



MONTERRAT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

ORDER OF THE DAY

Meeting No. 8 of the 18th Parliament
Tuesday 24th June, 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room, Montserrat Cultural Centre, Little Bay

1. PRAYERS

2. OATHS

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Minutes No. 4 of the 18th Parliament, dated Monday, 07th April 2025.

Minutes No. 5 of the 18th Parliament, dated Tuesday, 08th April 2025.

4. PAPERS TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE

(a) Financial Secretary

(i) Schedule of Virement #1 of April - March 2024/2025;

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

(iii) Montserrat National Trust – Statement of Financial Position for Year Ended 31st March, 2024.

S R & O No. 25 of 2024

Customs Duties and
Consumption Tax (Si-

	mon's Rock in Montserrat Educational Foundation Inc.) (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 26 of 2024	Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Hurricane Risk Reduction and Resilience Drive) (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 29 of 2024	Consumption Tax (Greenaway Equipment LLC) (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 34 of 2024	Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Electric and Hybrid Vehicles) (Exemption and Reduction) Order;
S R & O No. 37 of 2024	Income and Corporation Tax (Individual) (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 38 of 2024	Tax Information Exchange (Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters) (Implementation) (Montserrat) (Amendment of Schedule) Order;
S R & O No. 39 of 2024	Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Alteration of Rate of Customs Duties and Consumption Tax) (Christmas Barrel) Order;
S R & O No. 40 of 2024	Customs Duties and Consumption Tax

	(Christmas Decorations) (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 13 of 2025	Work Permit (Exemption) Order;
S R & O No. 14 of 2025	Customs Duties (Coretta Fergus) (Exemption) Or- der;
S R & O No. 15 of 2025	Customs Duties (Leny Burns) (Exemption) Or- der;
S R & O No. 16 of 2025	Tax Information Ex- change (FATCA Agree- ment) (UK IGA) (Montser- rat) (Implementation) (Amendment) Regula- tions.

(b) Attorney General

S R & O No. 27 of 2024	Terrorism, Terrorist Fi- nancing, and Proliferation (Sanctions) Act, 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024;
S R & O No. 28 of 2024	Legislative Assembly (Powers, Privileges and Immunities) Act, 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024;
S R & O No. 32 of 2024	Prison (Amendment) Rules 2024;
S R & O No. 33 of 2024	Child Justice Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024;

S R & O No. 36 of 2024	Cemeteries Regulations 2024;
S R & O No. 41 of 2024	Proclamation Declaring Block 12 Parcel 1/170 to be a Prison;
S R & O No. 12 of 2025	Child Justice Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2025.

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 and First Reading of the Bill

(i) Public Procurement Bill 2025

(2) The Attorney General to move:

The Introduction and First Reading of the Bill:

(ii) Police (Amendment) Bill 2025

The Second and Third Reading of the Bill:

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

(3) Honourable Donaldson Romeo to move a Resolution:

‘Consideration of an increase in support to the income and salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants and other affected persons in the Public and Private Sector.’

10. OTHER BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

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MONTSERRAT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MEETING

Hansard No. 8 of the 18th Parliament
Held on Tuesday, 24th June, 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

1. PRAYERS

The prayer was led by the Honourable Veronica Dorsette-Hector.

2. OATHS

Ms. Fiona Meade takes the oath as Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. Alverna Weekes takes the oath as Acting Financial Secretary.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, if it pleases you, I beg to move a motion for the amendment of the Order Paper. Under motions, number nine, the Premier and Minister of Finance and Economic Management to move the Public Procurement Bill. It should read the first reading of the Public Procurement Bill 2025. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder? Recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Order Paper be amended to reflect the introduction and first reading of the Bill Public Procurement Bill 2025.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Order Paper will be amended accordingly.

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have someone to move the motion that the minutes be confirmed? I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to move the motion for the confirmation of the minutes.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder? Recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion moved by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, if we are all content for both sets of Minutes No. 4 dated Monday, 7th April 2005 (sic) and Minutes No. 5 dated Tuesday, 8th April 2025 to be confirmed as presented. It has been moved and seconded.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Minutes No. 4 and 5 dated 7th April and Tuesday, 8th April respectively have been duly confirmed.

4. PAPERS TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Financial Secretary (Ag).

The Financial Secretary Acting said:

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

- i. Schedule of Virement No. 1 of April to March 2024/2025;
- ii. Schedule of Virement No. 2 of April to March 2024/2025;
- iii. Montserrat National Trust Statement of Financial Position for year ended 31st March 2024;
- iv. SR&O No. 25 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Simon’s Rock in Montserrat Educational Foundation Inc.) (Exemption) Order;
- v. SR&O No. 26 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Hurricane Risk Reduction and Resilience Drive (Exemption) Order;
- vi. SR&O No. 29 of 2024 – Consumption Tax (Greenaway Equipment LLC (Exemption) Order;
- vii. SR&O No. 34 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Electric and Hybrid Vehicles) (Exemption and Reduction) Order;
- viii. SR&O No. 37 of 2024 – Income and Corporation Tax (Individual) (Exemption) Order;
- ix. SR&O No. 38 of 2024 – Tax Information Exchange Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Implementation Montserrat Amendment of Schedule Order;
- x. SR&O No. 39 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Alteration of Rates of Customs Duties and Consumption Tax-Christmas Barrel) Order;

- xi. SR&O No. 40 of 2024 – Customs Duties and Consumption Tax (Christmas Decorations) (Exemption) Order;
- xii. SR&O No. 13 of 2025 – Work Permit (Exemption) Order;
- xiii. SR&O No. 14 of 2025 – Customs Duties (Coretta Fergus) (Exemption) Order;
- xiv. SR&O No. 15 of 2025 – Customs Duties (Lenny Burns) (Exemption) Order; and
- xv. SR&O No. 16 of 2025 – Tax Information Exchange FATCA Agreement UKIGA Montserrat's Implementation Amendment Regulations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General said:

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

- i. SR&O No. 27 of 2024 – Terrorism Terrorist Financing and Proliferation Sanctions Act 2024 Commencement Order 2024;
- ii. SR&O No. 28 of 2024 – Legislative Assembly Powers, Privilege and Immunities Act 2024 Commencement Order 2024;
- iii. SR&O No. 32 of 2024 – Prison Amendment Rules 2024;
- iv. SR&O No. 33 of 2024 – Child Justice Act Commencement Order 2024;
- v. SR&O No. 36 of 2024 – Cemeteries Regulations 2024;
- vi. SR&O No. 41 of 2024 – Proclamation Declaring block 12 Parcel 1/170 to be a prison; and

- vii. SR&O No. 12 of 2025 – Child Justice Act 2024 Commencement Order 2025.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5. MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Health and Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Permission for a short Ministerial Statement, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker said:

I didn't get notice of that.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

It was sent this morning, Madam Speaker. It is short and brief and summarizes what we're doing in the Ministry for the benefit of the people of Montserrat, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay, I will allow it.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Very quick and very basic. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing this late submission of this Ministerial Statement. There have been extreme time pressures over the last few days. I must commend your work as Speaker and the work of Dr. Baker and your entire team for a very professional and well-led department.

In healthcare, Madam Speaker, we welcome the training of trainers in CPR this week, something long-awaited in health for years. With this effort, our CPR trainers could then train our local health workers in life-saving techniques. What this means is that we will achieve sustainability in providing training in basic and advanced life support to

nurses and doctors on island with regular updates to training and regular practice, and this has been missing over the past decades. I'm extremely excited that it's happening now. Sustainable training in really relevant aspects of emergency care. We welcome, of course, the arrival of the new ambulances with the training arranged with this package. Again, progress in emergency care. We still await, unfortunately, the details of an MoU with Guadeloupe, which is our closest and most capable neighbour, and just further encouragement to the Ministry of Health in terms of the importance of this MoU in ensuring that people on Montserrat can receive high-level care in time-critical situations in an area that's just right nearby in order to reduce mortality and morbidity when persons present with medical emergencies.

I welcome the creation of the role of the emergency medicine consultant for the hospital. The casualty will be renamed either the emergency department or some other more relevant department, so this emergency medicine consultant with years of experience and massive amounts of training in emergency care will man this department and will help with the working out of guidelines and protocols for the department, so that everything runs smoothly. When you present with your emergency, we shall have you.

I welcome the decision of the Ministry of Health to commence the peripheral vascular disease clinics on Montserrat, or circulation clinics, led by a vascular surgeon. So, funding has been found for this person to visit and to start the clinics, and I applaud the health promotion team who are planning an island-wide screening and awareness program in September, which is World Peripheral Vascular Disease Month, World Circulation Month. We intend to bring our amputation rate on this island down to zero, so well done to the Ministry of Health. I celebrate, as previously, the availability of Alteplase on Montserrat this year in February, a clock-busting medication useful in managing certain types of strokes and heart attacks and I massively congratulate the radiology team in operating a fantastic CT service, a very capable department that need further support. I congratulate the health transformation project for the essential progress in healthcare that has continued. I'd like to specifically congratulate the team for securing continued funding for health transformation and I must acknowledge our local Ministry of Finance, our Premier and FCDO

for recognising the importance of continuing support for the giant steps we have made in healthcare through health transformation.

I would like to thank the Honourable Premier for his wisdom in securing plans for dialysis for Montserrat. He has helped us to divert old EU funds for the hiring of dialysis nurses and dialysis technicians, and he has welcomed an application for equipment through the Small Capital Projects Fund route for finding equipment for this project. We still have a long way to go in terms of decision-making and planning, but we remain extremely hopeful.

I must acknowledge the presence of Dr. Del Riego on island. This is the PAHO WHO lead, who has been in Montserrat since yesterday, and has met with our Premier and other stakeholders. Amazing work is about to commence with collaboration with PAHO, and some of this will involve data collection, which will allow us to assess what we have on island more adequately, and a lot of this work will go towards health financing, that's been a promise for the past 10 plus years.

In Healthcare, I await progress in other areas. We need to push on with documenting health policy, addressing health law, we need more work on the cancer screening registry concept and the cancer registry and a study is about to be done in relation to this concept of cancer families on Montserrat and the high prevalence of cancer which hopefully will lead to really good screening programs so that we can find our cancers early so people do not have to die of cancer on this island or travelling overseas for care.

In Education, please note the large number of jobs on the Government of Montserrat website. Many of them support the special educational needs program, so special educational needs coordinators, speech and language therapists, and education psychologists. We await the arrival of an education project manager, a person who will help with the formulation of projects and will support increasing technical subjects in the schools, will help us to grow our special educational needs program, will support a project in digital transformation of education and will support teacher recruitment and retention programs.

Presently, in education, it is all hands on deck for the 8-week summer program we have planned. This has come out of the concept of child safeguarding with a huge effort to expose students to a variety of really uplifting activities from agriculture to technical subjects to sports, swimming, ocean science, informational technology, including gaming, art and craft, costume design, masquerade, calypso, and so much more. Some of the costumes being produced at this camp will be used at upcoming festivals. Madam Speaker, I thank the Cabinet for approving funding for this program, and a huge thank you to the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Montserrat Children's Society, the Museum, and DITES for agreeing to merge with our summer program to create a grand event that will really create an uplift in the student population.

In Social Services, we're still waiting, Madam Speaker, for paperwork regarding getting children on Montserrat, the same rights regardless of where they're from. At present, if you're a non-national child, you have to pay at the hospital, whereas if you're a Montserratian, you don't, and this creates a disparity, dividing us down socioeconomic lines. We do not want some mothers who have to decide on whether or not they need to buy medication or food one afternoon, as opposed to the Montserratian mothers just being able to get medication for free for their children. So, this is really important to us as a team, and this is coming soon. There's also some work that has to be done on the laws which govern how we support people. So, if you've lived on Montserrat for 20 years but you're not a Montserratian, and we consider you one of us, and you need to be medicated somewhere, according to the laws, we are unable to support you, so this must change. So that's it in a nutshell; lots more could have been said. Time is precious, Madam Speaker. I just want to thank the team and thank the teams at the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Social Services for their hard work and continued support to this party.

Oh, our Premier wants us to mention that in the summer program, we have a special team coming that is supporting training in special educational needs. So, they arrive on island shortly, and they will be assisting the teachers at some of our schools and teaching assistants in how to manage students with special educational needs. So, it's a big part of our summer program. The summer program facilitates the uplifting of students aged 5 to 16, and this will include a population of

students with special educational needs, and please let it be known that we intend to support all children with this program. Thank you.

6. GOVERNMENT NOTICES

7. UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

8. QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Questions to the Honourable Premier from Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My first question is to the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance.

- 1. With the significant increase in the cost of goods in recent years, can the Honourable Minister of Finance tell us how and when exactly can the people of Montserrat expect to see reductions in the duty charged on vehicles, car parts, food, medicine, clothes, building materials, cooking gas, white goods and other essential items?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want it to be noted that my responses have been circulated late, but circulated nonetheless. We do recognise that the cost of imported products will increase based on geopolitics and its impacts on our economy. I am absolutely certain, as the former Premier for Finance, the Honourable Member would understand the implications of reducing tariffs and the fact that such reductions would require the prior approval of the FCDO. We have a proposal for the reduction on import duties on

building materials given the importance of construction on the socio-economic impact on our people. Secondly, we all know that import charges are based on insurance and freight, including cost. We currently have a proposal before Cabinet for the reduction on the freight element by 50% in the computation of import charges for all goods. This in our estimation is better than selecting a few goods for tariff reductions and once we have determined the impact over the first fiscal year it will be reviewed for further consideration.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to hear that Honourable Premier. Just one thing, you missed telling us when can we expect these prices to actually be available to us, the reductions in the cost of goods, based on your proposals to the British Government and your own changes in Cabinet.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, since I cannot speak for the entire Cabinet, I can only say that the Paper is before Cabinet for consideration. It's also in discussions with the FCDO so we await the approval process. We're hoping, however, that we will be in a position to have it in place before the end of July.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My second question.

2. In addition to conducting flights on Tuesday and Friday mornings between St. Marten and Montserrat, Winair will also leave St. Marten at 3.30 p.m. to arrive on Montserrat one hour later at 4.30 p.m. on Sundays. Can the Honourable Minister for access, tell this Honourable House what the cost of the contract arrangements with Winair was before these additional flights on Tuesdays were added, and what is the additional cost to the contract now?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The agreement with Winair covers a schedule for both peak and off-peak months until the end of the financial year, that is 31st of March, 2026. The budget allocation agreed with Winair for a full year of twin otter operations is EC \$2.3 million. The service is being implemented in phases. We began with two days per week, and increasing in line with our agreed schedule of Fridays and Sundays. Furthermore, our agreement also makes provision for additional airlift during the peak periods, December and March, on the Antigua route, daily flights from St. Marten and daily flights then return to St. Marten. So, we'll do the Antigua, they'll come from St. Marten to Montserrat, Montserrat, Antigua, Montserrat, several flights per day. Then, when they've concluded that, at the end of the day, they do their flight returning to St. Marten. There is no additional cost associated with the expansion to include Tuesday flights, nor the peak period flights from Montserrat to Antigua return during the December and March peak period travel periods.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental please Madam Speaker.

Can the Honourable Premier provide us, maybe not now, but following this Assembly, with greater details on how this contract is worked out with Winair, as much details as possible. Can you do that?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, in a letter written to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I indicated that I have absolutely no problem sharing information with the Opposition and that we must schedule meetings where we can have full discussions on any matter which they wish to raise. So, at your next meeting, I will seek to have that available for you.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question.

3. Can the Honourable Premier tell this Honourable House why a Twin Otter with two pilots and a seating capacity of up to 19 passengers, costs US \$260 for a return flight between Montserrat and St. Marten, 124 miles away, while a 7-seater Islander with one pilot costing over US \$400 with one pilot on a 17-minute flight from Antigua to Montserrat just 36 miles away? Let me repeat that. Can the Honourable Premier tell this Honourable House why a Twin Otter with two pilots and a seating capacity of up to 19 passengers, costs US \$260 for a return flight between Montserrat and St. Marten, 124 miles away, while a 7-seater Islander was costing over US \$400 with one pilot on a 17-minute flight from Antigua to Montserrat just 36 miles away?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, significant differences in airline pricing can be attributed to various factors. Firstly, the St. Marten to Montserrat route is a new gateway with direct international connections for which an attractive initial price was set to encourage route maximisation and to stimulate demand. Prior to the introduction of the price cap, the Government of Montserrat was not involved in the pricing mechanisms which were used by the airlines. However, recognising the public outcry regarding the cost of air travel and the need to increase visitor arrivals to stimulate economic growth, the government, in collaboration with the FCDO, has now implemented a price cap on the Montserrat to Antigua route for the remainder of this financial year.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I'm not so sure how to... May I just give a supplemental, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, the Isles of Scilly, a British Dependent Territory, with 2,500 people, moves over 200,000 people, passengers a year, in and out. 2,500 population, 200,000 plus. The cost of travel by sea, they have sea and air access, is, I think, 75 pounds, and by air, just under EC\$500. Honourable Premier, will your government be satisfied with the present costing between Antigua and Montserrat, as you just suggested, or will you be pushing the British Government to reduce the airfare even more, so that local people can afford, many can't afford it now, and that more tourists and visitors will be encouraged to come to Montserrat if the price is a lot lower especially when the UK Government itself has said that without reducing these costs significantly and most business people in Montserrat and general public know without reducing that we will not grow out of dependency on the British Government. We will not grow. Will you not fight for a greater reduction than the present price that we have?

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Member, your question is not seeking clarification on the response that he gave. You are asking him something new: if he will make a presentation to the British Government. You realise that?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, with all due respect, his answer referred to the fact that he responded to the public pressure that we need to reduce the air-fare. So, I'm asking him whether he will not fight more, whether it's to the British or will he not fight more for a greater reduction. That's my question. That's what it's in line with.

Madam Speaker said:

I do understand what you're saying, but you know what the rules say.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam.

Madam Speaker said:

So, I will allow the supplementary, but I'm just alerting you that you keep in line. Thanks. I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, we need to understand the difference between the Overseas Territories and the UK's other territories, Guernsey, Jersey, etc, and their relationship with the British Government. We also have to think in terms of economies of scale. So, trips between the Isles of Scilly and the UK are domestic trips and therefore fit within domestic legislation. Trips between Antigua and Montserrat, unfortunately, are still considered international trips in spite of CARICOM and OECS claiming that we have an OECS and CARICOM single market and economy. And we have to continuously work within the CARICOM and OECS framework to ensure that the water that separates us does not divide us. So, therefore, we need to make sure that a trip from Antigua to Montserrat is considered a domestic trip, as is a trip from Antigua to Barbuda or from St. Vincent to the Grenadines. In this way,

we do not have to go through the IMO certifications, which are extremely expensive and which will require substantial investment. So, if we make it a domestic trip, we can reduce the cost of travel. I've made a statement both at CARICOM and virtually at the recently concluded OECS meeting that we have to move in that direction. If we're making the single market and economy work, there must be domestic space. So, travelling from Amsterdam to Brussels is a domestic trip. We need from Antigua to Montserrat to be a domestic trip, and that will then reduce the cost. Secondly, the tariff charge or the taxes charged by Antigua for this international trip for an airline is US\$40. So, that has to be included in the charge. If it's a domestic trip, we will then be in a position to reduce that charge and reduce the cost of both air and sea travel. Madam Speaker, there's also the consideration that every request has to be backed by data. And as we've indicated, a lot of the things which we're doing here are being done for a one-year period in the first instance, so that we can gather the data to make a sufficient case for the British Government. And we will be moving from the FCDO to the Treasury come 2026. So therefore, we need even more data to justify our case to the Treasury.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Further clarity, Madam Speaker, if you allow for further clarity on what he just said.

Madam Speaker said:

Let's hear it.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My question is, what does whether we are domestic or not have to do with the level of subsidy given, whether we are a dependent territory or not? What does that have to do with convincing Her Majesty's Government with providing more funds? Plus, Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Premier tell us, is there not enough evidence? I'm referring to what he just said, Madam Speaker. Is there not enough

evidence already in our hand that our economy is falling flat on its face? People can't afford to travel. Isn't there enough evidence over the past four years, and especially when the very Honourable Premier before us argued and won a cost for ferry that was \$300 for domestic travel? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I hope this is the last supplementary on this matter. I recognise that the Honourable Member is going down a particular route. But data is not just picked out of the sky. And yes, you will claim that there should be data from the past 10 years. We do not have that data readily available for the strategy which is being postulated. So therefore, over the next financial, over this financial year, we're seeking to gather the data to make justification for additional support as it relates to access.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

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

4. Can the Honourable Minister of Access tell this Honourable House how many Twin Otters and Islanders his government intends to have servicing Montserrat over the next eight months?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, can I presume that he is going to ask question 4 later on or he is not going to ask question 4?

Because one leads on to the other. Can I seek that clarification from him, please?

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Romeo, you missed a question.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I'll ask it afterwards.

The Premier said:

Okay. It leads into it. Madam Speaker, question 4 speaks to some \$3.28 million was allocated to Access for the year 2025 to 2026. That's a question which he has in question 4. And the reason why I'm doing that, Madam Speaker, is that question 4 has implications on the response for question 5.

Madam Speaker said:

But just a minute, Honourable...

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Point of Order.

Madam Speaker said:

What is your Point of Order?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, if you'll allow, I'll ask question 4 to help him proceed. Let me ask question four.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay. Let it flow smoothly. Thanks.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Okay. Some EC \$3.283,800 million was allotted to Access for the year 2025 to 2026. Can the Honourable Minister responsible for Access tell this Honourable House how much has been spent so far by giving a detailed breakdown, including how much was spent to subsidise each of the three airlines, SVG, FlyMontserrat and Winair, as well as the cargo vessel that carries our cargo to and from Antigua?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the Government of Montserrat, in close collaboration with the FCDO, is committed to enhancing access to the island. To date, of the sums allocated and ring-fenced to the Access Division, a total of EC \$600,000 has been spent. FlyMontserrat, \$223,000 for passenger travel support. That's a price cap. SVG, \$154,000 for passenger travel support, which is a price cap. And Winair, EC \$222,000 operational support. As it pertains to cargo, that vessel, we expect to pay EC \$60,000 for this quarter.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My next question, then, Madam Speaker.

5. Can the Honourable Minister of Access tell this Honourable House how many Twin Otters and Islanders his government intends to have servicing Montserrat over the next eight months?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the Government of Montserrat intends to optimise air service by utilising a mixed fleet over the next eight months. This strategy includes one Twin Otter servicing the St. Marten-to-Montserrat route via Winair, and also using that same aircraft to service the Montserrat-Antigua, Montserrat route. One Twin Otter regularly servicing the Montserrat-to-Antigua route via the SVG. In addition, an additional Twin Otter is expected to service this route during the peak period. Islander aircraft, two to three, servicing the Montserrat-to-Antigua route via Fly Montserrat and SVG. This comprehensive approach addresses historical challenges associated with relying solely on Islander aircraft, providing increased passenger capacity, enhanced reliability, and a foundation for economic development.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

The Honourable Premier basically answered the next question, but one section not, so I'll ask it.

6. Can the Honourable Minister confirm whether SVG will also be flying a Twin Otter in and out of Montserrat over the next eight months, and if so, what will its schedule be, and how much will a one-way and return ticket cost?

Madam Speaker said:

You didn't ask question 6, Honourable Romeo. Was that intentional?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Pardon me, Madam Speaker, again. It's a separate question, so he can answer the one I just asked.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay. I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, as previously outlined, SVG will indeed be operating Twin Otter services this year. The intention is to have a daily service. However, given the fire service capacity requirements for Twin Otter operations at the airport, introduction of the SVG Twin Otter has been delayed and could possibly be phased, commencing with a three-day service and only increasing to daily operation once the fire service requirements are met. We are still working through the details in collaboration with the fire service and can only announce the actual schedule once we have the clearance to do so. The base fare that costs before taxes and fees on these tickets will be US\$110 or EC\$299 on inbound flights and EC\$312 on outbound flights per single journey during the off-peak periods, and no higher than \$340 during the peak season. The airline taxes and fees will be added to these costs and will be announced when the Twin Otter flights are ready to come in.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. My next question.

7. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House how much of the cost of a passenger's ticket will be government subsidy and how much will be the direct cost to the passenger over the next eight months?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, accurately itemising government subsidy and direct passenger cost per ticket is complex due to varying operational structures, base fare, and costings of each airline. Each operator presents unique challenges in fare negotiation, preventing a uniform approach. Madam Speaker, despite these complexities, the Government of Mont-

serrat has successfully negotiated reasonable fares with both airlines on the Montserrat to Antigua route. On Fly Montserrat, the government is contributing \$258 to the cost of passenger tickets per single journey, up to the number of passengers agreed during the off-peak season. Government's peak period contribution will be \$274 and will be applied during the peak months during December 1st to March 31st, 2026, up to the agreed number of passengers. On SVG, the government applied a fare contribution of \$214 up to the agreed number of passengers. Therefore, the direct cost to passengers during the off-season return tickets are expected to range from \$630 to \$655, and that's return. During the peak periods, return tickets will be approximately \$705, with slight variations depending on the travel direction. And Madam Speaker, the reason for including depending on the travel direction, if you're going into Antigua, the taxes are higher and therefore there will be a marginal increase going into Antigua.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, it's a bit confusing, but I know the Honourable Premier will come to the public and explain in more detail how this works. However, Madam Speaker, there's just one question regarding his answer.

You said \$630 during off-peak and \$705 during peak. In addition to that, isn't there another \$200 if you plan to spend more than 24 hours in Antigua? So, if I wanted to go to Antigua to see the doctor and the doctor's appointment is for more than a day, I would be spending \$800 to \$900 plus to travel to Antigua and return. And Madam Speaker, I don't want to ask a question without presenting a solution. Madam Speaker, does the Honourable Premier remember that once the British Government actually paid the taxes, this extra \$200 when appealed to because of the burden to people in Montserrat travelling to Antigua for more than a day.

Madam Speaker said:

So, what is the question?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

The question is, will people be paying the extra \$200 tax on top of the \$630 to make it \$800 and \$705 to make it \$905? And is there not some way we can appeal to the British Government to pay the taxes as they did once before to ease the burden on the people of Montserrat who want to travel to Antigua for medical and other reasons that are important and necessary? And as we are part of OECS, you know, we want to work with our brothers too.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, domestic taxation is for the domestic government. The government of Antigua and Barbuda will charge whatever they wish to charge. I have had discussions with my colleague comrade in Antigua and I will continue to have those discussions with my colleague.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Next question, Madam Speaker.

8. Can the Honourable Minister of Finance tell this Honourable House what the government's short, medium and long-term plans are for access beyond the airline ticket subsidy?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, the current access initiatives are being implemented using a one-year feasibility strategic approach for the financial year.

This will provide critical data, identify successes and highlight lessons learned, which will form the foundation for longer-term access initiatives and strategies. Upon the conclusion of this financial year, the collected data will be utilized to formalize long-term plans and implement sustainable long-term contract or agreement.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, if I remember correctly, in 2015, based on a study done by Matt McDonald, I think, it was concluded that the airport was inadequate and would prevent growth for Montserrat. It was not adequate for allowing economic growth. It was economically choking. So, it was already established by auditors and also, I think, the study by McDonald, since 2015 or thereabouts, that the airport is inadequate. Therefore, I'm asking the Honourable Premier, isn't there somewhere in your long-term plans a need for a new airport? Also, let me just leave it at that.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, if memory serves me right, and my memory seems to be fading sometimes, but wasn't the Honourable Gentleman the Premier in 2015? And did he have long-term plans for air access? That's one. Don't press your mic so soon. Secondly, we have to solve some of our short-term problems. Get the data to justify any application for funding for the long-term access issues. Without the data, we will not have a hope of accessing those funds. Madam Speaker, if I can recall, in 2015, there were no Twin Otters. During the tenure of the Honourable Gentleman, there was no Twin Otter service into Montserrat. We have now brought in the Twin Otter service. We are gathering the data. We are seeking to optimise the use of the airport. This will then

generate, again, as I indicated, the additional data sets required to provide a justification for a business case for the long-term strategy.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplementary, Madam Speaker, for clarity and correction.

Madam Speaker said:

A supplementary again? Yes, he answered the question.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I need to clarify something because he made an error in something he said.

Madam Speaker said:

No, I have to refer to order number 27. Don't use your privilege to ask questions, to abuse the situation. Don't.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Sorry, Madam Speaker, that's not what I said. I want to clarify something. He made an error in his statement.

Madam Speaker said:

He made an error?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, correct.

Madam Speaker said:

So, which means you knew the answer?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

No, Madam Speaker, no. Just a slight error. I, too, may have made it. The public needs to know.

Madam Speaker said:

Let us hear it, please. Don't abuse your privilege.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, the McDonald's study was done before the airport was built. So, it was already decided or understood before the airport was built that it was inadequate. And, of course, I came and met no Twin Otters, and the Honourable Premier knows why and when we left; there was a move towards Twin Otters. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

The question, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I was clarifying certain facts.

Madam Speaker said:

Oh, you were clarifying?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, clarifying the facts that he made wrong. That's all.

Madam Speaker said:

Let's proceed, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you. Thank you.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, on a Point of Order.

Madam Speaker said:

Let me hear the Point of Order, please.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I just need a clarification of what he said. And I think I have a right to respond to what he intimated.

Madam Speaker said:

So, you're responding to it now?

The Premier said:

Yes.

Madam Speaker said:

Let's get this going.

The Premier said:

If the study was done prior to the Honourable Gentleman being the Premier, why did he not use that study to make the application for another airport? And how can you do a study indicating that something cannot work, when in fact the government of the day accepted it, and you came in and met it and did nothing about it?

Madam Speaker said:

Let us move on from here, please. Let us go to the next question. Thank you.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I would love to clarify that, but we'll leave that.

Madam Speaker said:

Let us move on.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you. Certainly, would love to, but we won't.

9. *Can the Honourable Premier tell this Honourable House whether the Access Division will be issuing a tender for ferry services? If so, when? If not, why not?*

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, there are no immediate plans to issue a tender for a ferry service. Upon assuming office, we found no ferry service in place and explored arrangements for Montserrat to benefit from regional private sector ferry services. Recognising the complexities, such as SOLAS requirements to operate in Montserrat's waters, the Government of Montserrat has prioritised solidifying air travel, maximising the full potential of the John A. Osborne Airport, which offers substantial developmental benefits. While I acknowledge the public's desire for a ferry service, and we remain committed to its possibilities, it will require time to formalise the optimal path forward. The goal is to balance cost with the island's needs to ensure that any future ferry service supports long-term economic development.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

As a supplement, Madam Speaker, I can't help but ask the Honourable Premier....

Madam Speaker said:

Let me hear which aspect of it you don't understand.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes. No, no, no. I'm asking a supplement, Madam Speaker. Sorry. Madam Speaker, I have to ask the Honourable Premier.

As an experienced Premier, did he not know all of what he just said prior to coming into office and as soon as he came into office, didn't he know those facts that he just stated?

Madam Speaker said:

Let us move on to question 10, please. In other words, I'm not allowing the supplementary. I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My next question to the Honourable Premier.

10. The person holding the office of Premier during the period 2009 to 2014 made an appeal to the United Nations to have Montserrat removed from the list of territories to be decolonised. As leader of government business, can the Honourable Premier tell us if he intends to make a similar request again, or whether he intends to work with the United Nations Decolonisation Committee in a different way this time around?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Clearly, Madam Speaker, the Honourable gentleman does not understand strategies in negotiations. There was never a formal representation to the UN for Montserrat to be removed from the list of countries to be decolonised. Let me repeat that, Madam Speaker. There was never a formal representation to the UN for Montserrat to be removed from the list of countries to be decolonised. And Madam Speaker, I happen to have been the Chief Minister at that time that he's referring to.

The position taken at the CANTO meeting was a simple one. The committee cannot and will not tell the people of Montserrat when they should be removed from the list. That decision falls fully within the

remit of the people of Montserrat to do so. We, the people of this country, will determine when the time is right for us to move to independence or not. No UN Decolonisation Committee will make that determination for us. In order for a Territory to be removed from the decolonization, from the UN decolonisation list, certain protocols must be followed beyond a simple statement at a regional meeting. And I reiterate, Montserrat never submitted any such formal letters to the United Nations.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, a supplemental. Madam Speaker. My question did not ask whether they made a formal appeal or state that he made a formal appeal, made a formal request. It says made an appeal, so let us leave it as that, and therefore, I'll leave the rest for another time.

Madam Speaker said:

What is the question? What is the supplementary?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Clarity, just clarifying

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, I was clarifying my question. My question did not state that he made a formal request. The question said he made an appeal.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay, let's move on. You did say supplementary, so you confused us.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I know that. I know that. My next question.

11.Members of the legislature were all consulted to determine the scope and design of the new Parliament building, which was being funded by the UK Government. The Opposition made a strong case for having proper office space and adequate equipment to carry out the work of the Opposition Members. Can the Honourable Premier tell this Honourable House what aspects of the needs of the Opposition will be incorporated into the project to upgrade and refurbish the Montserrat Cultural Centre? Can the Honourable Premier tell this Honourable House what aspects of the needs of the Opposition will be incorporated into the project to upgrade and refurbish the Montserrat Cultural Centre?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, it was my understanding, and it still is my understanding, that the Office of the Opposition were adequately housed and had the requisite equipment. In my meeting with the Opposition team at the Office of the Premier, this matter never came up, nor am I aware of any submission to this effect. I do recognise that the Opposition has requested an additional amount of \$100,000 over the \$75,000 which was provided in the Appropriation Act, for which the Honourable Romeo thanked the FCDO. The request for the additional sum of \$100,000 has not been made with a proper business case, as is the requirement for all Ministries and Departments when requesting additional sums. This also applies in equal measure to the Opposition Office.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, I will leave that to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I will not dare touch that one. My next question, Madam Speaker. Boy, oh boy. Well, well, well. I tell you.

12. During the Honourable Premier's 2025 Budget presentation and debates last month, the Assembly and the public were informed for the first time that funds provided by the UK Government to build a new Parliament building will no longer be used for the purpose but to refurbish the Montserrat Cultural Centre. Can the Honourable Minister of Finance tell this Honourable House whether that decision was taken after discussion or in agreement with the entire legislature, or was it taken by the Honourable Premier on his own or by the majority of the Members on his side? And if so, why wasn't the entire legislature consulted?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I was not aware that as Minister for Finance, I needed to discuss reallocation of funds with the Legislative Assembly prior to it being discussed with the FCDO and Cabinet. Secondly, these are not decisions which can be taken by the Premier nor the Minister for Finance on his own. I don't know how you did it in your time, but this Minister of Finance will not make those decisions on my own. There must be internal consultations followed by FCDO consultation prior to a Cabinet decision, prior to taking it back to the Legislative Assembly.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pardon me. We were under the impression that the one Montserrat call would require some consultation, so clearly that is not so. But I think when we meet next time, we will discuss that. However, my supplemental is this.

Did you present a proper and full business case to the UK Government for moving from building the Parliament building to refurbishing the Cultural Centre?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I can assure the Honourable Gentleman that the requisite procedures were followed by the Ministry of Finance in dealing with such allocations.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for BUILT from Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question is for the Honourable Minister of Buildings, Utilities, Infrastructure and Transportation.

1. Can the Honourable Minister for BUILT tell this Honourable House whether there has been any progress with getting the hot mix plant operational, and if not, when will it be operational?

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Honourable Romeo.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to confirm that the hot mix plant is fully operational. While the public may have noticed a delay in roadworks, this has been primarily due to the aftermath of an intense and unanticipated storm, which brought 7.1 inches of rainfall to Montserrat. The resulting impact on our roads, drainage systems and bridges may not have been catastrophic, but nevertheless it was significant. As a result, Public Works Department resources were redirected to address critical clean-up efforts across the road and drainage network. It is important to note or to highlight that the same PWD team responsible for clean up and remedial works is also tasked with roadworks to include the placing of asphalt. Additionally, during a routine inspection of the road paver, two hydraulic seals were found to be faulty and required replacement. This also created some delay. Our Ministry reached out to the suppliers of the seals, Interrex in the United Kingdom, but were informed that the seals were not a standalone purchase item and that we would need to purchase the entire hydraulic cylinder unit. This was advanced administratively given the urgency. On the morning of June 23, 2025, our Ministry made contact with Interrex, and we were advised that the two hydraulic cylinder units that were purchased would be shipped via FedEx the same day, with an expected arrival date to Montserrat by the end of June 2025. We anticipate road repair activities will begin once the arrival of the parts and the installation into the paver have been completed. I am eager to get the work started, given the wear and tear on vehicles, risk to pedestrians, and government's overall thrust to build a better Montserrat in line with our five-star premium destination ambition. We urge persons, however, to desist from littering with cut vegetation which are going into our drainage system and blocking the drains. We appreciate the public's patience and understanding as we work to restore and improve the island's infrastructure in the wake of the recent flash flood impact and our ambitions as well to build a better Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My next question.

- 2. Can the Honourable Minister for Built tell this Honourable House if there has been any change in design for the seaport over the past six to nine months, and if so, exactly what and why?**

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. There has been no change to the design of the Montserrat Port Development Project over the last six to nine months. With this being a design-build contract, the contractor's design subcontract is the world-renowned marine design company WSP based in Texas, USA. It is a large multinational engineering and design firm and is a subsidiary of WSP Global. This company provides strategic consulting, planning, engineering and construction, as well as energy and community planning. Any changes to the design have to be authorised by the project's engineering consultants, Stantec, who have responsibility for setting the design criteria and ensuring that the design criteria are achieved by the contractor, who is Meridian. There has been a request by the contractor Meridian to move the roro ramp five meters outwards to avoid the possibility of dredging rocks. This change has not been authorised by the engineer Stantec. The contractor Meridian must provide all the relevant information, including the material test results and quantities of the rocks, before any authorisation can be considered.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My next question, Madam Speaker.

- 3. In keeping with your previous promise that updates regarding the Little Bay Port project will be provided as soon as it is appropriate, while respecting the confidentiality required for key consultation matters. Can the Honourable Minister for BUILT up-**

date this House on the estimated date for the completion of the Little Bay Seaport project?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Romeo, thank you so very much for this question. At this time, unfortunately a new completion date has not yet been determined as discussions and negotiations are still ongoing with all key stakeholders, namely the Caribbean Development Bank, CDB, UKCIF, that is United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Fund officials, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office FCDO, Stantec, the Government of Montserrat and the contractor, Meridian. All stakeholders remain firmly committed to the successful delivery of the Montserrat Port Development Project and continue to recognise its strategic importance to this island's long-term development. The way forward is currently under active discussion at these highest levels.

A dedicated task force and team of technical experts have been appointed and are meeting daily to navigate the challenges and determine a viable path ahead with shared goal of reaching a resolution as soon as possible. We recognise that as a people we have long waited the advancement of the development of the port at Little Bay and we are eager to move this critical infrastructure forward.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question.

- 4. In St. Peter's a constituent had his house flooded due to inadequate drainage and other factors outside of his control. Similar flooding for similar reasons has happened before to the individual. Can the Honourable Minister for BUILT tell this Honourable***

House what her ministry has done to assist that constituent and what her ministry will do to prevent a repeat of the same?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Several residents have written to the Ministry of BUILT to report damages to their homes and properties following the recent flooding. Although I was out of the country during the event, I sincerely want to express heartfelt empathy for the extent of the damage experienced, as we know it is exceedingly increasingly linked to the effects of climate change. It must be noted that a technical team appointed by the government will be preparing a report to evaluate the storm social impact which will need to be carefully considered.

At this time, I am unable to confirm what specific assistance may be provided beyond the rehabilitation of public infrastructure. However, we at BUILT have undertaken a rapid assessment of the damages, which is currently being discussed and at this point is estimated to be in the region of \$720,000. Extensive improvements to the infrastructure to mitigate against continued damage are estimated at \$9,850,000.

It is important to acknowledge the widespread and growing impact of climate change around the world, and we ourselves are experiencing its adverse effects. As government and individuals, we may need to seriously consider personal mitigation measures, including securing insurance coverage and drainage in and around our properties. This may require a review also for building codes.

While broader drainage solutions are being developed and reviewed, we must recognise that Montserrat is not immune to such climate related devastation. The visible damage caused by just four hours of sustained rainfall, 7.1 inches in total, was both alarming and deeply sobering. We must be prepared and stay prepared for it only takes one event as we are admonished by the Disaster Management and Coordinating Agency DMCA.

I sincerely extend thanks to the Public Works Department, the private sector, the Defence Force and everyone else who played a part in the clean up efforts. Your commitment and hard work have been invaluable and deeply appreciated.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I had problems sending a WhatsApp message which I just sent to you, Honourable Dorsette and most other members of the drainage problem just 100 feet from the gentleman's house. Madam Speaker, I must ask the Honourable Minister whether she will take the time to go to this gentleman's house and it's off the Sheep End Road. She will find it. He has spent several thousand dollars now trying to protect his property but not more than 100 feet from his house is a drain that is obviously inadequate. I sent the pictures just now. The opening has about a two-foot diameter and the funnel leading to the opening is about eight feet wide or about five feet high. Imagine a funnel leading to a two-foot diameter. So, Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister take the time to go and visit this gentleman, take her technical people quickly to see the damage and take her crew to see the damage done and the causes for it and act swiftly to address the problem because it will reoccur should we have any more serious rains.

Madam Speaker said:

So, you're making a recommendation to her?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I'm asking her whether she will go and visit and take a look.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of BUILT.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I will go and visit the person, and I will take the technical team along with me which I believe would have already visited, but I have no difficulty in doing so. I recognise the village Minister as well.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Questions to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment from Honourable Donaldson Romeo

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Honourable Minister and thank you for answering. My question to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Land, Housing and Environment and Sports.

- 1. Can the Honourable Minister of Agriculture tell this Honourable House how exactly the recent heavy rain and flooding has affected farmers and what has his ministry done to assist farmers who have suffered significant losses?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker if you don't mind, I'll also clarify some additional stuff to this answer. The recent heavy rains have affected farmers with banana and plantain trees but I also wanted to just state that as of this morning we recently got some new submissions as well with other persons who were affected but they weren't included in this answer just because it was this morning. But what we really saw was most being affected due to landslides. The major damage was seen on farm roads in the Blakes area and some in the Duck Pond area as well. So far Madam Speaker the ministry has repaired the entire lower Blakes Road and drains. The repair works will proceed to the upper Blakes area and then to Duck Pond over the coming weeks. Additionally, Madam Speaker affected farmers have

received some assistance with inputs and inputs are like fertilizers and seeds and that's the aid in the rapid regrowth to the affected crops
Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

My next question to the same Minister.

2. Can the Honourable Minister of Sports tell this Honourable House what the status of the lighting that was procured for the playing fields in Little Bay and Salem is?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Sports.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

So, Madam Speaker and I hope the Honourable Deputy Premier and the Minister responsible for MUL doesn't mind me answering this question. But the Montserrat Utilities Limited has indicated that the lights, poles and ducting are on island but are awaiting breakers and switches which were shipped approximately two months ago, Madam Speaker. Upon delivery of all components the MUL will proceed with the installation of the lights. However, Madam Speaker, it must be noted that the original intent was to place five lights at Little Bay and three lights at Salem. It was further determined that the lights procured are for recreational use and not professional use and I think this has to do with the amount of lighting that they emit. Against that explanation Madam Speaker, considerations are ongoing for all eight lights to be placed at Little Bay ensuring adequate lighting for the hosting of cricket matches or other events during the night. Therefore, Madam Speaker if this proposal is agreed it will mean that supplemental funds must be secured for the installation of lights at Salem.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker a supplemental please Madam Speaker.

Honourable Minister I just it just dawned on me that the football field in Lookout the mini football field and mini football field in Salem are they included in any of this?

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me, Honourable Romeo, you didn't ask about the football fields, you asked about playing fields in Salem and Little Bay.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

For playing fields, he said, for playing fields in Salem and Little Bay. So, I'm asking him whether...

Madam Speaker said:

So, Blake's does not come into it.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Not Blake's, I'm not referring to Blake's, the Lookout small mini field, okay, whether in some way there's some consideration for those two small mini football fields?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Sports, sorry.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I still don't mind answering. I'll keep the answer short. The football fields that the Honourable Gentleman alluded to they will be dealt with by the MFA.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker and just to let the Minister know somebody provided me with some lights that I will share with him. A donation of lights some time back I will share with him. You know I'll discuss it with him after. My next question.

- 3. Can the Honourable Minister of Housing tell this Honourable House what proposals, if any, have been put to the UK Government to assist persons? (a) Persons who have been waiting over 28 years for permanent hurricane worthy housing. (b) the rebuilding and renovation of temporary and faulty houses built in Lookout and Davy Hill and if so what response has there been? (c) with building new homes for evacuees who have been waiting for over 28 years for permanent hurricane worthy houses and if so, what the response has been? Let me repeat it. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what proposals if any have been put to the UK Government to assist persons (a) who have been waiting for over 28 years for permanent hurricane resistant housing? (b) with the rebuilding and renovation of temporary and faulty houses in Lookout, Davy Hill and if so, what the response has been? (c) with building new homes for evacuees who have been waiting for over 28 years for permanent hurricane resistant worthy houses and if so, what the response has been?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister for Housing.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker this question was posed to the Honourable Crenston Buffonge in June of 2022 so I'm sure he will support me in my response here. Madam Speaker, I'll take questions 3 (a) and 3 (c) together as they are similar in nature and can be answered in one. Madam Speaker the Ministry has continuously made representation to the United Kingdom Government through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office known as the FCDO for assistance for housing development. This has been done through the financial aid mission which is now known as the budgetary sup-

port mission and this was conducted earlier this year Madam Speaker. The Ministry was very clear and specific in its presentation which added a theme, physical development and housing. The presentation identified the current situation as it relates to the housing need on Montserrat and was captured under four broad areas. Those namely are housing placements which include homeless and displaced persons, housing for the vulnerable overcrowded homes and new start family demand; Number two, Madam Speaker, infrastructure and land need for new build; Number three, grants and this program assists persons with unfinished homes, homes in disrepair and equity needed to gain mortgages; Number four, Madam Speaker, the maintenance need and is specifically geared to the Government of Montserrat housing stock.

Now 3 (b), Madam Speaker. Funding for housing development from the FCDO on Montserrat was based on two consultancies. Specifically, a review of the social housing management framework and the development of new social housing designs. It is out of these consultancies that the framework for new housing development has been developed. 1.3 million was approved for corrective maintenance to the priority housing units within the government housing stock, and Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to say that this project is now completed. The project has provided a necessary boost of economic activity on the island and, more importantly, it has provided the minimum decent housing standards which the Government of Montserrat is obligated to provide and will also minimise the high level of risk and liability created by poor or non-existent housing. This will ensure the health and safety of all vulnerable persons. Approximately 31 housing units were rehabilitated in the Lookout area, Madam Speaker.

Additionally, 1.5 million was approved for the development of phase one of the Drummonds social housing development, and I'm sure you've seen some of the work that we've actually started there. Thank you, Honourable Buffonge, as well, and this will see that you will see the development and infrastructure and the construction of the new housing units, Madam Speaker. Work is currently on the way, and we're doing grading and installation of infrastructure, and infrastructure means things like the drainage, electricity, etc., and then the housing construction will then follow.

Madam Speaker, let me reiterate that obtaining financing for housing development is a continuous work in progress for this government administration, and that is why I alluded to the fact that the Honourable Member would have asked Honourable Buffonge that question before, because I'm not the first Minister, Madam Speaker, to have started this. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

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

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question is for the Honourable Minister of Education, Health and Social Services.

- 1. In an arrangement with the NHS, that's the National Health Service of the UK Government, 10 patients on Montserrat with serious illnesses can receive priority medical treatment in the UK each year. Considering the number of patients on island needing such assistance, can the Honourable Minister of Health tell this Honourable House how many patients for the year have been identified or applied for such medical care and how many more are there who are in need of medical care overseas?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Romeo is being a true tyrant in Parliament this morning. I question what Parliament would be in Montserrat without Honourable Romeo. Thank you for the question. So, I've divided my response into the response from the Ministry at large and then some additional input from myself. So, the response from the Ministry is as follows. One patient has been referred for the

year and is receiving care under the UK quota system, and an application was recently received for another patient, and this is being processed. This is what I've been told.

My response to this problem in health, Madam Speaker, is to congratulate the Ministry of Health on their discussions, which resulted in an increase in the number of patients we send out on the quota system from 4 to 10 patients, which is excellent. This number, in my view, is still inadequate as there is a high demand for the quota system. I know of two persons right now who are trying to get to the UK and do not have funding for the process or a route other than the quota referral route. The reality of this debate, however, involves the awareness that the United Kingdom funds healthcare on Montserrat, and millions of pounds are spent every year, and in particular, millions of pounds have been spent fairly recently on health transformation, which has brought us CT mammography, electronic medical records, emergency-ready district clinics to the provision of ECG machines and crash carts, and this took millions, and will require millions to maintain. The taxes that we pay on Montserrat filter indirectly to support some of health's recurrent budget, and do not filter back to the UK to cover NHS contributions. The UK taxpayers pay their tax monies that help to cover the cost of care on the NHS, and the NHS, in reality, Madam Speaker, is a health service that is even more financially strapped than ours, and struggling with an ever-growing patient population through migration to the UK, and the reality that the provision of good healthcare results in people living longer, therefore, they're still present and needing care.

Comparisons are interesting. So, I recently visited Guernsey, that's last week, as an election observer for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. As the Honourable Premier mentioned earlier, Guernsey is a Crown-dependent of the UK, so there's self-governing territory, and as a result, they are able to be in charge of their own affairs, specifically because of progress they've made in the financial services sector over the last 40 years, and as a result of this self-sufficiency, we can imagine that care would be better. In Guernsey, individuals pay for initial hospital visits, and for doctor's visits, and for the ambulance, but after the initial contact, follow-up care is free. But for patients who require major interventions, such as coronary artery stenting, or bypass grafting, or management of certain intracerebral

bleeds, or major trauma requiring a high-level facility, are transferred to the UK, which is one hour away, without restrictions, or night flying, where they receive care on the NHS without a quota system, but the cost of care in the UK, and the cost of the medical evacuation, is covered by the Government of Guernsey. So, this, Madam Speaker, I believe, may be about money. We're trying to get our patients into a system to which we do not contribute in any way, and perhaps the government needs to think about this. So, the real question is, is the Government of Montserrat ready to adequately financially contribute to the transfer of non-time-critical patients, but patients requiring less urgent, but essential care, with high-cost investigations and treatment? So, are we willing to cover that cost in another country? Our treatment may be perhaps we are unable to figure out how to contribute, and that perhaps we are stretching this dependency too far. The days of Honourable Romeo remarking about how we are British. Being British means nothing if we are unable to contribute financially to a cash-strapped NHS. There are other aspects of support of our quota and non-quota patients who travel to the UK, which are very adequately addressed in the questions that Honourable Romeo has ahead, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Supplemental, please, Madam Speaker.

Honourable Dr. Buffonge, are you saying that in the absence of having funds, of our own, to get people to medical care quickly, whether critical or getting there, in the absence of the UK Government facilitating those who go to the UK or greater numbers going to the UK, that people may suffer, their health can get worse and that we can have deaths as a result of that lack of funding?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. To Honourable Romeo, Madam Speaker, what I'm trying to explain is that health care costs money, and we're trying to get in on a system that's already struggling. Apart from the quota system which is limited so they allow us 10 patients per year which I agree is limited and it's unfortunate and I would prefer if we could all just go on a quota system when our time came but my comments were mainly for Romeo and for ourselves to examine the possibility that this is actually a financial issue, that we get lots of money from the UK for health care and that perhaps we need to figure out some arrangement other than what we have so far in order to get more people to access direct referrals to specialists in the UK which is what the quota system is about. There are other ways in which persons can go to the UK. So, all Montserratians, if you hold a Montserrat passport as a Montserratian or if you hold a UK passport as a Montserratian or a new Montserratian, you're able to move to the United Kingdom. When you have moved to the United Kingdom, you do qualify to access care.

Unfortunately, this is a challenge; it is a financial challenge. If persons are engaged in permanent employment on Montserrat it is a big deal to say you're going to leave your job, leave your family and move to the UK to access care and I think the questions that Honourable Romeo is going to bring a little further down on this list address the challenges of patients who try to go that route because it requires that you have assistance on the other end from your family or friends that is ongoing and it requires that you have some availability of funds to get to the UK in the first place.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question, Madam Speaker.

- 2. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House whether patients who are selected by the Government of Montserrat for priority medical treatment in the UK are given assistance from the UK or Montserrat governments with the cost of travel of ac-***

commodation, food and other basic needs while in the United Kingdom?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, separating the direct response from the Ministry from my own response as Minister. The response from the Ministry is that the referral discussion that occurs with the client involves discussions on financial support and accommodation while in the UK and that once persons provide the assurance that they will be supported in the UK the Department of Social Services confirms with family members abroad and they can assist financially with the cost of the airfare in some cases to the UK. Recipients of social welfare who travel to the UK are provided with three months of funding of benefits, and a round-trip ticket is provided to all clients who are selected for priority medical treatment. My response, Madam Speaker, is a bit broader.

My approach would be to highlight the reality of life on Montserrat and in the UK. The reality that the average person who has a job barely has income that covers their needs and their family's needs, and very often persons here and in the UK have very little disposable income. The question, Madam Speaker, highlights the disparity along socioeconomic lines. Persons who can afford to support themselves in the UK or have families who can or are able to access free care on the NHS arranged by the government without financial contribution. Sorry, persons who can afford to support themselves in the UK who have families who can, are therefore able to just get a ticket provided by the Social Services Department and get to the UK or fund themselves in going to the UK, but this is, in many cases, not adequate. The have-nots, Madam Speaker who cannot go on the quota system struggle. The have-nots so those who cannot afford those who cannot who do not qualify to get on to the quota system because for the quota system the Ministry of Health has excluded certain conditions. So, if you cannot if you do not fit in to what is acceptable for a quota referral and you're trying to go on your own, if you're a poor person and your family in the UK is poor it will be a huge challenge for you whereas if

you are a person who is wealthy or you can afford you have a little bit more disposable income and your family in the UK can, then it's easier for you to get there. So not adequately funding a program that allows our patients to get to the UK divides patients down challenging socio-economic lines and as you quite rightly say affects ability of persons to access care. Very often persons who get to the UK with just a plane ticket provided by the Social Services Department with the understanding that they're staying with relatives, in many cases they begin to feel unwelcome when they realize the true economic situation that they have landed in. Many of them are staying in uncomfortable situations with as much support as families can provide which is often very little. Some run the risk which is a real risk of ending up without a roof over their heads and without adequate food.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Honourable Minister, thank you for your answer but I need to be sure I understand.

Are you saying that this quota of 10 applies to people, only those who could afford or have family on the other end? Hold on. Please if you have family on the other end to provide accommodation and assist you after three months some help given locally but those who don't have any family or their family don't have the whereabouts to support them, are you saying that some can go and some can't go depending on whether they can afford or not and if so how then can there be a system arranged by the UK Government and Government of Montserrat that provides for medical care for sick people in the first place when there's not provision for the other basic needs while being treated? I know I'm asking the same thing but I want to be sure I understand what you're saying.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Romeo. A referral on the quota system provides you with direct referral to a specialist but this does not come with funding and attention to accommodation because there is the expectation that in order to qualify to go on the quota system that you have an address abroad to go to with family to assist with your financial support. Persons who manage to go on the quota system who have an address abroad that they can go to if they are on social welfare they're given three months of benefits but after the three months what happens then. Patients who live on Montserrat who qualify for the quota system but who have nobody abroad who can accept them cannot go via the quota system because it only provides you to access direct referral to a specialist with free care on the NHS for that particular problem that you've gone for. Therefore, yes there is a disparity where the have-nots will find it challenging to receive care in the UK. There are certain conditions that are not necessarily welcome on the quota system which I personally have felt that they should. For example, a person who has very disabling arthritis in multiple joints who could benefit from joint replacement that's not on the list for the quota system. Therefore, if a person wants to travel to the UK to have this addressed that person must move to the UK. If you're moving to the UK, you are initially reliant on your family support in terms of accommodation and food. If you are unable to afford your ticket to get to the UK there are multiple cases where the Ministry of Health and Social Services has paid for the ticket for you to get to the UK. If you're on social welfare this comes with three months of benefits. If you're not on social welfare it just comes with a ticket to you to the UK and the problem arises when these patients get to the UK to live which is what you have to do if you're not on the quota system when they get to the UK many of them find themselves in not comfortable circumstances when they therefore are on their own in an appeal to try to receive social funding which I think your next question addresses that issue and I think my response in detail in terms of the real question is, what attempts are made by our government to facilitate persons who cannot afford life in the UK getting some social assistance when they're in the UK or if they start off in a situation which they perceive as okay but then they fall out with the family or there's really not enough going on in terms of support from the family, what assistance does our government give in assisting that person if it's a non quota person assisting that person in integrating into UK society and receiving social support if it's necessary, what are we doing for

those persons and there's also the question of nationality which I think I answered in your question below. If you're a Montserratian with a Montserrat passport or a UK passport, do you want me to wait for your question? Okay.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. My next question which is different but similar. First question asked about those on the quota, this one is different.

3. Can the Honourable Minister of Health tell this Honourable House whether patients who travel to the UK for medical treatment of their own volition but on the Government of Montserrat's advice or support with an airline ticket outside of the quota of 10 patients on the UK Montserrat and NHS scheme are given any assistance from the UK or Montserrat government with the cost of travel of accommodation, food and other basic needs while in the United Kingdom?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, the ministry's response, which is as long as there is a medical referral discussion with the client regarding matters such as financial support and accommodation while in the UK, is included, so it is discussed. Persons will have to provide the assurance that they will be supported in the UK by family, the Department of Social Services will confirm with family members about this support and about accommodation, recipients on social welfare, as we said previously, received three months of benefits. The client is means-tested and, depending on the outcome, they may receive a round ticket. The ministry proceeds with caution because there are any number of cases where they have assisted persons to go to the UK

without anything else so they bought a plane tickets and they were unable to afford extending the financial arm of social services into the UK, nothing for patients who are not on social welfare, three months for patients who are on social welfare but when these patients are on the verge of homelessness the letters come back to the CMO to say why have you sent this patient. So, they are willing to help, but they proceed with caution.

My response to the question as Minister or as Ingrid Buffonge, persons who fall outside of the ministry's predetermined guidelines for the quota system approach the ministry for assistance with travel to the UK, so this is not the ministry referring the patient to the UK. The Ministry of Health does not assume the responsibility for the referral process but sees itself as helping to cover the cost of travel for the care of the patient once the care of the patient has been sorted by the family members who can figure out how to get the person on the NHS or once the clinical persons helping outside of the ministry have figured out how to get them on. So, you've got coronary artery disease, you've got family in the UK, if you stay in Montserrat, you're gonna have a heart attack and die. Please go to the UK to your family, the clinician tells the patient. You've got to go. If the family can afford to have you, you can go. The Ministry of Health does not see itself as facilitating a referral but simply helping you with the cost of your ticket, which I think is something, but obviously, more needs to be done. It is unfortunate that the persons who have to go who are on social welfare receive no more than three months of support and it is unfortunate that patients must attempt their own referral for assistance in the UK when they have and have to have proof of moving to the UK and go through a struggle to get on to social welfare to receive social assistance in the UK. As I was saying earlier the end of that question it is even more unfortunate if a non-national who has received a Montserrat passport but does not yet have a British passport has to move to the UK because they need care that patient cannot benefit from social welfare assistance in the UK. So, if you're from Jamaica or Guyana and you've been in Montserrat for the past 20 years and you've gotten a Montserrat passport but you don't yet have the UK passport, when you get to the UK you do not qualify for assistance from their social welfare department which is extremely unfortunate. For me, Madam Speaker this has been a new and harsh reality because I didn't even understand this concept some months ago. This disparity for if you

don't have a UK passport if you're if you have a Montserrat passport you are now Montserratian but you don't have a UK passport that does not allow you to receive social funds in the UK. For me Madam Speaker this has been a new and harsh reality that affects our local persons who were born elsewhere, it stops them from integrating into you UK society for necessary health care. It is a very grey and uncomfortable area that affects persons who have lived on perhaps for decades but because of love for our country and in some cases for the fear of being seen as a passport seeker have not bothered to obtain a UK passport but they no longer have ties in their country of origin so 25 years later you're sending me back to Jamaica to go and receive care and stay with my relatives, I have cut off ties I am now Montserratian. I have not received a UK passport because I love it here and I need you to know that I love it here, I'm not a passport seeker. I thank the Honourable Romeo for as usual highlighting this aspect of the medical care journey of patients on our island and more discussion is obviously needed on UK referrals and in figuring out how to best support our patients when they travel to the UK.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

A supplemental please Madam Speaker. I want to commend the Ministry of Health and the Minister for sending patients who need help no matter what the situation because this has been my experience that whether you're Montserratian born Montserratian or non-national you can be...

Madam Speaker said:

Your supplementary please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

It is a supplementary. I'm giving the preamble to it Madam Speaker. Whether you're a national born Montserratian or non-national who becomes a Montserratian and you travel to England you can be sent back. I have evidence of that. They can be sent back to Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

Can we have the supplementary?

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

It is coming Madam Speaker.

Honourable Minister are you aware that it is the FCDO's responsibility, the Governor's responsibility when any Montserratian leaves Montserrat and travels overseas especially to the United Kingdom to fight this battle? That the Governor and the FCDO should be on the front line of making the case to see that these people are taken care of and Honourable Minister will you join me in appealing to this entire Assembly to unite and find a way to fight for change on this matter and not sit back and accept the status quo?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Madam Speaker, Honourable Romeo, I do support you in ensuring that we adequately address this issue because I think a lot more work has to be done, but I would not necessarily point fingers at the FCDO and the Governor. I would point fingers at the Government of Montserrat. There are lots that could have been done over the past decades. A lot has been done, including improving increasing the numbers that can travel on the quota referral, but I believe that as a nation we need to grow up and stop trying to stretch dependency to the extreme. The people of Montserrat are also our responsibility and as a government and there are ways which going forward we should be able to attempt facilitating access to care for patients who need to go there and access to an easier transition into persons receiving a social welfare type package once they have been in the UK and have moved to the UK and are social welfare patients on Montserrat. So, I agree with you that a lot more has to be done., I will not point fingers at any particular team, but I join you on this mission of making sure that we, one, gain clarity and two, move forward with serious steps to properly

support persons who have travelled to the UK for medical care is a very relevant and real topic.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4. Can the Honourable Minister of Health tell this Honourable House what is being done to support members of the public, especially the aged and vulnerable suffering from diabetes and hypertension who struggle to pay for a healthy diet and I'm going to repeat. Can the Honourable Minister of Health tell this Honourable House what is being done to support members of the public, especially the aged and vulnerable suffering from diabetes and hypertension, who struggle to pay for a healthy diet?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The ministry's response, the clients that require nutritional intervention will have a nutritionist putting input into their care plans. In instances where they require support with their meals, a referral is made to the Meals on Wheels program, and the warden supports residents at the Lookout Warden Supported Unit are assisted with their shopping and other requirements. Once patients with conditions such as diabetes and hypertension let their health care providers know that they're having issues with dietary changes they're sometimes referred to a nutritionist who can advise them on how to use foods within their price range to achieve dietary goals.

My response looks at the broader issue of food sovereignty, which refers to the rights of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. Madam Speaker, this question spans what we are doing in other ministries. Too many of our food items are imported and have questionable nutritional value with a high price tag. Importing most of our even our vegetables from abroad, 30 years post volcano, is totally unacceptable. Our Minister of Agriculture is working on multiple ways in which we can create a culture in which we expect to feed ourselves healthy, locally grown food at reasonable prices. The \$900 which persons on social welfare given hugely restricts the quality of food that persons who are old and infirm are able to purchase. Unfortunately, many of these persons make do by purchasing healthy, cheap, pre-packaged, overly processed foods, some made as far as China, which contribute to ill health and gastrointestinal problems. For diabetics and hypertensive Madam Speaker I congratulate the Ministry of Health and successive governments who have ensured the presence of dietitians who tirelessly over decades have spread the message of what the healthy diet is comprised of and other health care providers have been on this mission as well, nurses, doctors, nursing assistants, health promotion officers have continuously carried this message of healthy eating and healthy lifestyle in general to patients. The reality, though, Madam Speaker, is that beyond the discussion on affordability, with the reality that some healthy items are available locally, individuals must take responsibility for what they consume. Regional data collection has watched Caribbean people increase the prevalence of diabetes from 3% in the 1960s 3% of the population to 15% of the population in the 1990s to 20% of the population in 2025; where are we going with this? This is a problem created by poor decisions on food choices in difficult economies with multiple financial pressures. At the same time, successful Caribbean businesses have grown and flourished out of the provision of unhealthy foods for our people without restriction. The inadequate focus on healthy eating, unfortunately, has passed down to generations of children who have grown up not even realising the extreme importance of a healthy diet. I would like to congratulate Dr. Tiffany Skerritt-Flemming and her colleague, Nish Brown, for pushing forward with a youth nutrition policy for Montserrat. The reality is that in order to have an impact on the rising incidence of diabetes, hypertension, obesity, high cholesterol, and their

complications, studies have shown us that we must target the children in our healthy eating and our general health promotion efforts.

Our reality on Montserrat is that diabetes and cardiovascular disease, so heart attack, stroke, and circulatory issues, which are the complications of the NCDs, so diabetes and cardiovascular disease account for 59% of our deaths. As a ministry, we shall push on with our health promotion efforts and adjust policies and laws to ensure that we are adequately guided as we go forward. The Ministry of Agriculture shall continue its hard work on improving access to healthy food, but each and every one of us, Madam Speaker, must take responsibility for what we put in our mouths, Madam Speaker, and for other aspects of healthy living, like exercise.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Health continues its plan to direct policy towards and to creating fast and accessible care to persons who do succumb to the complications of the NCDs, so we are constantly trying to update stroke and heart attack guidelines. We're working on faster medical evacuation for time-critical cases requiring tertiary-level care, and I may have said earlier in the ministerial statement I did, that we are also focusing on peripheral vascular disease or poor circulation with the intention of bringing our amputation rate down to zero, and that there are awareness programs and interventions that are ongoing.

There is local eye care, eye surgery being planned, thanks to a team that our chairperson, Austin Howe, is facilitating to ensure that once again, which has not happened in at least 20 years, eye surgery can be performed on Montserrat, and this is very relevant to our older persons who are afflicted by eye conditions and do not want to travel anywhere for their care. Eye conditions are very prevalent in the diabetic and hypertensive population, so we're talking about diabetic and hypertensive retinopathy, damage to the back of the eye, which results in progressive visual loss, and diabetics are also at increased risk of cataract and glaucoma, which impair their vision and increase the risks of falls and generally negatively impacts on their quality of life. And, Madam Speaker, our focus, as explained briefly in the ministerial statement, our intention to address dialysis.

The reality is that large numbers of our patients end up with kidney disease, and we do nothing locally to support them. In addition to that, patients who succumb to critical illness and multi-organ failure often end up in kidney failure, and we are unable to support them on our critical care beds. End-stage kidney disease results in death.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what the manufacture date of the new ambulances which were acquired by the Government of Montserrat is?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The response from the ministry, the two ambulances recently received from the West Midlands Ambulance Service were manufactured in 2019.

My brief response, Madam Speaker, is that I would like to personally thank the FCDO and Professor Ian Cumming for the gift of the two amazing ambulances and the emergency health care staff training that is being organised for the ambulance crew. I personally have dreamed of the day for at least 15 years where ambulances of that quality could be present on Montserrat and words cannot express my gratitude for the attention that has been given to our first responders who stand on the front line waiting for our emergencies and who are always desirous of improving on the service that they provide to Montserrat.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Sorry, Madam Speaker. I have to ask the question because I was asked and I couldn't answer it.

Honourable Minister, are they second-hand or new?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

They are, um, Honourable Romeo, but second-hand and of extremely good quality. I have been in the ambulances. I have driven one of them. I am truly delighted.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

So am I, Honourable Minister. I just have to ask the questions.

6. Can the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House what the total number of students attending the Montserrat Community College has been for each of the years 2020 to 2025, and what her Ministry is doing or intends to do to encourage more students leaving secondary school to attend the Montserrat College?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. No one can accuse Honourable Romeo of not working for his salary as a Member of the Opposition. The response from the Ministry is as follows. There are some figures. The Montserrat Community College's role for the past five academic years, 2019 to 2020; 65 persons, 45 females and 20 males; 2020 to

2021, 50 persons, 44 females and 16 males; 2021 to 2022, 49 persons, 26 females and 23 males; 2022 to 2023, 37 persons, 27 females and 10 males; 2023 to 2024, 56 persons, 44 females and 12 males; 2024 to 2025, 44 persons, 35 females and 9 males. The answer to the question of what the Ministry is doing to improve access into the MCC, into the Montserrat Community College. The Ministry's response, key actions, and interventions include, number one, expansion of program offerings. So, the Montserrat Community College is preparing to introduce initial teacher training with the goal of becoming a member of the Joint Board of Teacher Education of the Eastern Caribbean. This would create a local pathway for students interested in pursuing a career in education. Number two, flexible admission policies, recognizing that not all students will immediately meet the entry requirements for the Montserrat Community College. The community college will allow provisional acceptance to students who have not yet passed maths and English in particular. These students will be supported through remedial education programs to complete these foundational subjects before proceeding to CAPE-level studies.

Number three, skill-based and short-term courses to meet our local labour market demands and to support diverse learning. The college plans to offer on-demand short-term courses in areas such as dress-making, plumbing, electrical installation, hospitality and service, industry, education, and these practical programs are aimed at encouraging skills development and providing alternative pathways for employment. Number four, financial support through partnerships. The academic board has proposed a collaboration with the HYPE program, where the student stipend will be used to cover tuition at the MCC for eligible students, and this initiative would reduce financial barriers and increase affordability for families. Through these measures, the Ministry intends to make post-secondary education at the Montserrat Community College accessible, affordable, and aligned with the interests and the needs of Montserrat's youth, thereby encouraging more MSS students to continue their education locally. These initiatives will be implemented incrementally starting in the next academic year.

I personally feel that college education should be free on Montserrat, but that is my personal opinion.

My response to the question, my own response to the question, the fall in the attendance at the Montserrat Community College, which is pretty obvious, there's a gender disparity there as well, this fall is multifactorial, and with the population growth rate of Montserrat of minus 32 persons per year, it is no surprise. People and families leave for multiple reasons and take their young people with them. There are other reasons, like in the UK, some persons will be able to receive an education that's at college level, that's more focused towards what they intend to do at university. There is a lot that must be done to encourage our people to stay on island.

However, I would like to congratulate the principal of the Montserrat Community College, Mrs. Geraldine Cabey, for her hard work on steering the college and for her vision. Earlier this year, I sat with PS Mendes and our director, Dr. Julius, and with Mrs. Cabey, and we in education fully embraced her plans for an extension of the college to include more technical subjects to open the vocational arm of the college and extending this to teacher training. Not only this, but she also has the vision of extending the technical arm of the college down to the secondary school to ensure that, down to the secondary school, for students who await an enhanced technical subjects program from which they can craft and cultivate their future careers.

In Education, we presently await the arrival of our education project manager, who will lead on education transformation, which is intended to direct funding to projects such as this. Madam Speaker, the students on this island have the support of the Ministry of Education and have the support of the government at large in finding solutions to education's present extensive problems.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and my last question to the Minister.

- 7. Can the Honourable Minister of Education and Health tell this Honourable House whether there has been any estimation of the annual maintenance costs of the new hospital? If so, what is the**

estimate? If not, will there be a consideration given to starting those discussions now so that we don't fall into the same lack of maintenance funding issue that is plaguing other government capital assets?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. This response is entirely from the Ministry and probably primarily from Health Transformation. So, the answer is yes, an estimation of the annual maintenance cost of the new hospital has been considered, particularly in light of its modern design, infrastructure, and equipment needs. The Ministry of Health and Social Services acknowledges that annual maintenance costs will increase significantly due to the complexity of having a modern facility and the strategic decisions made to ensure equipment protection and patient comfort. Some of the maintenance costs implications include increased operational burden. For example, the implementation of an air-cooling system means that the Ministry of Health and Social Services must plan for higher recurring costs tied to operating and maintaining a mixed mechanical cooling system. These costs are being incorporated into forward budgeting and reflect the new hospital's higher operational baseline compared to the existing Glendon Hospital. Medical equipment maintenance, sophisticated equipment such as CT and 3D mammography, also comes with substantial service costs. These are estimated as for the CT scanner, US \$89,000 per year, for the mammogram machine, US \$28,500 per year, for the electronic medical record system, US \$8,200 per year, and there are other equipment costs that will come forward, such as a digital x-ray machine, ultrasound, etc. These figures illustrate the level of financial commitment required to get the new hospital on its feet and to maintain the running of this new hospital.

Number three, historical underfunding is acknowledged. Sorry. Honourable Romeo is killing me today, Madam Speaker. Honourable Romeo. Maintenance for buildings, utilities, and clinical equipment has historically been underfunded relative to manufacturer recommendations, so we have not been doing it right for decades. We have not

been putting in the money necessary to maintain what we have. This pattern is being corrected and being supported in part by new health sector funding streams like the Health Service Transformation Program. There is ongoing budget planning, while a full estimate of the total annual budget for the entire hospital, the entire new hospital, has not yet been finalised. The Ministry of Health and Social Services is actively including these considerations in its financial planning and in its new budget submissions. This proactive approach is essential to avoid replicating past deficiencies in maintenance funding that have plagued other government assets. And this response comes with a recommendation to this Honourable House. The continued prioritisation of this topic and this question, provided by Honourable Romeo, we thank you, provides an opportunity to have Parliament and Cabinet continue to ensure that appropriate annual maintenance funding is provided. This Honourable House is encouraged to support the finalisation of a comprehensive maintenance cost estimate, inclusion of these costs in the Ministry of Health's recurrent budget, early dialogue with the Ministry of Finance to prevent funding shortfalls that would compromise hospital operations. This forward planning will help to secure the long-term sustainability of the hospital and protect the significant capital investment that has already been made.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that's my last question. And I just want to say one thing, Madam Speaker, thanks to you and to Honourable Premier for providing answers to questions. Just one thing, Madam Speaker, it's kind of difficult trying to switch from what you're looking at going to the emails to get the answers. I'd really appreciate it if you could get them printed before we get here. That's all.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Questions to the Honourable Premier from the Honourable Nyota Mulcare

[Audio unavailable due to technical difficulties.]

The following question was posed by the Honourable Member and retrieved from her written submission to the Speaker. Due to a technical malfunction, audio recording was unavailable at the time it was asked.

1. The Government of Montserrat recently announced the implementation of a price cap on a limited number of airline tickets on Fly Montserrat and SVG, which came into effect on 9th June 2025 and is expected to remain in place until March 2026.

Can the Honourable Premier please clarify for this Honourable House:

- a) Whether the number of capped airline tickets is limited on a per-day basis for each airline; and**
- b) If so, how many capped airline tickets are allocated daily to each airline under this initiative?**

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister for Access.

The Premier said:

The short response is no. The capped airline tickets are not limited on a per-day basis per airline. Rather, the price cap is applied on a set total number of passenger movements during the off-peak, that's June to November period and the peak season, December to March. Monthly reports by the airlines will provide an indication of the number of passenger movements under the price cap arrangement and, therefore, the amount available within the specific period.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

[Audio unavailable due to technical difficulties.]

A supplementary question was posed regarding the monitoring and adjustment of capped airline ticket allocations. The exact wording is not available.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I'm lost as to what the question is, so if she can read it again, please.

[Audio partially inaudible.]

A question was posed by the Honourable Member; however, due to audio distortion, portions of the question were not clearly captured in the recording. The audible segments have been transcribed below to the extent possible.

Madam Speaker, my original question asked for how many capped.....airline tickets are allocated daily, he indicated daily,period, so I'm asking what are the total number of capped airline tickets allocated to these periods of

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Access.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I think that's a very substantive question. I responded faithfully to the question which was asked and it says how many capped airline tickets are allocated daily to each airline under the initiative and that I responded to. The more substantive response that is being requested will require me to get additional information which I cannot provide at this stage or which I do not have at this stage because it was not requested.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay. I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

[Audio partially inaudible.]

A question was posed by the Honourable Member; however, due to audio distortion, portions of the question were not captured in the recording at the time the question was asked. This portion was retrieved from her written submission to the Speaker, and along with the audible segments, has been transcribed below.

Construction of the Financial Services Commission Building began several years ago, with the stated intention of accommodating the offices of the Financial Services Commission, the Auditor General, and the Financial Crimes and Analysis Unit. However, it appears that the project has since come to a standstill.

Can the Hon Premier please inform this Hon House:

a) What specific challenges are currently affecting the completion of this project?

(b) When these challenges are expected to be resolved, and

(c) The projected timeline for the relocation of the Financial Services Commission, the Auditor General and the Financial Crimes and Analysis Unit into the completed facility?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the project initially started as a financial services project facilitated by a loan from the Bank of Montserrat. The intention was to fund the mortgage to the rental of office space to various government offices. However, increased costs as a consequence of a range of construction and material cost issues caused the project to be suspended because of insufficient funds. On assuming office, we have decided to take over the

building and the mortgage, that is, we, the government. Government, on a determination that the subcontractor was owed some sums which could have led to costly and unnecessary litigation, paid the subcontractor. In other words, government paid the subcontractor on behalf of the contractor. In order to have the building completed, government has approached the bank for a facility which includes taking over the mortgage from the FSC and obtaining additional funds to complete the building. We are awaiting a substantive response from the bank to facilitate a Cabinet decision on this facility and any new arrangements as to occupancy. In order for this process to be completed, we will obviously require the prior approval of the FCDO. As indicated above, I cannot give a timeline for completion of the building until we have completed the process as outlined, nor the allocation of space.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Request for a supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Given that the project was originally funded through a loan by the Bank of Montserrat, can the Honourable Member please clarify the current outstanding mortgage balance and whether the government's takeover includes full assumption of the debt and confirming the payment of the contractor? Let me repeat, Madam Speaker. Given the fact that the project was originally funded through a loan by the Bank of Montserrat, can the Honourable Premier please clarify the current outstanding mortgage balance and whether the government's takeover includes assumption of the debt and the payment of the main contractor?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I can just say that government has taken over the mortgage. As to the supplementary requested as to how much the mortgage sum is, that's a substantive question. I do not have the response to that at this stage, and I don't understand the issue as it relates to the contractor.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, I am trying to seek some clarity if the main contractor of the building has been paid to date, fully paid to date.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

The Premier said:

The main contractor could not be fully paid to date because the project has not been completed, which is why we're seeking the additional funds from the Bank so that the contractor can complete the works.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

I move on to my next question.

- 4. On 11th November 2024, the Government of Montserrat, through the Office of the Deputy Governor, published an invitation to tender for consultancy services to undertake a public service compensation review. Can the Honourable Leader of Government Business inform this Honourable House, (a) whether a contract has been awarded for this consultancy, (b) if so, when is***

the public service compensation review expected to commence, and (c) if a contract has not yet been awarded, can the Honourable Premier provide an update on the current status of the tender process?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, as the question is correctly phrased, this is a matter for the Office of the Deputy Governor, constitutionally. However, I am providing the response as submitted by the Deputy Governor. The previous tender exercise had to be withdrawn. The Public Procurement Board advised that there were significant issues which would materially affect the integrity of the procurement process and the feasibility of proceeding with contract award. All bidders were notified. The tender exercise was relaunched and a new ITT was published on 16th May, which closed on the 4th of June. Bids are currently being evaluated with the aim of commencing a contract in July. The review is expected to conclude in March of 2026.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, request for a supplementary.

Madam Speaker said:

Let's hear it.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Can the Honourable Premier state explicitly what the significant issues were that compromised the integrity of the initial procurement process whether related to procedural breaches, conflict of interest, non-compliance with public procurement regulations, or any other

deficiencies, and indicate whether any internal reviews or disciplinary actions were triggered as a result?

Madam Speaker said:

If I may, Honourable Mulcare, I think he said that he presented the response as presented to him. Your mic, sorry. I think he said that he's responding based on what was presented to him. So, to ask for all that detail, I think it's a bit unfair. Maybe you should get the response later, but for now. But Honourable Premier, would you want to? I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

I'm just reiterating your ruling, Madam Speaker, in that I cannot take supplementaries on questions as they pertain to the Deputy Governor's responses. If, in fact, you wish to ask a substantive question, kindly resubmit it. I will take them back to the Deputy Governor and come back with a response.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you. I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will resubmit. I move on to my next question.

- 5. There have been numerous complaints from members of the general public regarding the naturalisation process, including extended delays in processing applications and applicants being required to resubmit documentation, often incurring additional financial costs. Can the Honourable Leader of Government Business please inform this Honourable House, (a), what is the official process that applicants must follow to apply for naturalisation in Montserrat, and (b), in instances where the process is not adhered to by the responsible authorities, or where an applicant believes they have been subjected to discrimination or victimization, to which competent authority should such concerns or complaints be formally reported?***

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this again is a question which I'm responding to on behalf of the Deputy Governor, and I'll read her response faithfully. Consular matters are an issue for the Governor pursuant to section 43 sub 1 of the British Nationality Act of 1981. The Secretary of State conveys responsibility to undertake these functions to the Governor, who can exercise her discretion accordingly. The Office of the Deputy Governor has been delegated to administer the process in line with the procedures agreed with the UK Home Office. The ODG acknowledged that there have been some delays due to resource challenges. Communications were issued to alert applicants of the delays. Interviews have since been held, and steps are being taken to move forward with these applications.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, a request for supplementary.

I do understand the fact that the Honourable Premier is responding to or reading the response of the Deputy Governor. However, Madam Speaker, in light of the additional financial burden placed on applicants, can the Honourable Premier indicate whether the government intends to implement any measures such as, or suggest any process changes to reduce or offset these costs, given the fact that the delay is not the fault of the applicant, but are forced to resubmit the application and pay additional fees?

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, these are questions which I'll take under advisement, and I will welcome that our next meeting, that I have your input into some recommendations which can come from the Opposition, so we can take it forward. I can take it forward on our behalf.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I do thank the Honourable Premier for that inclusion. On to my next question.

6. In 2009, Clico International Life Insurance Limited experienced a major financial collapse that impacted thousands of policyholders across the Caribbean. Many citizens who invested significant sums were eventually able to recover some funds, with the notable exception of Montserratians, many of whom remain uncompensated to this day. Given that the Honourable Premier served as Montserrat's representative on the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, ECCB, can the Honourable Premier state what concrete steps the Government of Montserrat has taken, or intends to take, to advocate for and assist its citizens who have yet to recover their long-standing investments with Clico International Life Insurance Limited?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I cannot respond to what previous administrations did from 2014 to date, but I can assure you, I've had one meeting of the Monetary Council to date since my return to active political office. I have had discussions with the Governor of the Central Bank to have this matter put on the agenda for the July meeting, and I will, in fact, inform you and others who have an interest as to the status based on

the report coming from the Central Bank. In fact, I commit to share that report with the opposition as well.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable....

The Premier said:

If I may, if I may, Madam Speaker. On the other question, on the point, if you'll permit me, it's unwritten. Would you permit me to give a further elucidation? The reasoning behind why the Montserrat policy holders have not been paid is that from 2009 going forward, and I can speak from 2009 to 2014, is that the committee started by paying out the smaller policy holders but the larger policy holders happen to be in Montserrat and therefore, this is why territories such as St. Vincent and St. Lucia, most of their policy holders have been paid out because they were under the \$750,000 limit. Most of the policyholders in Montserrat are well over that \$750,000 limit. There have been at least two persons in Montserrat who were paid out, and it's simply because they were within the original limit for compensation. But as I said, I will follow up in terms of what has or has not happened since my time out of office, and I will report back to the House and also share the report with the Opposition. If it's not a confidential document.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

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

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Premier for his responses, as well as for providing the written responses to allow me to review and ably do my work here in Parliament today. And I further look forward to his update to this House and to furnish the Opposition with the response for the CLICO matter. And I do hope that it will bring positive resolution to our citizens. I now move on to the Honourable Minister of Education, Health and Social Services.

My first question.

- 1. Several years ago, the working hours for hospital drivers were extended from an eight-hour shift to a 12-hour shift. These employees have since been subjected to prolonged working hours without any corresponding improvement to their remuneration package. Furthermore, it has been reported that they have no designated rest facility and are compelled to rest in the very buses that they are assigned to drive. This situation raises serious concerns regarding adhering to basic labour standards and occupational health and safety requirements. Can the Honourable Minister of Health please inform this Honourable House when will this matter be rectified and what immediate measures will be taken to ensure that these essential workers receive fair compensation and are provided with appropriate working conditions in keeping with established labour and health standards?***

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker and thank you to Honourable Mulcare in supporting health workers. The response from the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health reports that when the Margetson Memorial Home was transferred to the Golden Years Home some years ago, that the shift of the drivers was adjusted from eight hours to 12 hours to accommodate this and this allowed one driver to be assigned to the hospital and one to the Margetson Home from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., so 12-hour shifts. The ministry has felt that the shift, that in extending the shift to 12 hours a day, that the workers would appreciate the significant downtime outside of the working hours, so the fact that they had more days available to them for the week, and had the intention of ensuring that they stayed within the 40-hour work week. As a result, 12-hour shifts three or four days a week were the result. And they report, the Ministry of Health, that there is no distinction between rest areas for different categories of staff, so there are some rest areas in the hospital that they have access to. The Ministry of Health states also that there is a business case for two additional drivers, and this has

received approval, and that the vacant positions either are advertised or will be advertised, and that the Ministry is considering the best approach to sort out its transportation needs, to adjust salaries, and to address workers' needs in general.

My approach as the Minister to this Ministry, to which I have been assigned, is to state that it's really important that as we progress in health in any area, that it's really important that the burden does not fall unfairly on any particular group of workers, which seems to be the case in this scenario. It appears as if, from the discussion, that most drivers actually prefer an eight-hour shift, five days a week. When they're doing 12-hour shifts, the off days I felt feeling quite exhausted and struggling to get a balance with enough rest and getting other aspects of their lives sorted. For some of them, it is family life, and for some, it is an extra job. Madam Speaker, most of us who work for government have an extra job because salaries are low, and we have other people to feed and roofs over our heads to maintain. I'm delighted that two additional driver roles have been created, so this should solve the problem, and I look forward to the well-being of the drivers being heavily factored in when decisions are being made about the shift system, which appears to be seriously affecting their quality of life. This raises the reality of our treatment of other workers in health, Madam Speaker. I feel the treatment of other workers has not been adequately warm.

I would like to raise the situation within the answer to this question for the support of the radiology staff at the X-ray Department of Glendon Hospital. Madam Speaker, these workers have replaced, have embraced marked departmental expansion and innovation. Their adoption of the new technology, requiring new skills, has been incredible. The department has moved from being an X-ray-only facility then to X-ray plus taking on ultrasound, and then over the past year and a bit, embracing the operation and the management of mammography and CT scanning. We must all accept that this is an incredible jump in the workload and in the skills required, Madam Speaker, yet they are still paid as if they are running an X-ray-only facility. In particular, if you address the fact that one of the persons expected to operate the equipment, who herself is incredible, is also managing the radiology department with these leaps and bounds in innovation and workload, she is now managing a department that has really gone beyond what

managing an X-ray department should have been. With our population growth rate, as I said earlier, of minus 32 persons per year on this island, it is essential that we urgently address their remuneration package and hours of work, and thus I'm asking the Ministry to which I have been assigned to urgently prepare a business case for human resources and finance which adequately compensates these extremely capable and valued workers who could quite easily find work elsewhere with their level of skill.

Madam Speaker, in this breath, I would like to assure all persons who work at Glendon who man the ship, even at hours when the rest of us are comfortable in our beds to ensure, and when all of us are sitting with our families and they're at work, to ensure that they know that this government is here to support them. I am extremely glad that you have highlighted this problem, and I know you will continue to highlight further problems that workers at the hospital and other workers for government have been experiencing, and we look forward to, as a team, providing solutions with our own cash strapped budget to ensure that all the workers are adequately compensated and adequately cared for, because it is extremely important for development of Montserrat and ensuring that we continue the progress that we're making, so thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, supplementary request.

I note the Honourable Minister's response, and with much investigation, she will realise that the shift system actually changed long before the relocation. However, let me say, the current shift sheet does not reflect what was highlighted in the response. Work two days with two or three days off, and to indicate that there is no distinction for rest areas for different categories of staff shows the lack of care for workers, as it is impossible for the rest area for 12-hour shift workers to be the same as persons with less hours, considering your profession, Honourable Minister. Can the Honourable Minister of Health, and I reiterate, considering your profession, commit to do-

ing her own groundwork to inspect the shift sheets and the rest area to make sure that medically, government does the right thing for the hospital drivers?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member of Opposition for her attempt at an insult, a person who has zero experience in health. Madam Speaker, I'm unsure as to what sort of rest area the Honourable Member is referring to. On a 12-hour shift, are we expecting to stretch out on a bed and have a nap? I would like to point out that in the UK, because of the staff shortages, a lot of nurses, particularly in emergency care, are on 12-hour shifts. The rest areas are the same for other members of staff, where you can sit, have food, sit back, unwind, watch something on a television or on your own device, but nobody in health is napping on a 12-hour shift. I am happy to, going forward, to look into it some more, but the reality is that if we can make the shift shorter, they will be happier, and we are happy to address that particular problem.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's unfortunate that the Honourable Minister sees it as an insult, but my aim to seek responses for the general public, and nowhere in my question did I speak of napping, but a proper resting facility for the drivers. And I may continue to my next question, Madam Speaker.

2. Headteachers and senior nursery nurses in the early childhood sector currently receive a travel allowance of only \$50 per month, an amount that does not reflect the actual and rising costs associated with transportation, including fuel, vehicle maintenance, and replacement parts. These educators are routinely required to

use their personal vehicles to travel to education headquarters for meetings, to collect materials for school fundraisers and specific learning activities, and other essential duties that support the delivery of quality early childhood education. As a result, they're often left covering the significant shortfall between the actual transportation expenses and the current allowance. Can the Honourable Minister of Education please inform this Honourable House when will this matter be reviewed and what steps will be taken, including the preparation and submission of a Cabinet paper to address this matter, ensuring that the travel allowance is adjusted to reflect the true costs incurred by these vital education professionals?

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Minister of Education.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The response from the Ministry is the current \$50 per month is by no means a reflection of the Ministry's perspective of the value of the contribution of the early childhood sector, the value that they bring to the island's development and sustainability, and that the Ministry of Education recognises that the current allowance of \$50 per month is really not adequate to cover the true costs incurred for transportation by early childhood educators. Reviews of an approval for adjustments to allow adjustments for allowances across the public service are handled by the Human Resources Management Unit. However, the Ministry of Health will continue to advocate for and make the relevant submissions to have this matter addressed in the next financial year.

My response is personally that EC \$50 per month is totally dismal as a transportation allowance. It is very likely that this amount was set in the 1960s. \$50 does not even cover half a week of petrol, nor does it even cover a month of bus fare. It is uncertain what this \$50 is intended to cover. These value professionals have my commitment to addressing this issue and I would like to thank my Honourable Cousin in Opposition for her question and to perhaps applaud her for noticing this, but also to recognise that as civil service head for many years, as

their representative, she watched this \$50 per month transportation allowance be their allowance for a very long time.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Minister for her responses and indicate that going forward that my questions be taken as lobbying for the people of Montserrat so that they can achieve their overall (chuckle). And I want to also correct the Honourable Minister that I was not the head of service, but I was the president....

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Mulcare, Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable Mulcare, we are not supposed to have debates and speeches on responses. Thank you. Or, if you just wrap up and thank the Minister, that's fine, but no speech or debate, please. I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. However, on a Point of Order, it would be clarification, I do expect that this goes both sides of the House because the Honourable Minister was allowed to debate and say more than the question that I asked.

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me? So, you're challenging the ruling, Honourable Mulcare?

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Madam Speaker, I'm making an observation that you cautioned me and the Honourable Minister was not cautioned.

Madam Speaker said:

Let us complete this exercise, please, without an argument.

9. MOTIONS

(1) The Premier and Minister of Finance and Economic Management to move the Introduction and First Reading of the Public Procurement Bill 2025.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Finance.

First Reading – Public Procurement Bill 2025

The Premier said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a motion for the first reading of the Appropriation Bill 2025 (sic).

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I move to second the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Bill, shortly entitled ***Public Procurement Bill 2025***, should be read a first time.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will be read a first time.

The Clerk said:

Public Procurement Bill 2025.

(2) The Attorney General to move:

(i) **The Introduction and First Reading of the Police (Amendment) Bill 2025.**

(ii) **The Second and Third Reading of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church Incorporation (Amendment) Bill 2025**

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise 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 ***Police Amendment Bill 2025***. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Acting Financial Secretary.

The Financial Secretary (Ag) said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move a motion for the second reading of the ***Police Amendment Bill 2025***.

Madam Speaker said:

The motion for the first reading.

The Financial Secretary (Ag) said:

Okay. Yes, Madam Speaker, apologies. I move a motion for the first reading. I second the motion for the first reading of the ***Police Amendment Bill 2025***.

Madam Speaker said:

Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Bill, shortly entitled ***Police Amendment Bill 2025***, should be read a first time.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will be read a first time.

The Clerk said:

Police Amendment Bill 2025

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honorable Attorney General.

Second Reading – Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to move a motion for the second reading of the Bill shortly entitled ***Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025***. Madam Speaker, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Act, Cap 294, included in the 1962 revised edition of the Laws of Montserrat, constituted in Montserrat a Board of Trustees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Leeward Islands. The Board of Trustees comprised of the Superintendent of the East Caribbean Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Secretary-Treasurer, and other persons to be appointed in accordance with the Constitution of the East Caribbean Conference. The Act provides that, subject to the rules and regulations and controls of the East Caribbean Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, the Board constituted under the Act had the full power to hold, purchase, exchange, devise land and other property of any kind for the Church. Under the Act, the Board was also given the power to sell, grant, and convey land or other property vested in the said Board, but again subject to the rules and regulations and control of the East Caribbean Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist, and only with the consent of the Conference.

Madam Speaker, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Act was first enacted in May 1927, and the last amendment was made in 1961. Since that time, things have changed in the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Caribbean region. In order to ensure that the Board of Trustees, as currently constituted, can effectively act to manage the land and property of the Church, a request was made on behalf of the Church for amendments to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Act. To this end, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025 is before this Honorable House. The Bill seeks to amend the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Act, Cap 294.

Clause 1 of the Bill sets out the short title.

Clause 2 of the Bill defines the phrase, Principal Act.

Clause 3 amends the preamble of the Act by deleting the current preamble and replacing it with recitals that set out the constitution dates of the Leeward Island Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the Seventh-day Adventist Church South Leeward Mission, and the South Leeward Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The recitals provide also for the constitution and incorporation of the Board of Trustees of the South Leeward Conference of Seventh-day Adventists who will have the power to hold lands and other property in trust for the Church.

Clause 4 of the Bill inserts section 1 (a) into the Act, which defines the phrase, Board of Trustees, to mean the Board of Trustees of the South Leeward Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Clause 5 of the Bill deletes and replaces section 2 of the Act. The new section 2 sets out the constitution of the Board of Trustees.

Clause 6 amends the Act by deleting section 3 and replacing section 3. The amended section 3 deals with vesting of property and the powers of the Board of Trustees. It provides that all land and other property real or personal of any kind acquired or held by or for the benefit of the Church would vest in the Board of Trustees. Section 3 outlines the powers of the Board to act in relation to this property and outlines that

these powers are subject to the rules, regulations, and control of the South Leeward Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Clause 7 makes minor amendments to section 4 of the Act by deleting East Caribbean Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church and substituting, therefore, South Leeward Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Clause 8 of the Bill inserts a new section into the Act, which gives the Governor acting on the advice of Cabinet the power to amend the preamble of the Act by order.

Clause 9 of the Bill inserts a section 6 into the Act. Section 6 validates all acts purportedly performed by the Board of Trustees or the Board of Trustees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, South Leeward Mission under section 3 or section 4 of the Act, which would have been validly performed by the Board of Trustees of the Leeward Island Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House for its consideration and further debate. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I stand in support of the motion for the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025 to be given its second reading. Shall I address at the same time? Okay.

Madam Speaker, as this Honourable House would have already heard, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Montserrat was incorporated in 1927, and the Act was amended in 1961. Madam Speaker, time has moved on, life has evolved, and so has the Church and therefore, Madam Speaker, I will not address the significant changes, technically, since the Honourable Attorney General has done so, but to address it generally, that the significant organisational changes have occurred, and including the transition from the East Caribbean Conference to the South Leeward Conference. These changes, therefore, Madam

Speaker, are required so that the outdated elements of the Act can be addressed to address the challenges for the Church, particularly in managing its property transactions and aligning with this governance structure.

Recognising, therefore, the need for legislative reform, consultations were conducted with the Church representative, including President Carson Green of the South Leeward Conference, and the Attorney General's Chambers, who I wish to register their thanks and our thanks have worked tirelessly, Madam Speaker, so that this Bill is here today. And so, these discussions, Madam Speaker, resulted in the proposed amendments to modernize the Act. Among key issues you will have heard is the changes to the Board of Trustees so that we can validate past decisions, and the provision to allow for future updates to the preamble without requiring legislative approval. These amendments, I assure this House, ensure the Act aligns not only with the Church's current operations but also reduces the burden of legislative amendments for future organizational changes. I am particularly pleased, Madam Speaker, with the validation clause, which legalizes a prior action and decisions taken by the Church's governing bodies before the amendment of this Act, and I've already said there also is the power to amend the preamble by order. The Act grants the Governor, acting on the advice of Cabinet, the authority to amend the preamble by order, streamlining the administrative processes.

These amendments modernize the legal framework governing the Church, again ensuring it operates legally, secure, and adaptable to future changes. So, in a nutshell, legal financial governance implications for the Church, Madam Speaker, will be addressed today. Therefore, Madam Speaker, it provides for certainty and operational flexibility as well. As I said before, saving time and enhancing the efficiency for the Church and Parliament. I therefore invite the Members of this Honourable House to support this Bill, giving modern wings to the Adventist Church governance and legal structures. If it pleases you, Madam Speaker, I will rest.

Madam Speaker said:

Recognise the Honourable Parliamentary Representative Buffonge.

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill. What it seeks to do is to formalize the new development as was stated within the life of the SDA Church across our region. Madam Speaker, the SDA Incorporation Bill updates the old law to reflect the new changes, as was said. For years, we've been part of the North Caribbean Conference. I think a little correction on the Honourable Hector's part, not the East, but the North Caribbean Conference, which includes several countries across the region. They have now formally transitioned into a new body, which is called the North Leeward Islands Mission, which includes Montserrat, Antigua, St. Kitts, and Nevis. I don't know, maybe they're trying to tell us something as governments of the three countries. Madam Speaker, the Bill updates the laws to reflect, one, to recognise the new mission and its leadership, the Board of Trustees, and to ensure that the Church can continue managing its properties along with its operations here in Montserrat, and to also confirm that any other action that would have been taken by the mission or the Church are now valid on the law.

It also ensures that the new leadership, the Board of Trustees, is officially recognised and empowered to continue its operations about their properties, their work in the community without interruption, and to also validate all the steps that were taken before. But Madam Speaker, beyond the technical updates, which is basically what this is, it is also a chance for us to reflect on the consistent contribution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Madam Speaker, I'm not only a Member of this House, but that Church has been responsible for my upbringing and some of the principles I still hold with me today. Madam Speaker, the Church has always been a beacon to this community. From before COVID, during COVID, the Church was always there to help Montserrat, even in providing PPE and assistance with disaster relief. Madam Speaker, even as Minister of Agriculture would have reached out to the Church with the use of their lands in Cork Hill, and without hesitation, they came forward and those lands are still in production today, which is also proof of the Church's commitment to the development and service to our community. Madam Speaker, the Pathfinder program within the Church they continue to mold our youth in teaching them significant skills, from public speaking to surviving and team building.

I must add, Madam Speaker, that their presence was missing on King's Birthday parade. I believe because of the observance of the Sabbath, they were not able to attend, and I'm making a submission here that we consider somewhere in which we can, whether transfer back to Sunday or something of that sort, where the Church and pathfinders can be on parade and enjoy the celebrations. Madam Speaker, to the Church I say congratulations. I implore them to continue their work and to thank them for their continuous service to faith, family, community, and national development. Madam Speaker, I rest and support of the Bill.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other interventions? Would anyone else wish to speak on the Bill, or else we move on? Okay, so it seems not.

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:

And now that the Bill has been read a second time, the Assembly will go into committee to consider the Bill in detail.

COMMITTEE STAGE

The Clerk said:

Clauses 1 to 2

Madam Chair said:

The question is that clause is 1 and 2 should stand part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clauses 1 and 2 now stand as part of the Bill.

The Clerk said:

Clause 3

Madam Chair said:

The question is that clause 3 should stand part of this Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clause 3 now stands as part of the Bill.

The Clerk said:

Clauses 4 and 5, and 6

Madam Chair said:

The question is that clauses 4, 5 and 6 should stand as part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clauses 4 to 6 now stand as part of the Bill.

The Clerk said:

Clauses 7, 8, and 9

Madam Chair said:

The question is that clauses 7, 8, and 9 should stand as part of the Bill.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

Clauses 7, 8 and 9 now stand as part of the Bill.

The Clerk said:

Enacting Clause and Long Title

Madam Chair said:

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

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

The Enacting Clause and Long Title now stand as part of the Bill. And our final question is that the Bill should be reported to the Assembly.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Chair said:

The Bill will now be reported to the Assembly.

RESUMPTION OF ASSEMBLY

Madam Speaker said:

The Assembly will now resume its sitting. I recognise the Honourable Attorney General.

Third Reading – Seventh Day Adventists Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025

The Attorney General said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to report that the Bill shortly entitled ***Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025*** successfully passed through the committee stage of this Honourable House with no amendments and in light of that, I would like to move a motion for the third reading of the Bill

shortly entitled ***Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025***. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Do we have a seconder? Do we have a seconder? I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Madam Speaker, I stand to support the motion.

Madam Speaker said:

It has been moved and seconded that the Bill shortly entitled ***Seventh Day Adventist Church Incorporation Amendment Bill 2025*** be read a third time.

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

The Bill will now be read a third time.

The Clerk read the Bill a third time.

Madam Speaker said:

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

(3) Honorable Donaldson Romeo to move a Resolution.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honorable Romeo.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Resolution is entitled Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants,

and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sector. Whereas the UK Government has acknowledged

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me, excuse me, sir, you need to move the motion first.

Resolution – Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants, and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sectors.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Yes, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move a motion for the reading and presentation of the Resolution entitled Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants, and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sector.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Honourable Speaker, I rise to second the motion for the Resolution Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants, and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sector.

Madam Speaker said:

Honorable Romeo, you may make your presentation.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Whereas the UK Government has acknowledged that it has an internationally binding legal obligation to ensure, to the utmost of social, ed-

educational, economic and political well-being and advancement, and to promote constructive measures of development;

Whereas all Members of this House, especially elected representatives, are expected to discuss and adopt legislation that positively addresses the well-being of the people of Montserrat; Whereas, as detailed in the Appendix Part A, the elderly, the working poor and public and private sector and other vulnerable people face the effect of cumulative inflation and grossly inadequate income base ever since the DFID-funded study about 11 years ago included that the estimated needed support for the healthy nutrition of an adult was EC\$1200 to \$1400 a month;

Whereas, as detailed in the Appendix B, Part B, the ODG Compensation Report 2021 and data from the Statistic Department indicate that the estimated cost of living in Montserrat is currently \$2,485 per month for a single person;

Whereas there is and has been manifest need to respond to the urgent basic needs of the vulnerable, working poor, pensioners, and the public and private sector;

Be it resolved that this Honourable House now calls on the Government and relevant departments, without imposing any obligation whatsoever on them, without the approval of the Cabinet under Section 70 of the Montserrat Constitution Order 2010, to discuss an urgent adjustment to support for the vulnerable, pensioners and especially our working poor and their dependents in the public and private sector.

Madam Speaker, I just received copies. I should present it and share it with everyone. Could you pass it to the Government side in particular? Of a resolution done by the Cayman Opposition, which was tabled in 2023/2024, calling on the Government to adjust the cost of living for those receiving assistance and the civil service pension uplift. Madam Speaker, the reason why I'm sharing this is so the public understands that I've been pushing for this Resolution for quite some time, with the understanding that the Opposition does not just sit back and watch things fall apart, but take some action to influence change. Madam Speaker, we are not allowed as Members of the Opposition to

make a decision to increase a salary, or we are able to increase income for anyone, or are we able to vote on our own as Members on the other side in Cabinet to make such a decision. Therefore, the law requires that we can only appeal to that Cabinet, to the majority, to make the change that we deem necessary. Madam Speaker, the important thing to note is that in the Cayman's case, and they've done it once since then, the entire Parliament joined together to agree to these changes, although it was proposed by the Opposition.

Now, our situation is different to the Cayman. Cayman, they have the funds to make those decisions on their own. This decision that I'm asking for can cost several million dollars, and therefore, the challenge is, where do we get those funds from? And I'm sure the Honourable Premier and others are working hard to address this matter, in that we have to appeal to an external source for any extra funds to assist in this regard. Madam Speaker, therefore, my intention was, my hope was, that this entire Parliament could agree to what is stated at the conclusion of this Resolution just now, that this Honourable House together would agree to call on the Government and relevant departments without imposing any obligation whatsoever on them without the approval of Cabinet, so it's still up to Cabinet to discuss an urgent adjustment to support for the vulnerable, pensioners, especially the working poor and others.

I have no doubt, Madam Speaker, that every Member in this House, elected and unelected, wants to see some change. But as we listened this morning to some answers, I realized how critical it is that we voice that intention together, publicly. And Madam Speaker, that is what today is all about. Us voicing that intention and that wish and that support for the action to increase the income of especially those who are vulnerable and weak. So, Madam Speaker, I know I don't need to convince anyone that increasing the income to not just public servants, but those in the private sector, and not just increasing income, but providing support, and there are many ways to provide support, which includes, of course, creating employment opportunities. Madam Speaker, includes reducing duties at the port, so that all may feel it, and probably reducing utility costs so every household can feel it. There are many ways it can be done. But there are some direct increases that are needed to salaries and income.

Madam Speaker, one pensioner in her 60s, after working for the government for 40 plus years, whose monthly income is under \$2,000, is left with \$600 after paying a relatively small mortgage and utility bills. Notice I said a mortgage, somebody who has had to provide housing for themselves in our situation at a fairly old age, and they have several more years to pay off. Already retired in their 60s. Between now and then, clearly, that pensioner has to depend on external support to live decently. Madam Speaker, there are former head teachers, senior nurses whose monthly pensions are under \$2,000 as well. Some of them have given 30-plus years. And Madam Speaker, there are those who, would you believe it or not, receive less than \$400 or \$500 a month, somewhere around that, from their social security benefits, and have to be topped up to \$900, which is the maximum help they can get, if they don't have more than \$8,000 saved. So, you're in an awkward spot. If you have something saved beyond eight, you have to spend it to get help. So, you have to live real tight, or get rid of any savings you have to back you up to be able to benefit. Madam Speaker, a couple in their 80s and 70s, who have worked for the Government of Montserrat, combined, they've served for 70 plus years, and Madam Speaker, they receive \$1,350 a month between the two of them, and that provides not only for food but many other basic needs that they may have. Madam Speaker, none of the people I have mentioned just now have been classified as mendicants, none. Clearly, they are people who have served our country well and deserve to live a decent life.

Madam Speaker, sadly, it can get worse in the private sector, where mothers with single children are working for less than \$2000 a month, and many may think I'm saying that you should give them money. No, I'm not just saying that at all. There are many ways to give support to single mothers and children, whether they are working for government or not. As we continue, we will discover that even people working for government are struggling with higher salaries than what we just described.

Madam Speaker, our visits to businesses have been really shocking. Although we are aware most of us are aware that the economy is stagnant and I want to make it very clear here that I'm not blaming the present government. They've been in for six months. They've inherited quite a lot of what they're trying to resolve, and they may very well be

working on resolving what we are putting forward right now because they've heard the cry of the people, and they've heard the comments and challenges that have been made.

Madam Speaker, but as we went from business place to business place, this is what really saddened me most. Apart from some having a problem with paying arrears for rent and this has been going on since COVID. They've been struggling since COVID to keep up with their rent, apart from struggling to be able to pay their staff, and having to chip in where they were challenged to. I don't want to be too specific here because people can guess who we're talking about. In some cases, where staff will get bonuses and there's nothing to get a bonus from, and the owner knows, look, they need that help. They have to provide the extra help for them. The fact that some people are taxed for overtime, so they even try to work overtime, and they end up paying significant taxes, Madam Speaker. So, the businesses are dependent a lot on what is spent in the economy, and the public servants contribute the majority of that spending, as we all know.

Madam Speaker, there's also been a slowdown in projects. Had we had the port project going a bit more and the hospital going a bit more, they're all coming on stream, and we're happy for that. Things could have been slightly different. The businesses sort of explained to us what happened since the port project stopped. Some explained to us their circumstances present compared to a year ago, and most of it is not pretty. I'm not going to go into too much detail today because I know everybody out there understands what we're talking about. Everybody understands. Everybody has somebody close to them. Everybody has to face being asked for help constantly, and especially politicians, we all know that. So, both businesses and people are struggling. Madam Speaker, I referred to the studies, one done by the governor's office in 2020. That's nearly five years ago, and what amazes me, Madam Speaker, is that that study made it plain that the cost of living was estimated to be around \$2,485 for an individual. The living wage, they call it, and approximately 40% of those within the government do not earn enough to cover the basic cost of living. Let me repeat, 40% of those employed within the government do not earn enough to cover the basic cost of living.

Madam Speaker, it goes on to say that women are also represented within the percentage of workers, as they account for 60 percent of those who do not earn a livable wage, and that's within government, employed by government. Madam Speaker, that is daunting, and that's 2020. Things have gotten significantly more difficult since 2020. Madam Speaker, the study speaks to the impact of inflation despite it says a few years of deflation in recent years, Montserrat has experienced an accumulated rate of 21.6%, an inflation rate that is over the past 15-year period. That's since 2010, and this it says has caused a serious erosion in the spending power of public servants. Madam Speaker, what this means is that an item which cost a thousand dollars in 2006 in 2020 costs \$1,216 for the same item. So, in 2006, what you were able to buy, you can only now in 2020 buy 80% of what you could have bought them, 80% it says. And remember, as I said, the civil service represents a significant part of our GDP. Significant.

A significant portion of our recurrent budget and what is spent in the economy. If civil servants don't pay their mortgages, we'd be in trouble. But they're forced to pay their mortgages because it comes out before they can support themselves. Madam Speaker, the document also shows that, and this is evidence already provided, already researched and done by the Deputy Governor's Office. Not the government, the deputy governor's office, with the aid of consultants hired by DFID. For example, somebody's basic salary being EC \$4,112, net salary after tax and social security in 2020, and social security has gone up a bit. There may be a little break on taxes since then, but I'm going to just refer to 2020. Social Security \$150 dollars and so civil service associate subscription \$10, and tax \$624. You end up with a net salary of 3,328 dollars, and it says out of that comes rent, an average of \$610. Now, tell me where you could get a house to rent for \$610 or what kind of house you could get. I know that has changed. And if you have a mortgage, even if you have a small two-bedroom house, you're talking about \$1,500 a month or more. I'm going very gently, 1500 is low. Electricity 310, gas 45, internet 110, groceries 800. Groceries 800, 2020, 800. And remember, there's another study that says since 2013 that it would take 1,200 to 1,400 to have someone eat a nutritional diet, 2013/14. Now 2020, they're saying \$800. So clearly, that's not a nutritional diet.

So, we have to worry about children and parents not being able to eat properly. Already in a society where our culture, our food lead us into hypertension and diabetes. So where are we headed, Madam Speaker? The other costs are a bit more now, but in the end, it says that the person earning \$4,112 ends up with \$843 extra in their pocket extra. That's if they don't have a car loan to pay. So, the car loan will kill that almost. And again, this is for an individual without children; 843 left. Some single families have more than one or two children to deal with. Then, let's look at a clerical officer earning \$1,943 in 2020. Hopefully, that has increased a bit. Some tax changes are great. But this is the evidence back then. You're talking about after tax, they pay tax. Are they paying tax? You earn 19 something. Now it's Honourable Lewis and others will probably give you some details on that. It's a little different. They were paying taxes, social security, and you name it. Then they end up with \$804 to take home, from which they then take care of expenses. Rent, the same 610 if you're a single person, which I know is a lot more than that now. Electricity, similar figures. And that person is \$690 in the minus in 2020. Now I just got these figures, and I wish I could have quoted percentages. And this is evidence already in hand. Rice in 2015, quarter three, a two-pound bag of rice was \$4.41. It's now nine, \$7, no, no, \$8.48, nearly double. Five pounds, 10 in quarter four, \$10.56, now \$15 plus. I'm trying to pick some examples, and I wish I could give percentages, but I just got it. Rice, 10 pounds, \$19.49, now \$28.29. Powdered milk, 1800 grams, \$64 quarter four in 2015, now \$83.24 in 2024. I would hope there's some sort of deductions that might have changed that, let's hope. But I'm just quoting from figures already established and had in hand. And it's important to note that. Saltfish was 13.89 per pound. In 2024, it's \$22.70. You heard that? Saltfish, down from \$13.89 to \$22.70. Not a poor man's meal anymore. Cooking gas, 100-pound cylinder, quarter four, \$158 in 2015, quarter four in 2024, \$227. That's 2024, last year. I wish I could have said what it is now. So clearly, those things speak for themselves. And the reason why I'm actually mentioning this, I have to go back to what is said in the Resolution. We're calling for urgent action, urgent adjustment to the support of the vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure the Honourable Premier understands this, and I'm sure he's working hard to address this. We no longer have a situation where Montserratians will have to stay and fight to survive.

They have a choice. They can pick up and leave. Imagine Montserrat, and things have come to a point where Guyanese are saying, I'm not even bothering with a Montserrat passport. I'm going back home. And you go and check them out. Some of them are doing well. That wasn't the case a few years ago. And Madam Speaker, unlike Antigua or England or most of these other economies, the people have to stay and challenge the governments and put on pressure to bring change. So, it's a do-or-die situation for a government to address the sort of figures we're talking about here. In another country, there'd be a riot, there'd be protests. But guess what? People can pick up and leave. Madam Speaker, we lost several thousand people in the beginning of this crisis, all in a rush, simply because we did not address the urgent needs of the people then. And we continue to lose people constantly. Throughout all the years, when I was Premier, when anybody was, people have picked up and left. But Madam Speaker, we're facing a different time now. And that's why I'm speaking today. It's an urgent matter. Not only school children are leaving, not only people in their 20s are leaving, but people in their 20s, 30s, 40s, in the prime of their lives, Madam Speaker. Just over the past two weeks, two civil servants in reasonably good positions, and I'm sure they're working, some of them, for the salary or more that I mentioned, 4,000 plus. And one said to me, a young man said to me, intelligent young man, Mr. Romeo, I'm leaving. I have a house, a mortgage that I've been paying for for the past few years, but I'm leaving it; what happen, happen. And he began to explain to me where his life would be if he spent the next 20 years here with his family and his children. And when he explained it to me, I'm saying, Young people think this way? Once, Montserratians would never leave a house and go, no sir. If they go, they're going to fight for it to keep it. But this person is saying, Just forget it. Take my losses. I have certain skills. And this person has skills. I said, why you don't work part-time. He said, Look, I work part-time, I have no time for my children and my family. I make a few extra dollars. But, so that's how people are thinking now.

Honourable Wade frightened me yesterday. I thought he was leaving, too. He frightened me. He played a game on me. Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, another individual working in a prominent position in government whispered to me through the car window, Don, I'm leaving. I'm talking about die-hard Montserratians who have wanted to stay and are thinking there are greener pastures. And you know, the

funny thing is, some even realize that there's fire outside the frying pan, you know, but they're prepared to jump out the frying pan and face whatever fire. They're tired of the frying pan. They're tired of the heat they're in, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, so what we need is urgent action, and that is why the Opposition is united in speaking today and making it clear that we are in support of urgent action that would relieve the situation.

Madam Speaker, I just want to make one more on the issue of hardship. And it's hard to even receive or believe. Imagine that the OCHA, O-C-H-A, Office of the Coordinated Humanitarian Affairs of Montserrat, of affairs, that's the UN body, UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, called OCHA, has identified a significant poverty problem in Montserrat. It says that more than 36% of the population lives in poverty. And it's hard to even really think that. First thing you go ask me what is poverty? Didn't we just hear that 40% of the public servants cannot afford a living wage and that some of them have children? And those are people earning more than a living wage, can't afford. So, are they living in poverty? Let's get it straight. Let's face the truth. Let's put the pride aside. People are struggling. Whatever I failed to do back in 20-whatever, whatever Honourable Taylor failed to do, whatever Honourable Meade failed to do in his time, whatever anybody failed to do, people don't really care about that much right now. What they care about is that this Assembly of Members find a way, as mentioned, as one Montserrat, to resolve the issues before us. And that is what this Resolution is about.

Madam Speaker, failure to respond. And I know the British Government has heard the appeals over the many years. While many people are dissing whatever's said, they've been listening. They know that failure to address the urgent basic needs of the vulnerable, working poor, pensioners, and the public and private sector could be considered a breach of the acknowledged internationally binding legal obligation to ensure to the best of their ability. So, whether we are a Crown dependency or whether we are a British Overseas Territory makes no difference. In fact, their responsibilities to us are of a greater order than we ourselves claim. And that is words coming from them themselves. I can quote them to you. I've said it. They have said that to us. Their responsibility is of a greater order than what is being suggested in the White Paper or by the British Government Ministers. So,

I'm not saying, and as many people say, we must go hand and be... I'm not into any begging, Madam Speaker. But let's face the truth. 60% of our salaries in here comes from the British Government. Whatever you work, 60% of the cost of our recurrent budget, of hospital operations, of police operations, road maintenance, 60% comes from Britain. So, what we're talking about is either we're going to find the support elsewhere, or we find as much support as we can get from where we're already getting support, especially survival. And survival is at stake when it comes to Montserrat and growing the economy is the greatest challenge. So, if a little more help would mean that you're empowered to survive, to get out of dependency, then let's be clear. I know that the Honourable Premier is going to have to make a case to the UK Government for assistance. And what I want to assure him is that the Opposition will be in full support, and that is what this Resolution is about today. That all of us unite in sending a message that there needs to be an urgent action in addressing inflation. I was looking at the news the other day in the US, and they're rating Trump because he boasted that he's going to handle inflation, right? And I think it's a 30-something percent approval against a 60-something percent disapproval of his handling. They are monitored. And like I said, I'm not blaming this government. You've just been in for a few months. But if we continue on the course we're going, and do not act urgently. Listen, what I'm talking about here needed to have been done before COVID, especially since COVID. The Ukraine war came and made it worse. And I appreciate the fact that there's some things going to be done about duty and all of that. But listen, let us not fool ourselves. The people of Montserrat want to work.

That's why many of us are here. We would have gone. There are places to go to sit down. People want to work, and they want to be able to support themselves and their family properly. Millions of dollars' worth of projects have been sitting down just for maintaining buildings for years. That would have made a huge difference for people. Maintenance of government buildings. Yes. So, these are the things. I'm not just asking for an increase in monies or income, but there has to be some increase, and as I said, I'm pretty sure that there's going to be some hard work in this direction, Madam Speaker. So, I'm going to allow others to speak. I believe I've been very clear, and I look forward to hearing the comments of others. Thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honorable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Madam Speaker, esteemed colleagues, I rise today to speak in strong support of the resolution calling for the case to be made with Cabinet approval for an increase in support to the incomes of salaries of our most vulnerable citizens, the working poor, our pensioners, public servants, and others in both the public and private sector who are struggling silently every day. In addition to the Resolution as presented by the Honorable Romeo, I acknowledge two supporting documents. One, situational analysis of social welfare in Montserrat. Two, Government of Montserrat salary review. Madam Speaker, let us look at some facts. Despite being members of CARICOM and OECS, we do not benefit from most of the international grants that they benefit from. And that's facts, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we are not allowed or given the authority or the leverage to borrow to address some of these issues. And there are even restrictions on who can invest in Montserrat, especially based on some of their nationalities and alignment internationally. Madam Speaker, over the past eight years, public servants have received three, as in one, two, three, three percent salary increases. That's barely one percent every year during the same period. Both public servants and private sector workers have been hit with increase in social security contributions, plus high inflation, effectively reducing their take-home pay rather than increasing it.

This is not just an economic oversight, Madam Speaker. It's a social injustice, and I'm sure you would agree. In the private sector, the only movement for workers in the private sector has been a small, tiny bump in the tax-free income threshold from 15,000 to 18,000, a mere 3,000 difference. Madam Speaker, this is a mere 250 a year in extra disposable income in all private sector workers receive. That's all they received. Nowhere near enough to shield workers from the relentless increase in cost of living. What is that cost, may I ask, Madam Speaker? According to government compensation report, the cost of living in Montserrat as of 2021 is \$2,485 per month, and as I stated in 2021. Yet the proposed maximum minimum wage, which by the way I understand and remember and heard the Honourable Deputy Premier

stating that they will bring to the House shortly, is just \$12.5 per hour, which translates to about \$2,000 per month, still below the threshold needed to live with dignity, and I stress dignity. Madam Speaker, meanwhile, some of our pensioners who would have toiled to build the foundations of this beautiful island receive less than this minimum, and government assistance, Madam Speaker, is capped at just \$900 per month, a staggering 64% below what it costs to survive in this country.

Madam Speaker, these are not my figures. These are facts. We must ask ourselves, what kind of society do we want to be? One where the people who build this country, who serve this country, and who still strive every day to contribute, are forced to live below the poverty line? Our economic environment is shrinking, Madam Speaker. May I remind us all, jobs are scarce. Madam Speaker, I don't need to remind you that even though they are big projects, many of the workers are being imported, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, not for a permanent population, but for a short time, then they go, they leave. The population is declining, Madam Speaker, and opportunities for a second income are virtually non-existent for most people. Madam Speaker, we promised economic stimulation through major capital projects, yet the results are bitterly disappointing. In the case of the port project, more than 60 million has already been spent, Madam Speaker, which represents more than half the budgeted funds. Yet construction has ground to a halt, plagued by financial and technical setbacks. And to make matters worse, an additional \$30 million, Madam Speaker, was gifted to this same company, despite missing deadlines and little value for money to show. What message does this send to our people, to our taxpayers, to our youth?

Madam Speaker, an extra \$13 million relief fund was negotiated for an overseas company, or overseas-based company, that is not meeting deadlines. Why not then also negotiate funds, Madam Speaker, to provide relief for our own local businesses, our workers, our pensioners, and our vulnerable people? Is it that we only give gifts, Madam Speaker, and large gifts to overseas-based companies that are not performing? Are we rewarding incompetence, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, the hospital construction is now on its way. And we are thankful, Madam Speaker, but then again, we have imported labour, imported equipment, imported heavy equipment, imported plant.

Madam Speaker, this can also result in a minimal local economic benefit, similar to the minimal effects the port project is having on our local economy. Madam Speaker, it is a situation that we all regret, but it's the reality, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I truly believe governments should negotiate additional funding for projects with partial funding, instead of diverting funds already secured to be used on a given project elsewhere. For example, Madam Speaker, two million pounds, Madam Speaker, equivalent of EC \$7 million, secured under the previous government, mark you, government is continuous, to build the Parliament building would have been a great stimulus to the economy had the additional funds to construct the building been negotiated. In terms of the retrofitting of this cultural centre, in which I stand and speak today, Madam Speaker, I must ask, what is the scope of works to be done on the cultural centre that will cost \$7 million? An important question. What is the range of work that will be done that will total \$7 million, Madam Speaker? And by that, I must ask, Madam Speaker, what else will be done with that total, Madam Speaker, seeing that we will not have works, scope of works, that will total to 7 million, two million pounds, do the calculation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, negotiating additional funds for both the Parliament building and the retrofitting of the cultural centre, at this time, would have a greater effect on economic impact, because you would have two running projects, Madam Speaker, possibly several contractors and several workers working, Madam Speaker. And Madam Speaker, as you note, I'm not just asking for the increase, Madam Speaker, I'm suggesting approaches in which we would have been able to stimulate the economy in terms of more construction, more projects, and more jobs. Meanwhile, local businesses are gasping for breath. They are experiencing declining sales, facing high freight costs, punishing, Madam Speaker, punishing customs duties, and are burdened by an outdated, unfriendly Companies Act, for which many are advocating the amendment of this Act, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, some are reducing hours and contemplating even closing their doors completely. It's a sad state of affairs, Madam Speaker, but it is our reality. And yet, governments have not acted with the urgency this crisis demands. Many businesses are not in a position to service loans at this time. If you don't believe me, do your own research. And would be

better served by grants, of course, you can set the conditions of the grant to ensure that it's effective and meaningful, and that it will result in the businesses surviving. Madam Speaker, I may ask at this point, why did the administration switch from the promises of grants and now switch to loans, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, as I said before, loans, many businesses cannot service at this time.

Madam Speaker, the social and economic risk of inaction. If there is no action, Madam Speaker, and action immediately, we will see increased poverty, social instability, and immigration of skilled workers, which could further erode Montserrat's fragile economic base. One Minister in this sitting earlier alluded to the population growth of Montserrat being minus 32. Madam Speaker, while I am not sure if that is correct, if that is so, Madam Speaker, is this a result of the economic hardship being faced by people in Montserrat? That's an important question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, without immediate action, the island risks a worsening spiral of low demand, failing businesses. The viability of businesses, Madam Speaker, will go out through the door, Madam Speaker, and it will result in reduced government revenue, revenue that we so need. Madam Speaker, colleagues, this is a defining moment. You must choose whether you continue to ignore the silent suffering of our people or act boldly to correct this course. I call on government, with the support of Parliament and the Opposition, of course, to make the case that allow it to, one, commit to a meaningful and immediate increase in public sector salaries and pensions, two, adjust the minimum wage to meet or exceed the real cost of living, expand social assistance for those below the poverty line, provide targeted relief and reform for private businesses and private sector workers, to preserve jobs and economic activity, and demand transparency and accountability in capital projects pending, ensuring these investments benefit the people of Montserrat, not just overseas-based contractors.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, in light of the failure to deliver our port as scheduled, inadequate oversight, monitoring, and report mechanisms, will the Honourable Ministers responsible for the port and hospital projects commit to quarterly public progress reports to this Parliament detailing milestones, achievements, spending to date, and delays encountered? We cannot build a resilient Montserrat on the backs

of underpaid workers, overburdened pensioners, and poor implementation of projects and project overruns. Madam Speaker, let us take this step, not just as policymakers, but as stewards of the people's trust. Madam Speaker, I urge every member of this House to support this very important and critical resolution for fairness, for dignity, and for the future of our beloved island. I thank you.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Mulcare.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the principle that no government should ignore the needs of its vulnerable citizens. I also rise in firm defence of a fundamental principle that a fair day's work should afford a decent standard of living. That principle is under threat, and we, as a House, must respond with action, not delay. I commend my colleague, Honourable Donaldson-Romeo, for bringing this matter to the fore. And I must say the time is now. This Resolution speaks directly to the truth we can no longer avoid: that many of our people are being left behind. The elderly and the disabled who have insufficient income, living on less than half the cost of basic nutrition, and are left to depend on their children or families, who cannot assist them as they are already stretched with their own mortgages or loans, children to send to school, among other responsibilities. So, our elderly are left to suffer.

Also, the low-income worker who cannot even command a mortgage, as their salaries are too low to allow them, as they say, to own a piece of Montserrat. The single mother juggling jobs but still not able to fully support her children to ensure that they get nutritious meals, a good education or a proper roof over their heads. Public servants who keep the engine of government running, earning below what is needed to survive. You heard me earlier trying to hint to the Honourable Minister of Health to use her medical profession to support the hospital drivers and the teachers who are receiving \$50 for travel allowance. But she missed the point, didn't realize that I had to spell it out. She was more concerned about looking at it as an insult and giving false information that I'm the head of service, and I allow them to still

receive this \$50 instead of giving support and joining the fight to have this changed. Drivers, nurses, radiologists, other health workers, teachers, and other education officials take note. I am not a medical doctor, but I am a trade unionist at heart, now in active politics, who is committed and will fight and advocate for better conditions for workers. We also have private sector workers, especially women and youth, unable to make ends meet. The retired civil servants whose pension cannot cover groceries, their medical bills, or house insurance. The business owners who are struggling to survive but are unable to do so because their overhead costs, such as rent, supplies, maintenance, and salaries, far outweigh their income or profits. And a rising cost of living that is not matched by a rise in support.

These are not just statistics, Madam Speaker. These are our neighbours, our family members, our constituents, our employers, because they voted for us to make their lives better.

This is not a new crisis, Madam Speaker. It is a long-brewing injustice, but it is a crisis that has now reached breaking point. And the Resolution rightly calls on government and our partners to act with urgency and compassion. We desperately need a housing project or other construction projects that will stimulate the economy to benefit our citizens. Madam Speaker, it is in this context that I especially wish to underscore the need for a cost-of-living allowance to be introduced as part of any immediate and medium-term solution. Let's face the facts. The cost of living in Montserrat is no longer creeping; it is galloping. The cost of living is outpacing salaries and welfare; therefore, a cost-of-living allowance is urgently needed. The 2021 Office of the Deputy Governor Compensation Report confirms that a single person now needs \$2,485 per month just to cover basic costs. Meanwhile, we have workers, public and private, and pensioners earning under \$2,000 per month and welfare recipients living on \$900 per month. Is this just? Is this sustainable? Is this who we want to be? We cannot pretend that 3% every few years is keeping pace with rising food prices, rent, electricity, fuel, childcare, and medicine. It is not, Madam Speaker.

Yet coupled with the fact that cooking gas is still \$225 for a 100lb cylinder, \$45.10 for 20lb, and \$49.60 for a 22lb, prices which government has promised to fix but still has not addressed, up to this day.

That is why a cost-of-living allowance tied to actual inflation and reviewed annually is essential. This measure is not new. It is practiced widely in the region and in the UK, where many of our citizens have fled in search of relief. Why should we wait for Montserratians and citizens to migrate to enjoy a decent quality of life when we can and must implement the same mechanisms here? The Opposition conducts a moving clinic on a Friday, visiting constituents and businesses. Many of them are considering migration. Some have already decided to leave. Businesses are on the brink of closing. Many haven't had a single sale for months. Rents are outstanding and lots of suffering is visible within the community. Yet we constantly hear government speak of loans instead of grants to help the people of Montserrat.

Madam Speaker, a COLA is not a gift. It's an equalizer. It ensures that wages and support mechanisms keep pace with the real cost of living. It protects not just purchasing power but dignity. Let us be clear. Failing to act on this Resolution or failing to introduce a COLA has consequences. It will push more people into poverty. It will worsen non-communicable diseases due to poor nutrition. It will further erode trust in government. And it will drive continued migration of our youth, private sector workers, nurses, teachers, police officers, fire officers, security officers, other public servants, caregivers, and skilled workers. Face it. Our best and brightest are leaving. Not because they want to, but because Montserrat has stopped offering them a viable path to sustainability. It will continue to drain our Montserrat.

Madam Speaker, this is not just a social crisis. It is an economic and demographic crisis. If we lose our workforce, our youth, what kind of development are we planning for? We are at risk of becoming a place where only the very rich or the very vulnerable remain. That is not the vision of a sustainable Montserrat. And that is the pathway to complete decline. We cannot build a resilient Montserrat if our foundation, which is our people, is crumbling beneath the weight of unmet needs. Madam Speaker, we must honour our obligation, both legal and moral. Under the UN Charter, Chapter 11, Articles 73 and 74, Montserrat is classified as a non-self-governing territory. Under the UN Nation System, under Chapter 11 of the UN Charter, the UK, as the administering power, has explicit responsibilities. Article 73 of the UN Charter states, Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government, recognise the prin-

ciple that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount. They have accepted as a sacred trust the obligation to ensure political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants, promote constructive measures of development, and ensure just treatment and protection of the inhabitants.

The UK Government's own commitments and obligations have been reaffirmed also in the UK-wide papers on Overseas Territories, especially the 2012 Paper. The Overseas Territories, Security, Success, and Sustainability states, we have a broad responsibility to ensure the security and good governance of the territories and to ensure that they meet the obligations under international law. The UK Government, through its FCDO, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, routinely confirms that it is ultimately responsible for the economic and social development of the Overseas Territories where self-governance is not absolute. The UN Decolonization Resolutions, such as General Assembly Resolution 1514-15, Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and subsequent resolutions urging the administering powers, like the UK, to improve living conditions and promote development.

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UK has obligations under these treaties and is expected to act consistently with their principles in its territories. Therefore, Madam Speaker, the United Kingdom, as the administering power under Chapter 11 of the United Nations Charter, has accepted as a sacred trust the obligation to ensure to the utmost our political, economic, and social advancement. These obligations have been echoed in multiple UN resolutions, international human rights frameworks, and the UK's own White Papers. The duty to promote constructive development measures in Montserrat is not just moral, it is international and constitutional. It is therefore our duty as Montserratian legislators not to wait to be told what is owed to our people, but to demand what is just, debate what is fair, and deliver what is needed. This resolution calls for consensus and sends a clear signal that we can no longer treat poverty as a side issue; it must become a central issue.

Madam Speaker, today this Honourable House is presented with a rare opportunity, a Resolution grounded in evidence, guided by compassion, and framed by the Constitution. I stand in solidarity with Hon-

ourable Romeo, not only because of the proposal he has tabled, but because I, too, have walked among our people and seen the quiet desperation that fills too many lives and homes. To the government side, I say, support this Resolution, not because it is politically convenient, but because it is morally necessary. Use it as a mandate to revisit budget priorities, consult with our UK partners, and to plan for a just and inclusive future for our Montserrat. Madam Speaker, the question before us is not whether we can do more, but whether we will. We must ask ourselves, what kind of Montserrat do we want to build? Is it one where our elderly feel abandoned? Where our workers live in silent stress? Where poverty is tolerated as normal? Or one where every citizen, and I say again, every citizen, regardless of age, status, or income, is afforded the basic security to live with dignity? That is the Montserrat I believe in. That is the Montserrat this Resolution calls us to shape. I commend the Resolution to this Honourable House and urge that it falls on unanimous support. Let us not merely speak for the vulnerable; let us act for them. Let us make this a one-Montserrat unanimous vote and show the people of Montserrat that we really care, that the government hears them, sees them, and will not leave them behind. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Education and Health.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Although I firmly stand on this side with my government, I would like to applaud the efforts of Honourable Romeo, who continues his attempts to represent the poor and the underprivileged in his work in Parliament. And I applaud him for addressing the obvious issue of depopulation. I feel for him in this move as I too once sat in Opposition begging for the rights and well-being of people on this island, in particular those who were downpressed or were vulnerable. For me personally, the Montserrat situation is as such that there is obviously limited money, and as I'm sure you've seen over the last several months, we on this side have been arguing for many quite expensive projects that are putting pressures on the government's purse. It is obviously an issue that we support, and we hope that the Human Resources Department, when they have finished

their work with, when the government has finished its work with getting accurate figures about how people are really surviving on this island, that we can increase salaries and we can increase pensions. These are obviously things close to the heart of this government.

I believe a parallel approach would be the obvious, to ensure that we're doing all that we can to promote a good economy on this island, a viable economy on this island, where people can thrive. The same UK that we are begging, has people sleeping on the streets. Get off at a London train station and you will see them. You will walk past them and walk over them. Funnily enough, in my trip to Guernsey last week, a country that is financially secure due to its progress in the financial services sector, a country that is self-sufficient, there is nobody sleeping on the streets. Yes, they have housing issues. There are issues. But the extremes of poverty were not seen. So, my approach would be, while waiting on government to address the issues of raising salaries on Montserrat, that we do all that we can as a government to promote foreign direct investment. And that we do the obvious, like supporting festivals, which will bring people into Montserrat, who will bring with them their money, so the average man in his second job and the average woman in her second job can earn this extra income to contribute to the household.

Having said all of that, I defer my decision and my approach to this in full to the government, which I am a part of, and to our Honourable Premier, whom we have the utmost respect for. To my dear cousin in Opposition, Madam Speaker, the sourness and the bitterness that I have seen today, I suggest she get some help with dealing with it. And I would like to ask her Leader in Opposition to support her in her future attempts at being part of this one-Montserrat project. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Honourable, let's stick to the topic.

The Minister for Education, Health and Social Services said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I addressed the topic.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honorable Minister of Agriculture.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have listened to the Opposition Members today, and this is just my very humble submission, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I just so happen to have read the situational analysis of social welfare in Montserrat, that documentation. And Madam Speaker, there are certain recommendations in that document. One of those recommendations is actually a stepped approach to getting social welfare payments up to 80% of the cost of the healthy food basket. Madam Speaker, this is a phased approach to the increase of social welfare payments and should have actually been implemented starting in 2014, up to 2016. Madam Speaker, that document also states that around that same time period, it was recommended that EC 300,000 be provided in grants to NGOs to deliver community-based services to the population to improve its social welfare program. Madam Speaker, this just so happens to be the same years the Honorable Gentleman moving the motion was Premier.

Madam Speaker, we like to say that government is continuous, so I must at this point say that if this change was initiated back then, then the increase being suggested here today would not be as substantial and would be easier for us as a new government to implement, considering the financial constraints. Madam Speaker, I'm going to stay away from laying any further blame specifically on that matter. But what I was really hoping that the Honorable Gentleman would have done today was present the roadblocks that he would have faced towards implementing this change. Madam Speaker, I see myself as the most junior member, not just of age, but the most junior member of this Assembly, as this is my first elected term. And what I would like to see is that as many of us support the advancement of Montserrat by also taking ownership of decisions which we have made or have not made and being open and honest with this Assembly about the difficulties that we have faced so that we all may learn and not repeat the mistakes of the past, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, for me, this honest dialogue will provide additional stepping stones so we don't always start from the starting block, and it would streamline the pro-

cess for us to achieve national outcomes, which I think we all seek to achieve for the betterment of our people.

Madam Speaker, in ending, we would have noted that the Honorable Lewis mentioned minimum wage as part of the solution. But Madam Speaker, for me, solutions don't just lie in minimum wages. I think the real question that we should ask ourselves here today is, why does such a large percentage of our population have to live or operate at any minimum wage? Madam Speaker, when we ask ourselves the question of what kind of Montserrat we want to build, then the Opposition should understand why this government is also looking at bringing value to our people through skills, education, and creating an investment culture so that many of our citizens will work and operate at a higher value, creating more sustainable sources of income, Madam Speaker. And I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

Anyone else? I recognise the Honourable Parliamentary Representative Buffonge.

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in full support of the motion or the spirit of the motion as intended by the Honourable Member of the Opposition, Donaldson Romeo, in seeking, as he states, and I want to be specific, consideration of an increase in support to the income and salaries of the vulnerable, the working poor, pensioners, public servants, and other affected persons in the public and private sector. Madam Speaker, in my interpretation, this pretty much covers the entire country. Madam Speaker, this motion seeks to touch the struggle that so many people in Montserrat face on a daily basis. There's no hiding that fact; it is the fact. And not just Montserrat, but across the region, across the world, this is the nature of life as it stands. Madam Speaker, a struggle to meet the rising costs of living in a small, very isolated community that is heavily burdened by inflation and global instability. This is the reality of what we face. Madam Speaker, if you were to look at inflation over the last decade, most salaries and allowances, public and private, would need to be at least

doubled just for people to keep pace and maintain a basic standard of living. This, again, is the raw truth; there's no denying it.

But I want to be equally honest, Madam Speaker. While I fully support the spirit or the intention of this motion, I cannot be naive. It's been stated several times before that government does not have a magic wand, not this government, not the previous government, or even the last administration, Madam Speaker. We cannot simply snap our fingers; we cannot simply request out of thin air the support that we need, especially in a fragile economy that is still dependent on aid to meet our basic needs. That, Madam Speaker, is fact. Madam Speaker, the previous administration would have done some work in terms of addressing the needs of persons from salaries, from changing tax bands, from paying like. There has been a lot of work that has been done in the past by several administrations to try to cushion the impact of the cost of living. While it might not be enough, the continuation of government will see that something else is done.

Madam Speaker, I am still looking for the 1%, we promised seven, and we gave six. But not only a matter of good governments and face, every job counts, and people are still looking for it. But Madam Speaker, beyond that 1%, I want to speak to a deeper truth. We have relied on aid for far too long in this country. Every budget, we speak at every sitting of parliament about our aid partners, about their responsibility to Montserrat, what they should do, and what they must fund. And now, after my six years of being in this Honourable House, year after year, the same narrative paints us as being very passive, very recipient people waiting. Madam Speaker, whether we call it first call, whether we call it preventing collapse, whether we call it reasonable needs, and let's face it, reasonable is very subjective. In places like Ukraine and Israel, reasonable might mean peace. Madam Speaker, in other countries of the Caribbean and other places, reasonable might mean clean, safe drinking water. Madam Speaker, we might continue to say that Britain has their obligations to us, has that responsibility. And I want to note that I heard Honourable Mulcare in reference to UN and that she did say urge, not force. Madam Speaker, we can demand it, we can argue for it, and we will and continue to make the case after case, but in the end, we cannot take it. We cannot go down to, I think, number 10 down the street, or wherever that is, and

take it from the UK's Treasury. Madam Speaker, in the end, they must agree.

Sometimes before, we would have done some things and they came back and took it back from us because we did not have their permission. Honourable Romeo understand what that means. Let us not pretend that this is new. It has been for decades, Madam Speaker. Government after government after government have made the case, put forward the evidence, and appeal for what our people need, over and over again. And I remember at one budget, I think the FS might agree, that our new spend request, in other words, what we're asking for on top of what we normally get, was in excess of \$23 million. Reasonable needs as far as the government and the country would have agreed to at that time, \$23 million. And still, we must wait as that final decision does not rest with the Government of Montserrat. Madam Speaker, this is the dilemma we face when we're in aid dependency, or granting aid as it's called.

Madam Speaker, I want to deposit here today that what Montserrat really needs, and what we must work to, is to build an economy that generates our own revenue. Until we get to that point where we can provide our own safety nets, provide the ability, or the environment that uplifts our people, that and only then would be when we can truly take care of our, as they are called, I really hate these phrases, working poors, and pensioners, and our civil servants, every man, or woman, or child for that matter, under the struggling weight of this rising cost of living and with limited opportunity. Madam Speaker, this is the kind of future I would love to see for this country. This is the kind of future I would love to see for every resident, I don't care where they're from. Once you reside here, this is the kind of future we want to build for our children and their children. I think we need to also agree in this House, this Honourable House, that our intention is to get us out of grant-in-aid. Our ultimate goal, as far as I'm concerned, is to get us to a point where we don't need to ask for permission to do some simple things, like looking after our vulnerable. We cannot continue, year after year, shaping our national budget around what somebody else might do. Making our case to technicians, and then they go away, and then they have to lobby their own Ministers to help us. Madam Speaker, quite frankly, and if anybody could tell me otherwise, I would agree. Which country has aid made that country rich? Anyone,

any one of you. Which country has been able to be made rich after being in aid? What it does is create dependency. What it does is create a nation with limited sovereignty, for want of a better word. So, if we're really serious, as I know the Honourable Member is, if we're really serious about doing better for our pensioners, about doing better for our civil servants, our working poor, as they call them, we must move beyond motions and continue to do the work that is necessary. Accessing the true cost of running our country. What does this improved or extra allowance mean for budgetary aid? What does it mean for our revenue?

Madam Speaker, how much money will it actually take to adequately pay salaries, adequately compensate our pensioners, and still support our health, our education, maintain infrastructure, Honourable Member of BUILT, she understands, and still protect our most vulnerable, which is the obligation of government. Contribute to our private sector and allowing them to live and hire people, which is the obligation of government, Madam Speaker. And mind you, and I must add and must deposit and must say, without increasing the taxes on our people. It's one thing to say yes, do more, and we want to do more, all of us, Honorable Buffonge and Osborne, wants to do more. Each administration in the past have tried their best with the limited funds. But how do you do that, Madam Speaker, without increasing the already burdened person that we're referring to in our private sector, in our civil service?

Madam Speaker, I come from an era of the last administration so I know for a fact that a lot has been done to cushion, and I've said that before. No need to go down that road from tax brackets and getting rid of lower salary scales, food vouchers, and paying electricity bills. Government after government have tried to cushion these impacts, some of which are not sustainable. When we're talking about salaries, this will be recurrent, not a one-off grant to pay utility bill. So how do you maintain that over and over and over for years to come, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, I know for a fact that this government is working on some solutions, including the amount of freight that is applied to duty, as was stated before in one of the answers that were given. Madam Speaker, I know for a fact that we're looking to reduce building materials. These are ways in which government is trying. And out of, I don't know if I should say it here, Premier and I would

have had a discussion briefly, but out of my last COTED meeting, widening the basket of goods that we consider essential and making a case for the CET across CARICOM to be dropped, to encourage or to allow persons to be able to buy more for less. Madam Speaker, these are all things that have been done and will be done to increase, oh, sorry, to ease the pressure on the persons.

Madam Speaker, also, we cannot be naive. We have to be paying attention to what's happening in the world regarding war and the implications that will come as a result of the cost of living changes that will come as a result of these crises. It's not getting any easier. More and more persons are finding it very hard and difficult to meet their basic needs. The truth is, if we are honest, Madam Speaker, this would require a radical shift in how we think and how we operate and move away from simply being a consuming people towards producing. It means cleaning out some of the planting boxes that I've given to you some years ago and start planting something in your backyard. It means being proactive as a people. It means pushing ourselves, pushing government to be innovative, to be productive. And bold. Bold as the people of Burkina Faso and Ibrahim Chowdhury. With relations, maybe we should leave that for now. Madam Speaker, our education system, Honourable Doc, you have your work cut out for you.

Madam Speaker, we have to continue to train our children to become more than just workers. Going through the system to get your degrees and then to become a worker. We have to train them to be entrepreneurs, producers, thinkers. And as a result, they will become better leaders when our time has passed. If we keep teaching them to wait, what are we doing for the generation that will wait? This cannot continue. Madam Speaker, so yes, I support the motion. I support the intention of the motion. I support the people of Montserrat and anywhere that we could ease their suffering, Madam Speaker, I will support. But I also bring a challenge to this House. Let us stop relying on first call Honourable Romeo. Let us stop relying on foreign aid as the salvation to our people. Yes, the UK must play their part. I know it was a famous Premier that once said, and I'm paraphrasing here, if they don't give me what I need, I will seek to get it elsewhere.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let us begin to craft a new vision for the people of Montserrat. One that's rooted in economic resilience. One

that's rooted in innovation, in dignity for our people. Because if we're serious about salary increases and other benefits and support, not just this year, because it's one thing to find the money because we have some extra at the port, but for years to come, then we must be serious about building the kind of Montserrat where we decide for ourselves how we live as a people. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity and I rest.

Madam Speaker said:

Any other presentations? Okay, if not, we will have to ask... I recognise the Honorable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Thank you. Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to, like Dr. Buffonge, Honourable Dr. Buffonge, applaud Honourable Romeo for the years that he has spent advocating for the vulnerable and the poor or the less fortunate in this, our land of Montserrat. Madam Speaker, I have heard all the presentations made here today. And like my Honourable Colleagues in Parliament, these scenarios are not foreign to me. They're not new to me. I have seen many of these very scenarios growing up as a little girl, as a young woman. And today, in this, my land, I have seen the struggle and the pain of men unable to take care of their families. I have seen the struggle and the pain of single women trying to live a moral life, yet forced to adopt practices which undoubtedly burden their consciences. I have seen the struggle of our workers in the public service and in the private sector struggling before the end of the week or month end. Scenarios, Madam Speaker, contrary to our vision of a healthy, wholesome, and prosperous Montserrat. People are struggling.

Our pensioners who have contributed to building this nation are struggling on their small pensions. Madam Speaker, experience has taught me that often a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary may wish to advance a law, a policy, a program, but is unable to do so because he or she does not have the support of other Ministers or Cabinet or the Minister of Finance, especially. But Madam Speaker, I believe today that I stand with a leader who has promised and who has demonstrated that he will do along with the others of us and the Madam Speaker of

the Members of Parliament to improve the lives and condition of our people. Today, I can advance what experience has shown that when persons come over to government, aspersions are cast on the other side. But today, I will not berate nor accuse or throw disparaging remarks or missiles at any of our Honourable Members to do what we are asked to do today. Experience has taught me that we all have the good of the people at heart and today for me and tomorrow for you. Rather, I welcome the support of the Honourable Members to improve the lives of our vulnerable, our poor, our less fortunate by increasing monthly allowances paid to them, pensions, salary increases, you name it. If I had it today as Minister Crenston would normally say we would have done it. I also believe that where there are two adults living in a home that each individual should be given their own financial assistance because when one gets the full and the other allotted the half or the family, financial abuse can occur, the needs are different and the sense of dignity and independence is on the mind.

We cannot ignore the high cost of living. An experience has taught me as much as the rain falls on the just and the unjust and the sun shines on the just and the unjust, we are all affected differently. The high cost of living affects all, some more than others. Madam Speaker, Honourable Mulcare has said it's the moral thing to do and so I will take the moral approach today because the Bible teaches us that anyone who gives to the poor the less fortunate that God owes them guaranteed blessings. It further teaches us not only from an individual perspective but from a government that if we see others in need and do nothing we would have failed whether it's the sick, clothing or providing for the poor. And I've already said before in this very House that Madam Theresa, Mother Theresa, said a society is judged by how they treat the less fortunate. Madam Speaker, those of us who stand or sit in this House today are not deliberately withholding anything from our people. Those of us who have sat with our UK representatives have argued, have advanced the need to assist our people, and the evidence and the experience have also taught me that the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance was the leader who increased the living allowance for the vulnerable, and I think that would have been in 2011, 14? Honourable Romeo says 2014. Alright, whichever the month, the year, and so Madam Speaker, today I am also fully aware and we have agreed that we are going to undertake an enhanced poverty assessment of the entire country, Madam Speaker.

We would have heard some figures from the years and those are not to be dismissed because it truly shows us how our salaries, pensions have been eroded and so as I continue with my colleagues at this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, we will advance and we will support the need to address the situations which plague our country at this time. I also want us to be mindful of the geopolitical situation, the wars, and how these may affect our people. And so, Madam Speaker, when I entered this Honourable House under a United Alliance Government, I am not going to go through all we have outlined in our manifesto. We are fully aware that things do not happen overnight but there are a number, Madam Speaker, of programs that we have outlined for both short-term and long-term to advance our people. And we have advanced to the people of Montserrat that we would be a caring government restoring vision and competence and trustworthiness to our people.

I still believe in this manifesto and the commitment we made to the people of Montserrat. I stand in support of the Premier and Leader of Finance because he has shown himself and his actions as Minister of Finance previously and even now. We have already seen twin otter service between St. Marten and Montserrat. That is laying the foundation, Madam Speaker, for increased tourism to bring money into this country and to provide jobs. We have already seen the test flights to offer more access to our country. We have already seen, Madam Speaker, the work of Honorable Buffonge and her team in advancing medical care for our people. And I know together we will continue to work to alleviate the situations that confront our people who are in need of help. Madam Speaker, we are already embarking, and I know it will be asked and what happened to the private contractors to provide work. We are already discussing that, Madam Speaker, in terms of our road works, infrastructure development, other contracts in order to rehabilitate our government buildings, our ghauts to make life better, and to create other jobs for our people.

Madam Speaker, that is not to say we will not advance the cause to our UK partners for the needs that have been laid out here today. And so as a government and as this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, I stand committed with my colleagues to do all I can. And Madam Speaker, over the weekend, a young man, the teacher shared with me,

and a young man who answered a question and it plagued me all weekend and even more today, that in addressing a question with regards to social ills, that young man said in his answer, he said, Madam Speaker, mothers selling their bodies in order to take care of their children. Madam Speaker, can I therefore walk away and turn a blind eye and not advance that which is best for my people? So, Madam Speaker, there's a saying, promise little and deliver much. So, I do not come with a fancy speech today. And that is in no way meant to cast an aspersion. I'm just saying it as I feel it today. That with the Social Services Department, we will seek to advance and to help our safety nets, offering to the vulnerable. And this, Madam Speaker, is whether you are Montserratian or not. And I'm talking about safety nets, like one off that they have been given.

We will continue, Madam Speaker, to look out for the best. We are seeking to advance our energy project, which will assist in reducing the fuel surcharge. And often the remark is made about MUL, MUL will transition, MUL will transition, because we do have a green energy ambition. And Madam Speaker, in that way, we will reduce some of the costs that we're talking about today, that families are forced. And so, I end by saying, you see my little document, all scratched up, all marked up. It's next to me, like my Bible. And I will urge and continue to urge all the Members of this government to let us seek to deliver on that which is written in here and the other aspirations that we have for our country. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address this Honourable House.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'll try to be brief, relatively brief. And I say relatively. I do understand the plight of poor people. I come from poor people. I used to sweep the streets in Salem to help my step-grandfather. So, I understand. I understand not having indoor plumbing and eight of you sleeping in a two-little-room house. I understand it. But Madam Speaker, we need to recognise not only where we have come from, but where we're going. In 2006-ish,

the Honourable John Osborne increased the social welfare to \$600. During the administration in which I had the pleasure to serve between 2009 to 2014, we had the pleasure of increasing the social welfare by 50%, 50% from \$600 to \$900. The Honourable Gentleman speaks of studies done in 2014 and prior, which spoke to providing increased payments. But Madam Speaker, who was the Premier from 2014 to 2019? Why was not there even one penny increase in social welfare payments? It's all well and good to come here and say, yes, I'm looking out for the poor. And we need to fight the British Government so that we can get more money. But let's look at something, and I just looked across and I realized there's a gentleman in the House. I'm not going to call his name. We were in Dubai in 2014. And we were at the stage where we were securing funding for a major port funded by Dubai Ports. We lost the election in 2014. We lost it. But had we had that port, there would have been non-tax revenue coming to Government of Montserrat. There would have been employment generated. What used to be Piper's Pond would have been built out, would have created additional employment possibilities. Potato Hill would have been built. But alas, Madam Speaker, the administration, which was led by the person who moved this motion, had a Minister who said, I don't want any Arabs here.

Employment generation, Madam Speaker, we need to empower people by creating employment possibilities. And that is what we are about. I can empathize with Dr. Buffonge. Forgive me for saying this, but she came into the office of the Premier one day, very sad and almost brought to tears. She needed to get four machines, four dialysis machines. Should we provide those dialysis machines, or should we give persons an uplift in social welfare payments? After the aid mission, the Ministry of Education got less than \$500,000 for a range of projects, which she wanted to implement, but she did not have the data to support it. We are currently, and I've said this privately to the Honourable Gentleman, we're doing the country, sorry, the enhanced poverty assessment, which is a very intrusive, very intrusive process where the statistics department will be going out and seeking information from persons and households to make a determination of what the poverty levels are likely to be. And as I said to him, I can guarantee him that at the end of that country poverty assessment, that there will be an uplift in the welfare payments because it will be supported by the FCDO, but we need to have the data, the data in order to sup-

port those requests. So, all of this gallerying around that, oh yes, people are poor and they need help. Yes, we understand that. And I understand it more than most. Most of my salary goes to people who come to me and ask for help. Many of them, I really don't have the extra money, but I can't tell them that.

But Madam Speaker, we have to know when people are genuine. It is all well and good to jump up and prance and say, Hallelujah, praise the Lord. But you're known by the deeds. I would like for him, for example, to come with me in Davy Hill and let us try to figure out how the gentleman who is now 80 years old to get his windows fixed. I'm not going to stop. I'm just simply saying we need in this country to stop giving the impression that we are so interested in poor people when by our own actions we're not supporting them. And I can say more, but I will not go along that line. I just wanted to raise that to draw an inference. Tomorrow, my team will be taking a look at a major private sector investment initiative. I understand that Honourable Lewis is saying we are restricted from whence we can get private sector investment. I never saw that within our constitution. The British Government has never told me that. Perhaps they have told him and others that, they've never told me that.

Because we have to look at foreign direct investment coming into Montserrat to create the employment possibilities to generate an economy, so that our people don't have to be coming to government to say we are the working poor when we can create employment possibilities and further non-tax income to the Government of Montserrat. Very important. We hear about the price of gas and the price of food, and the price of everything else. As I've indicated earlier, we're looking at, and the Cabinet Paper is being prepared, reducing the tariff component on all imported goods all, by at least 50 percent. And that will have a significant impact on the cost, provided the merchants pass it on to the consumers. But we will monitor that.

Madam Speaker, this Resolution predated you as Speaker, predated us, because it caused a friction with the former Speaker of the House, who did not allow the Paper. When you approached me on it, I said, allow the gentleman his day in the Legislative Assembly. Let us debate the Resolution. And in fact, we have. And some important points have been made. But Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Gen-

tleman, if he's being honest and truthful to himself, will recognise that no amount of talking you do inside here is going to convince the FCDO that they will give us more money to do anything until we have the data to back it up. Okay? That is what is happening. Another point of interest is that Montserrat, who is getting 68% of its recurrent budget in this fiscal period, is being graduated from official development assistance by the same British Government who is providing us with that aid. Graduated, because they're saying we're too rich. We now will fall under the Treasury, which requires even more, even more data to justify any expenditure which we're likely to make in ensuing years. Just coming from Brasilia, CDB, where we again were to be graduated from the BNTF. We had to argue that Montserrat cannot be graduated not when they're getting or relying on 68% of their recurrent revenue from aid directly from the British Government, along with others.

We were fortunately successful to be able to have the BNTF program continued to the tune of about three million dollars. Let us, as a Parliament, Madam Speaker, not seek one-upmanship where four and a half years or thereabouts from election time. Let us try to work together. Let us try to have the discussions, and as I've said and I've written to the Leader of the Opposition to indicate, let us have regular meetings so that we can discuss issues pertinent to the population and to the needs of the people of Montserrat. If you did not get it, just let me know and I'll resend.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Sir, I said we still have to debate in the House with all the respect.

The Premier said:

Yes, I have no problem with that. If you put on your mic, you have to stand up. So, Madam Speaker, yes, we all recognise that we have to look out for the poor. We have to look out and see how we can increase pensions, and this then brings me to another point. Since in the early 1990s, I've been fighting with the British Government that persons who retire to Montserrat with a UK pension should have their pension linked to the UK pension increases so that they do not, they are not at a disadvantage having returned to a British Overseas Terri-

tory. And I've said to the Minister, this will remain on the agenda in every meeting I come to, I'm going to raise it because it has to be resolved. And that will take care of some of our pensioners from the UK who have worked many years and are still needing social welfare assistance in Montserrat, when in fact it should not be necessary, had they been upgraded, along with those who remained resident in the United Kingdom. These are critical issues, but we have to work together on them.

And in closing, Madam Speaker, I want to commend the team with whom I've had the pleasure to work for the past few months. And I'll start at the very far end, the Honourable Dwayne Hixon. He has come a very long way, and the experience which he has gathered, acting as a minister and travelling on behalf of the Minister and representing the government and people of Montserrat, is good for the future. The Honourable Crenston Buffonge has been representing the Office of the Premier and the Premier himself at a range of regional meetings as the Minister with responsibility for those areas. Honourable Ingrid Buffonge she has just come back from a stint as an election observer, a wonderful job, and she continues to fight for education and health. Honourable John Osborne represented the Premier at the recent OECS authority meeting with distinction. Honourable Hector will be representing the Premier at the CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in Jamaica in July. This is giving the team an opportunity to make me a relic of the past so that they can take this team and this country forward, gaining the experience and the guidance of a dinosaur like myself. But one of the things which we will promise is that whatever we do, we will do in the interest of the people of this country.

There are things which have been promised, which have taken a bit longer to deliver, but they will be delivered, will be delivered. So, for example, the tax on overtime pay, that Paper will soon be before Cabinet, where your tax on overtime pay will be denominated at the rate at which you're paying your regular taxes. So, if your tax rate is 5%, then your overtime pay will be 5%. The tax on your overtime pay will be 5%. If your tax rate is 10%, then your tax rate will be 10% on your overtime pay, as against the 30% which ensues at the moment. It's my right to speak. I did not disturb you when you were speaking, Madam. So, Madam Speaker, we say all of this to say we have a Resolution before us. The Opposition cannot, in its own right, seek to create a

Resolution committing government to an expenditure which has not gone through the process and what we're suggesting to them is that with the poverty assessment, kindly encourage persons to participate fully when the statistics department and the enumerators come around to have the discussion. It's going to be a long process. I think it's going to take maybe two hours in consultations thereabouts, but it is for your own good, so that when they come to get the information, they have the information, so that we can deal with the issue of increasing the benefits to those who need the benefits increased. So, Madam Speaker, with that brief intervention, I thank you and I yield.

Madam Speaker said:

That's all of our interventions; we'll ask the mover of the motion to wrap up. I recognise the Honourable Romeo, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd start it's important to clear up issues that are raised. I was hoping that we didn't have to go through this and I could tell you all something if it wasn't for the lady on my right and the gentleman further on my right I would have canceled this Resolution today because I knew this Resolution might turn out to be a Don Romeo thing but I just want to let the public know and this House know this is not about Don Romeo, what he did or did not do. This is a simple Resolution calling on this entire House to support calling on government and the relevant departments to discuss an urgent adjustment to support the vulnerable pensioners and especially working poor and their dependence in the public and private sector and let me tell you all something if you want to label me as the welfare Premier, you want to label me as the man who argued for poor people, I am proud. Because let me tell you something, if we do not address the circumstances of the poor, there'll be no Montserrat. Telling you all today, and Honourable Dorsette is a woman of the Word. The reason why we're here today is because we failed to take care of the poor, especially at the beginning of this crisis, just want you all to know that. The bible says if you don't take care of the poor and the weak, it will drive you out of your country. And let me tell you further, you see the gentleman called Burkino Faso that you mentioned, the reason why he's having success is because his focus is on the poor

and the weak, and then he got the wisdom, that's where he got the wisdom. It doesn't come from him; the wisdom was given to him to be able to represent his people so effectively. So, let me warn you all, if you want the wisdom, let us get this thing passed and approved and pushed and that this becomes something that we all stand for, not Don Romeo.

The reason and let me go carefully, Honourable Premier. I want to thank you for encouraging the Speaker to allow this Resolution to come forward. Thank you very much, but that should not be your responsibility. The Speaker should have made the decision based on the fact that we have a right to have an Opposition to pass a Resolution according to our constitution, and I believe that is why she made the decision, not because you told her. She made the decision because she assessed the situation and came to that conclusion. And let me go a little further, unfortunately, and I must say this because I did not want to come in here to create any division. I wanted this to be a united thing, and that is why I nearly cancelled this whole thing. I nearly did. Because Madam Speaker had this Resolution come to this House last year, I guarantee you that there would have been a change in remuneration and income for the very people we're mentioning right here. You know why? When a government and an Opposition unite on a matter, the power of unity is incredible. And this I agree with you, Honourable Premier, it will happen. It will happen in a few months. It will happen and hopefully soon, but will it be adequate? And let me say this, Honourable Premier, if you really want to make a change that's going to make a serious dent, you need the support of the Opposition taking this matter forward. Don't just think that by giving the statistics is going to happen, don't think that by doing it you just you're just going to get what you want. You know better than that.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Crenston, oh, no, let me let me finish. I have to be very careful here because I don't want to start a war. In defending myself, I have to be very careful because it's being thrown at me. One of the things we need to clear up, Madam Speaker, in this Honourable House is that we were not graduated by the British. The OECD countries that allow the British to use ODA aid are imperative; they can't give us aid unless the OECD countries agree. So, a group of countries agreed, along with Britain, to provide 0.0% of their GDP to the poor world. That's number one. They wanted to stay in

ODA aid. They do not want it to be transferred to competing with the internal budget. They don't. But guess what? No matter where they place us, whether ODA or an internal side, the legal obligation to us remains the same. As a matter of fact, I would argue that by being included internally, we may have another advantage that we didn't think of. You know why? It gives you a voice within Parliament in the UK. You can demand it if you wish, and I will support you. Furthermore, it may entitle us to the levelling of funds. So, if you don't have ODA, there's a levelling of funds to level up how you treat people within Britain. So, if we're internal level up with us, too. It's from the levelling of funds that the Isles of Scilly got 48 million pounds offered to them for ferries last year. Who mentioned somebody mentioned it, so technically, no matter where you place us, the argument is the same.

Honourable Speaker. I want to go say another thing, too. If you ever think that because you're gonna come up with statistics, you're gonna get what you want. Me, sorry for you, sorry for us, Madam Speaker, pardon me. Statistics are not going to give us anything. And Honourable Crenston, you said that we can't force anybody to give us what we need, and he's correct. Our job is to influence, sir, to influence not to force; that's for the military, is to influence. And so just for the record, so he understands what influence means and whether we have to depend on statistics, I need to relate to this House that even with statistics, even with a business case for the ferry for the fibre optic. Guess what happened? The British still wanted to kill the project. There was a business case, it was approved by Cabinet along with a joint group in the UK to go for the business case and the next thing I'm told it's gonna be squashed because we have to get further approval. And Madam Speaker, I must say this because we need to know this. You know what I did? I called the director and I said to him, Director, I'm going to the UN next week. This is the one good thing we have. Good news, I have for the UN. So please do what you have to do to make me say, in other words, within two days, it was signed off on. They had the statistics. They made the business case themselves, yet it was being blocked. Go and read the business case, fantastic, all the figures, all the facts, everything to make the case. They agreed down to the end. But guess what? I still had to influence them to simply do what they agreed. They should have let us go for lunch. You know, imagine, imagine. So, the facts and the statistics don't let anybody fool you.

You need the support of the Opposition. We need to act as one government, and we need stats too.

But think about it. You think if the United Kingdom they were facing the situation discussion we're having here, that anything will hold them up from addressing it the next day. They'll be out of office in no time. So, please understand this Resolution is simply about us uniting over a matter that is urgent, that's all it is; for us to say we agree or not agree. Don't get confused. Let me read it again. This Honourable House now calls on the government and relevant departments, without imposing any obligation whatsoever on them, without the approval of the Cabinet under section 70 of the Montserrat Constitution Order, to discuss an urgent adjustment to support the vulnerable pensioners, especially the working poor, their dependents and the public and private sector. That's all it is. It's not about Don Romeo. And I've been warned, Don, you keep letting people fire licks at you, and you don't deal with it. I'm not going to deal with all that today, but I'm going to call on my brother to come public and clear his name because my name is being dragged into this Davy Hill matter, and I'm telling him to come and clear his name before I do it. And the Honourable Premier needs to stop coming in here and confusing people over a matter that has nothing to do with what we're dealing with. So, I'm just simply saying that I've...

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Madam Speaker, Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Let him come to the public...

Madam Speaker said:

Excuse me, Honourable Romeo. What is your Point of Order, sir?

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Madam Speaker, while we understand the Member's passion for this subject, I don't believe Standing Orders allow for him to debate his

own Resolution. I believe, as far as I'm aware, the Standing Orders allow for the presentation and Members to contribute, and then it goes on from there, but the Honourable Member is seemingly debating his Bill or his Resolution entirely over again.

Madam Speaker said:

He was given the opportunity to wrap up, so I hope that's what he's doing, wrapping up.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Premier said something, nobody stopped him, I didn't stop him. I'm responding to what he says. I'm allowed to respond to anything said on the other side, clarify, reinforce anything said on the other side.

Madam Speaker said:

Right. So please wrap up. That's what I've given you the opportunity to do.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I am, but his Point of Order is not-his point of order is not in order.

Madam Speaker said:

Let us not bother with the cross-talk, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

So, Madam Speaker, if Honourable Crenston, I'm just simply responding to what was said. I'm responding to you and others. Okay, good, so let me go further, we're talking about influencing. It was said that when I came into office that I had the opportunity to increase welfare, and that is true. And I will share with you the very letter that I received from the Secretary of State when we made a decision to increase the salaries for public servants by 3%, 3%. And this is what it said, so you understand, yes, Honourable Osborne said it's important

to explain why things didn't happen. So that's what I'm responding to. And this is what the Honourable, what's her name, Priti Patel, said: I'm very disappointed to learn about your recent announcement of the Government of Montserrat's decision to award a 3% salary increase, increasing to 10% at the lowest paid to all civil servants. It is particularly disappointing that this decision was taken after the UK Government had made clear that we did not support your government's proposal to pay such an increase when the matter raised when the matter was raised in February and despite the thorough and protracted negotiations with the Department of International Development that's DFID at the time held with the Government of Montserrat between December and April on its budget preparations. So, she was telling me she was disappointed. We made the decision without their approval. That's how the first 3% increase was made. She went on to say, this is especially true at a time when Montserrat has other pressing needs and the context of a continuing 1% public sector pay cap in the UK. She's saying we only have a 1% cap. How could you give 3%? So, please understand the sort of fight that had to be made.

We made the decision, it was approved in this House, and it was not by blocked by the British Government. After they withdrew \$1.54 million in protest for our decision. Otherwise, the civil servants would have never gotten an increase. And I'm happy to trade 1.54 million for an increase that cost 1.54 million that has continued until this day. That is the atmosphere I was fighting in and not only that, remember that the 600 was raised to 900 and I commend the Honourable Premier before elections in 2024 for making that decision but it was under considerable pressure that it was done and I'm not trying to point to myself please what I'm trying to say is because the Opposition took a strong position then and he became in agreement. It was done. Yes, you made a decision to raise it. We pushed for it, so there was agreement, and let me make the point. The point is very simple, and that's why I tell you know, you guys want me to respond, I will respond. And that is why this debate is very important. Had this Resolution been tabled a year ago, there would have been an increase, I guarantee you, not just that, simply because everybody on this side was in support of it. There was no objection. Nobody calling people mendicants. Nobody's saying that we don't need aid. Nobody's saying that we begging. They would have had the support of the Opposition, and the British Government respects unity on something that makes sense and

that is morally right and strong. Please don't forget that. They respect it. So today our unity, however simple it may seem, will go a long way.

Madam Speaker, this may not be the forum, but I'm going to mention it on the record. Honourable Crenston spoke about being bold like Burkina Faso. I totally agree, and let me tell you something, Burkina Faso has foreign forces behind him to support him in his moves. He's not doing it all alone. He's wise to use his wealth and resources and to drive out those who are robbing them but he needs support. He needed some strong support to do what he's doing. But guess what Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker this House can be as bold as the leader Burkina Faso. Please don't forget me saying this on the record. We are in a position to be just as bold as this young man. Why? Because of what my Honourable Member stood and read a while ago. One day we're going to realize that in 2019 the basis was set for the Government of Montserrat to stand like Burkina Faso and demand change and it still remains for us to use to stand together. That is why Honourable Premier I'm, not just recommending that we agree on this Resolution, which I think you already agree on. You're already acting on it. Honourable Premier, once you get those stats and you get your facts together, I'm urging you, please work with the Opposition before you go back to the British Government. And I want to even suggest that you come back to this House with whatever conclusion you have, whatever proposal you have, whatever business case you put together, and let us unite so that a Resolution goes out of this House supporting your request to the British Government so they know that this entire Parliament is behind you. And I want you to understand that that is what this Resolution is about.

If you want a one-Montserrat situation, try it. We will go out as you said and promote and encourage people to get the facts in for the government. We're going to do what you ask us to do. We're going to continue to agitate on the radio and do what we have to do but my request to you sir is that when you come to the conclusion if you want to involve us it's up to you but when you come to the conclusion and you have that case, please bring it with the Opposition bring it to the Opposition, don't let us meet every week or month as you say for nothing. Bring it back to us, let us stand in this House in unity over what you put forward, and it better be substantial because when you

have a 21% inflation that's compounding over 15 years, what sort of increase is needed? If the living wage is \$2485, please understand the level of change that's needed to do what Honourable Mulcare said: keep our civil servants, keep our young people and allow people to live in decency. We're talking about a significant injection significant change. So that is why I'm saying to you today, make sure that when you do come to a conclusion, don't depend on the facts that you put forward don't depend, come, unite with us and let us take it forward. If nothing else I said makes sense today, I hope that one does.

Now I heard the Honourable Crenston say let's forget about first call, and you know, talk about the UN thing. And I hate to have to even speak about this, and the reason why I speak is because of the lady on my right who said stood and read it, the power of agreement. She read it. Please understand, sir, that when we graduate out of ODA aid, there's no more first call to ODA aid; it's over. Correct? It's over. We have a few more months until next year to get money from ODA aid, but mark my word, the change the Honourable Premier mentions of negotiating with the British Government for internal funds will require an understanding of our rights, which have nothing to do with first call. Nothing. Forget first call, throw it out the door because there's no more. It's all about whether we understand what Honourable Mulcare read our rights under UN law, and again, we can't force them to do anything. We have to influence them to do something. That is what we have to do. But once again, I'm being very careful here, very careful because I already told my colleague on my right, I keep mentioning that, there's going to be a change with how I operate going forward. There's going to have to be a change in many ways. No, no, no, no,

Madam Speaker said:

Please don't interrupt the speaker, please.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker, I'm referring to what....

Madam Speaker said:

No, no, I'm not...

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

I understand. So, he understands, and I will speak with the Honourable Leader. He understands what I'm saying. I said it to him before, so he knows I'm talking about what happened this morning. We need to move forward in an understanding that we are in a position in this House to make a significant difference in saving our economy and growing it out of dependency. We can make, we are the deciding factor, not the British Government; we are to the extent where if the British Government does not help, help will come from somewhere else, but it has to start with us understanding our rights under international law. We have to understand it.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to stop there. There are many other things to comment on, and it's best that I stop there and simply appeal to this House that this decision today is about simply making a stand for the weak, for those who don't get the salaries we get. And that is all it's about. I guess we'll have a division so it'll be clear where we stand each of us on this matter, and I'm going to sit at this point.

Madam Speaker said:

Thank you, Honourable Members. But before we proceed, I would like to clarify something for the benefit of this House and as well as for those who might be listening lest they go away with the wrong impression. Seeking clarification on a matter is quite different from seeking permission to allow the presentation of the motion to move this Resolution. The Speaker, being the sole judge of the admissibility, made the decision on her own. It was not with the influence or the instructions of the Premier. Okay, I just needed to make that clear lest anyone goes away with the wrong impression, okay. We'll move on. So, it has been moved and seconded that the Resolution, "Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners, Public Servants and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sector" should be approved.

The question was put

Madam Speaker said:

Well, I heard more no than ayes. There were more ayes than nays, so I would take it that..

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Madam Speaker. Point of Order, Madam Speaker. Can we ask for division then to be clear?

Madam Speaker said:

Okay, fair enough. The division does come after the question has been put, so it's in order. So, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk conducted the division by individually calling upon each Honourable Member to declare their vote.

The Premier said:

Nay.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Nay.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Nay.

At approximately 2:30 p.m., the Honourable Minister of Health and Education withdrew from the Assembly and did not resume her seat. Accordingly, when called upon during the division, the Honourable Premier exercised the vote on her behalf.

The Premier said:

I'll vote for her, nay

Mr. Dwayne Hixon said:

Nay.

Mr. Crenston Buffonge said:

Aye.

The Attorney General said:

Nay.

The Financial Secretary (Ag) said:

Nay.

Mr. Paul Lewis said:

Aye.

Mrs. Nyota Mulcare said:

Aye.

Mr. Donaldson Romeo said:

Aye.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay, could you just give us the tally, please? So how many nays? Six?

The Clerk said:

Sorry, 6 nays, 4 ayes, a total of 10 persons voted.

Madam Speaker said:

Okay, so it would appear that the nays outnumber the ayes, so the “Resolution for the Consideration of an Increase in Support to the Income and Salaries of the Vulnerable, the Working Poor, Pensioners,

Public Servants and Other Affected Persons in the Public and Private Sector” has not been approved by this Honourable House.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker said:

Is someone going to move for the adjournment? I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier.

The Minister for BUILT said:

Madam Speaker, I ask that this Honourable House be adjourned sine die, if it pleases you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker said:

I recognise the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

The Minister for Agriculture, Land and the Environment said:

Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion that this Honourable House be adjourned sine die.

Madam Speaker said:

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

The question was put and carried.

Madam Speaker said:

This Honourable House now stands adjourned sine die

The assembly adjourned at approximately 3:08 p.m.

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Dated this _____ day of _____ 2025

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly