her people. Let us engage in a spirit of constructive debate, where our shared goal is always the betterment of our beloved island and service above self.

While COVID has reminded us that we never know what is around the bend, I am filled with hope and optimism. I pledge to serve with the utmost integrity, dedication, and passion, representing the voices of Montserratians and residents in this Honourable House, while upholding the highest standards of public service. I am reminded by a quote, “No matter how bad yesterday was, it's over. Start the day with a smile.” Madam Speaker, I thank you and may we move forward together for the benefit of Montserrat and the people we serve. I thank you.

Mr. Dwayne Hixon said:

Permission to speak, Madam Speaker, on the adjournment. Philippians 14, verse 13 reminds me that through Christ, all things are possible. And because I can truly testify to that, let me first take this opportunity to thank Almighty God for his favour, grace, and mercy that brought me here, and which I will rely on to guide me along this journey. To my parents, children, loved ones, friends, and the United Alliance family, I appreciate all your efforts as you supported me unwaveringly from every angle. I am humbled by your confidence that I will be able to lead and represent you on both local, regional, and international matters. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the other elected Members, and I look forward to working with you to bring about sustainable growth and improve the quality of life for our beloved island and our people, respectively.

Madam Speaker, it was Theodore Roosevelt who once said, “This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in.” I wholeheartedly endorse this statement. Let this be our inspiration as we encourage each other, irrespective of our political views. As citizens of Montserrat, we must contribute our various talents to positively influence and promote the greater good of this country. This, therefore, requires each of us to re-examine ourselves and think about how we can either start or continue to make a meaningful impact. This impact does not have to be loud to be meaningful. It can be achieved in simple but significant ways. Honourable Members of this House and citizens of Montserrat, I pledge to serve this country to the best of my ability, to honour God and to contribute to making Montserrat an island that achieves sustainable development, that is thriving and inclusive.

As Parliamentary Secretary, I am currently availing myself of the various opportunities being afforded to me to understand and to undertake my role within the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, and the Environment, along with youth and sports. This is an exciting venture, learning and experience, and I look forward to interacting with the technical persons within the various departments as they impart key knowledge as necessary. That will feed my desire to be a strong pillar.

Madam Speaker, collaboration in coordination and successful execution will be my mantra. We will not reinvent wheels but review the systems and programs in place, build on and develop smart, and in this case, smart, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and trusted solutions over the next five years, in the first instance with the aim of yielding greater outcomes. This includes but is not limited to revisiting housing schemes and programs, initiatives for farmers, and devising strategies to improve food security. We will review strategies, policies, and laws that will improve these areas and the overall function of the Ministry, ensuring alignment with the national planning strategies and initiatives. We will bring up our SDP and extract, and work to complete any relevant pathways towards our development goals.

Madam Speaker, the initiatives I will focus on in my support to the Honourable Osborne would also explore financial assistance in the form of grants and aids, research and education, market access, food security, conservation programs, food safety, and quality and rural development.

Of course, I will rely on you, the people of Montserrat, to hold me accountable, to share your views and suggest ways in which you believe that this Ministry can better support you. As it pertains to sports, youth, and community development, which falls under our remit, there is much work to be done. As a government, we recognize that our young people need more opportunities to help them maximize their potential in various areas within our society. This necessary reassessment will require a collective effort between the government, interest groups, and especially the young people of Montserrat. We will continue to support previous progress in these areas by offering programs that will support employment, sports advancement, and community development.

In the upcoming weeks and months ahead, I aim to keep you updated on work being done to support you, the people of Montserrat, and by extension, take this country forward, which is our main goal. Thank you once again. God bless all.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other member wishing to make an intervention may do so now.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, as I rise, let me use this opportunity, with your permission, to first of all acknowledge the presence of the Honourable Speaker of the House, Marjorie Smith, Her Excellency the Governor Sarah Tucker, the presence of the Honourable Premier Reuben T Meade, all Members, Ministers of the government side and Parliamentary Secretaries, all Members of the Opposition side, to the Honourable Attorney General, the Honourable Financial Secretary, to all Members present here today and those under the sound of my voice. Madam Speaker, Members of this Parliament, fellow citizens and residents of Montserrat, as we gather to open this new session of parliament, I stand before you with deep gratitude and a profound sense of purpose. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the people of Montserrat. Your engagement in our democratic process via the recent concluded general elections is a testament to your commitment to building a stronger Montserrat. I thank every one of you for playing your part in this journey. Once more, I congratulate every parliamentarian here today who have been given the confidence of the people.

Together, we have a job to do. Let us never waver in that commitment, and let us never lose hope in the strength of our collective vision, pushing Montserrat to heights yet untouched. I especially welcome all Members of the Assembly who are sitting in this Honourable House for the first time, both my colleagues on the Opposition side, Honourable Mrs. Nyota Mulcare and my other two colleagues on the government side, Honourable John P. Osborne and Honourable Dwayne Hickson. I wish to also pay tribute to those who have served this island with distinction and integrity for many years in the previous 17 parliaments. To former Premier Honourable Easton Taylor Farrell and Honourable Charles Kirnon, as well as Honourable Dr. Samuel Joseph, we express our deepest appreciation for your years of service and sacrifice. Your contributions have shaped the Montserrat we see today, and we are grateful for the time, energy, and passion you have devoted to this island.

To my colleagues, Honourable David Osborne and Honourable Claude Hogan, I thank you both for your invaluable service in the Legislative Assembly. I look forward to your continued support and wise counsel as we embark on this new chapter. Together, we are bound by our commitment to Montserrat and its people, and I am confident in the strength of our shared purpose. Madam Speaker, permit me to also extend a hearty welcome and congratulations to you on your election as the new Speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly. This Honourable House represents one of the most eminent blocks of our emerging democracy. I trust that you will lead this House with fairness and, above all, integrity. This is now your House, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, at this point, I wish to thank the former Speaker for her contribution in the previous Parliament. Madam Speaker, I congratulate also Honourable Nyota Mulcare as the new Deputy Speaker. I am confident she will perform at the highest levels possible and provide admirable support to you, Madam Speaker, in running this Honourable House, your House. Madam Speaker, as Leader of the Opposition, I stand with a clear vision of our role in the esteem Assembly. Our duty is not simply to oppose, but to strengthen and uphold the democratic foundations of this nation. The role of the Opposition is essential to ensure that government actions are scrutinized, that decisions are transparent, and that power remains accountable to the people it serves.

Accountability is not just merely a function of governance. It is the backbone of our democracy, a safeguard against complacency and a commitment to honesty. The Opposition work goes beyond questioning decisions. Madam Speaker, we are here to also propose ideas, to build on solutions, and to support initiatives that will lead Montserrat to a brighter future. We will not hesitate to champion policies that uplift our communities, that secure a better future for our young people, and that ensure a life of dignity for our elderly. From health care to education, from economic development to environmental stewardship, we will push forward with a vision that puts the needs of the people first. Our island has faced significant challenges, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, and economic trials, but we are strong people, and we are ready to rise. We in the Opposition are committed to breaking the cycle of stagnation that has held us back. We stand ready to work with this government, our local businesses, our community leaders, and most importantly, the people of Montserrat to usher in an era of meaningful development.

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker, this vision is not for the benefit of a few, but for every person on this island. We envision a Montserrat where every community, from Lookout to Salem, sees tangible progress. This is our home, and we must work to make it a place of opportunity for all. Madam Speaker, we are a small island, and we have survived because we are not just dreamers, but we are builders and we are determined. As the Opposition, we pledge to stand alongside our people, not only to hold this government accountable, but to actively contribute to the building of a progressive, inclusive Montserrat. As we embark on this journey, let us all remember that we are united in our purpose. Let us dedicate ourselves to lifting Montserrat higher, to making it a land of opportunity, of visible progress, courage, and one of shared hope. Thank you, and may God bless Montserrat as we take this journey together.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to speak. Madam Speaker, the protocol is already well established by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and others. I would like to start by thanking God for keeping it to this day, to allow me once again to sit on this side to represent the people of Montserrat. The elections are passed, and the people of Montserrat have spoken once more. Therefore, I must thank all of those who've come out to exercise their right to vote.

Madam Speaker, I nearly forgot, but I must remember to congratulate you on being appointed to the Honourable House as Speaker. I've worked with you before as Cabinet Secretary, and I'm confident that you can do a good job. You have wisely identified a mentor in Sir Howard Fergus, and I will do whatever I can to support you, and please feel free to put me in my place if I go off track. Thanks to my wife, my brother, my children, my close family, sisters and brothers and devoted friends, too numerous to mention. I'm tempted to mention names, but I know I'll get in trouble, but I will do my best one-on-one as we go along. I want to also thank my strongest critics, many of those who love me, but do not hesitate to put me right if they think I'm off track. Special thanks to the PDM candidates, Mr. David Osborne, Mr. Jermaine Wade, Ms. Shirley Osborne, Mr. Glenn Daley, Mr. Alaric Lynch, and Mr. Eustace Osborne. I name you because you're important. You have helped the three of us to make it to this Assembly. We value you, we love you, and we will work with you going forward. I also want to say thanks to the MCAP team, who challenged me in recent years. I want to thank the former Speaker who helped to make things quite interesting. I also want to thank Dr. Baker and staff, Mrs Kelly, Mrs Lee, and also Miss Laureen Bramble, who've moved on to another department. She will be greatly missed, too.

Thanks to the ZJB manager, Herman and staff, the people of Montserrat do not understand how important ZJB and their staff are, and I want to really take this opportunity to let them know how important you are. Fittest man and the tech guys here, without you assisting us when we do statements, being patient with us at times, you are so important I had to mention you specially. Thanks to those in the diaspora, especially those who listen to the radio more than most of us and still take the time on a regular basis to call and to comment and to encourage. There is a special set of supporters, members of the public and of the private sector, who are not afraid to show their colours, to show who they supported. I'm very proud of you, especially the public servants who understood their rights and exercised that right of association. I'm most proud and thankful of those who took their time to go out physically and campaign for us, were unafraid and did so from their heart and not for money. In a meeting with supporters we had just closed by a few days ago, members who wanted to be formally part of the PDM team were anxious to help, and they did something I will never forget. One lady stood up and said, "Let us contribute money now," and I saw money going on the table one after

the other. They were determined to help PDM build a solid foundation and an organization that would make a difference going forward.

They asked and acted on what they could do for PDM in order for us to do our best for all of our people on Montserrat. And of that I'm extremely proud. The task of leading our people at home and abroad is now in the hands of nine elected members, five with previous experience in government and four first-time Members of the Montserrat Assembly. And from what I've heard today, you sound and tell us that you're going to do a good job. And like those who have spoken before me, I want to formally extend my congratulations to the Honourable R.T. Meade and his three Honourable Ministers: Ministers Dorsette, Osborne, Dr. Buffonge, plus their backbenchers Mr. Hickson and Honourable Crenston Buffonge. I want to tell you that I've sat on the other side and taking on the responsibility of governing Montserrat at this time is a huge challenge, probably greater than ever before in the past 28 years. Honourable R.T. Meade was there at the start and he went through I think the darkest days. But today as we go forward, I want to make it very clear that winning an election is one thing. Winning for the people by delivering on promises after the elections is another. And just to help you understand what a layman said to me, a young man, a DJ in our circles here on Montserrat. He said to me, if the government wins in addressing the cost of living, that government will win. And I'm sure most of us understand that the high cost of living is what punishes those of us who live on Montserrat. That drives many to pick up and go to the United Kingdom rather than staying here to fight it out. So winning means providing relief to the businesses and people of Montserrat, reducing taxes and customs duties. Providing salary, pension and welfare increases. Support to the working poor like never before. To single mothers, many of whom earn less than the minimum wage. Not the minimum, the living wage which is established by the Deputy Governor, not minimum wage.

Honourable Premier, I know your party has promoted importance of bringing investors but we know that in the next 6 to 12 months or even 2 years, investors will not have a significant impact on addressing the cost of living. So I'm urging you Honourable Premier and government that we work together to address the urgent needs of the people now or we will lose them. I'm speaking in very simple language. We must, while we build infrastructure and the environment that attracts local and foreign

investment, we must take care of our people. And we have a short time to address the issues that hurt most.

In meetings with our people in our homes, as we campaigned on the streets and in rallies, my zeal and commitment to represent the people of Montserrat have grown more than ever. And I want to let the people of Montserrat know that they can be assured that all of my knowledge, experience and skills will be used going forward. I cannot forget the lady in her 70s whose pension is less than \$1,500 with a mortgage of \$800 and forced to live on just over \$500 a month. Just \$500 a month. Someone who's worked for the civil service for 34 years. Then there's a lady in her 60s forced to retire at age 60. She's now 62. Her entire social security payment goes to her mortgage, leaving her with nothing to live on. She still has to go out there and compete and work. Then there's a lady in her 70s who still has to pay a mortgage for an EU-funded house that was given to the people of Montserrat for free, for free. Something has to be done about that.

Then there's a single mother who works for the government and again, for less than the living wage established by the Deputy Governor's Office. She struggles to pay her utility bills every month. Short every month, but does not qualify for any assistance. She has to pay the same bus fare, electricity costs. Her children eat and need the same things our children need. Then there's a non-national who has three jobs. Has to run from Salem to St. John's and back to Salem, pay the bus fares, and she too lives below the living wage. The time for equal opportunity is now. The Honourable Premier spoke about going to the United Kingdom and challenging them to make sure that pensioners are treated as equals to pensioners in the UK when they retire in Montserrat. Well, I am challenging you, Honourable Premier, that we have to insist that Montserrat, those who stay here, are treated as equals, and I'll clarify that.

Madam Speaker, in taking our job of holding the government to account for its stewardship, we will do so vigorously and seriously. And I must not forget to congratulate our newest Member of the Opposition, Mrs Mulcare. She brings a seriousness and a sense of commitment and devotion that I know will help to make this Opposition probably the best Opposition ever. Madam Speaker, I'm trying to cut my speech because when you speak last, you have to go quickly. As I repeatedly stated in recent years, Montserrat needs a united Assembly and a united people in

order for us to speak with one voice, one vision and plan aimed at achieving our ambition of development towards greater self-sufficiency and self-government. I look forward to the ruling government establishing a clear vision and plan so that we can lend our support. We need a clear vision and plan to which we can lend our support. And with that, I want to mention the things that we are prepared to do. As the Honourable Premier travels to the United Kingdom, we want to let him know that we will be supporting him in negotiating firmly with the UK government for what is needed for urgent and long-term needs. We'll join you in thinking big. We're not just asking for a little more aid. We are calling for transformational funding to make Monserrat self-sufficient. And that aid the UK government has promised.

In essence, there's a gentleman in Brades called Mr Gibbons. He told me the people of Monserrat deserves an Assembly of nine representatives who think big even if they move small. He said, think big, move small. But I add, think big, move small, but also smart. We are small. Monserrat is small. But as the Jamaicans say, we can be talawa. Once the nine of us consider ourselves first class, then we must insist that first call becomes a reality. We must do like Rosa Parks. No more sitting in the back of the bus. No more second and third-class treatment. We are British and we must insist on being treated equally to British Territories like Isles of Scilly with 2,400 people and St Helena who got hundreds of millions for access alone, airports and ferries, Honourable Premier. When you go to England, do not be afraid to make a strong request for the people of Monserrat. It's going to take courage and wisdom. It is our responsibility to insist that, as I said before, our local pensioners on Montserrat, the working poor, the young people are given opportunities, our business people are assisted. Just as during COVID, the British spent hundreds of billions to help their country survive through COVID, which we did not get.

Honourable Premier, this is the time to request from the UK Government some form of relief and treatment similar to what was done back then. We will join you, Honourable Premier, and the Government in involving all of our people, national, non-national, white and black, at home and abroad. We will give them a say in Monserrat's future. Madam Speaker, there's one thing I want to mention to the Government today, and that is that freedom of speech is critical. If we're going to have a united Monserrat, we need to have our people speaking freely. The “What's on

Your Mind” program should not take until January to get started. If our Government can get access fixed by the middle of this month, a huge task, by getting a ferry, surely within the next seven days, “What's on Your Mind” can be back on. The managers on island they've done the work of preparing for changes for “What's on Your Mind”, and Honourable Premier, I'm challenging you today to give the people of Montserrat the right to speak. We've gone through an election. People are not even able to comment now on what has happened during the election.

And I would lastly like to make it plain, sorry I'm having a little trouble here, that as I did throughout the campaign, Madam Speaker, I stuck to the issues. I never got personal with anyone, and I intend to do so in this Assembly, on the radio, wherever I go going forward. It's one thing to say you want unity; it's another thing to behave in a manner that encourages unity.

So I call on all in this House to stick to the issues, to respect each other. Madam Speaker, I also call on the Government to make sure they provide the Opposition with the resources necessary to do our job properly, just as is provided in the United Kingdom. No different. Madam Speaker, I'm calling on us as a people to treat our non-nationals, our visitors and others as equals, whether they have to pay the same at the hospital as we do, whether we have to make sure they have an opportunity to benefit in whatever way. This is the time, because without them, without unity of all of our people, Montserrat will not exist. And I know Honourable Buffonge is looking at me. I know what it's like when I get in my element. And I want to tell you this, that like never before, I am committed to serving the people of Montserrat to the best of my ability. I want to provide suggestions. I hope that they will be welcomed. I believe the other Members of the Opposition are sincere and want to work for the betterment of Montserrat. And I hope that all the appeals made are genuine. I will hold you to them, but I will do my job of holding you to account for the good of the people of Montserrat, as always, and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

8. ADDRESS BY A MEMBER OF THE YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Madam Speaker said:

I will now invite Ms. Mauricia Barzey to address this Honourable House.

Ms. Mauricia Barzey said:

Honourable Speaker, distinguished Members of Parliament, and to the people of Montserrat, a pleasant good morning to you all. It is an immense honour to stand here on the behalf of the Montserrat National Youth Parliament as we open the new parliamentary year. I am filled with optimism, hope, and a sense of responsibility that we, the youth, are Montserrat's future. Yet, we are not only the promise of tomorrow, but we are here actively shaping our community today. This is a moment called to action. We are part of a world undergoing rapid transformations with unsolicited challenges and boundless opportunities. In Montserrat, we have our own unique context, our size, our resilience in the face of natural disasters, and our enduring spirit that binds us as a people. But beyond our shores, we are also part of a global movement, one where we feel the urgency to address issues that will define our generation. Climate change, technological advancement, social equity, and the pursuit of sustainable growth.

Our generation is proud of its heritage, carry forward the legacy of resilience that defines Montserrat, remembering the strength which previous generations navigate in the reshaping of our island. We look to this Parliament to recognize the heritage in the decisions made here, to respect the past while innovating our future. Today's youth want to participate actively in our nation. We have ideas, energy, vision, and we need a platform where those voices are heard, welcomed, and valued. We ask that you consider ways to encourage youth engagement in legislative processes, empowering us with educational and mentorship opportunities that will develop our leadership. The promise of a thriving Montserrat rests on building a diverse, resilient economy that provides opportunity for all. And we, the youth, are eager to contribute to that future. Many of us are acquiring skills in technology, creative industries, agriculture, tourism, and entrepreneurship. And we urge Parliament to continue investing in sectors that will give us sustainable and meaningful work here at home, ensuring that we are not forced to leave to find opportunities elsewhere.

Madam Speaker, we look to this Parliament to invest in green initiatives that will not only protect our island's natural beauty, but also provide job opportunities and support a sustainable economy. Renewable energy,

climate-resilient infrastructure, and sustainable tourism are ways that we can work together to ensure Montserrat's future and enhance its appeal to visitors and investors. Our small island is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. We, the youth of Montserrat, are deeply concerned about our environment, and for this reason, we have sought funding from the Commonwealth and planted 681 trees over five planting days across Montserrat, while mobilizing 58 young persons to volunteer each day. We understand that our future depends on the decisions made today to protect and preserve our natural heritage, and we urge Parliament to prioritize environmental policies and green solutions that will safeguard our homes from the threat of climate change. Let us make Montserrat a beacon for climate resilience in the Caribbean, setting an example of responsible stewardship.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the age of technology, knowledge is power. We believe that access to quality education and skill training is fundamental in securing our future. As of this week, we have donated 350 books to the Brade's Primary and Nursery Schools as part of our first rollout collaboration with the Leaders Readers Network, and we urge Parliament to invest. Invest in educational programs that will prepare us for the demands of a modern world, programs that will encourage critical thinking, digital literacy, and practical skill development. We also see innovations as a path forward. We hope that Montserrat will invest in technology and infrastructure that will allow us to connect and compete globally. Let us open up our island's to ideas, innovations, and partnerships with neighbouring islands and global entities. We can call on Parliament to work on transparency and accountability, always putting the well-being of the people first. Because as young people, we envision a Montserrat where every citizen feels valued, included, and supported. We believe in an island where unity drives progress, where diversity strengthens us, and where everyone, regardless of background, has the right to thrive.

Honourable Speaker, distinguished Members, as we look ahead, we ask that you consider our voices as you liberate and make decisions. We pledge to do our part, to continue learning, to remain engaged, and actively contribute to our community. We are ready to work with you to build a Montserrat that honours its past, embraces its present, and builds a future that we all can be proud of. And as I close, I urge Parliament to let this parliamentary year be one of strength, unity, and progress for

Montserrat. Let us ensure that the promises of this very island are ones that we can live on for many generations to come. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that this Honourable House be adjourned.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

This Honourable House now stands adjourned sine die.

Assembly adjourned at approximately 11:10 a.m.

(Sgd) Judith Baker

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Dated this 21st day of January 2025

(Sgd) Marjorie Smith

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

