

BELIZE

No. HR 29/1/11

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, 15th September 2015

10:14 A.M.

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Pursuant to the directions of Mr. Speaker on the 11th September 2015, the House met on Tuesday, 15th September 2015, in the National Assembly Chamber, Belmopan, at 10:14 A.M.

Members Present:

The Hon. Michael Peyrefitte, Speaker
The Hon. Dean O. Barrow (Queen's Square), Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development
The Hon. Gaspar Vega (Orange Walk North), Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture
The Hon. Erwin R. Contreras (Cayo West), Minister of Trade, Investment Promotion, Private Sector Development and Consumer Protection
The Hon. Michael Finnegan (Mesopotamia), Minister of Housing and Urban Development
The Hon. Patrick J. Faber (Collet), Minister of Education, Youth and Sports
The Hon. Manuel Heredia Jr. (Belize Rural South), Minister of Tourism and Culture
The Hon. Anthony Martinez (Port Loyola), Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation
The Hon. John Saldivar (Belmopan), Minister of National Security
The Hon. Wilfred P. Elrington (Pickstock), Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Pablo S. Marin (Corozal Bay), Minister of Health
The Hon. Rene Montero (Cayo Central), Minister of Works and Transport
The Hon. Edmond G. Castro (Belize Rural North), Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Deputy Speaker
The Hon. Santino Castillo (Caribbean Shores), Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
The Hon. Hugo Patt (Corozal North), Minister of State in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture
The Hon. Herman Longworth (Albert), Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
The Hon. Mark King (Lake Independence), Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation
The Hon. Dr. Omar Figueroa (Cayo North), Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister
The Hon. Elvin Penner (Cayo North East)
The Hon. Francis Fonseca (Freetown), Leader of the Opposition
The Rt. Hon. Said Musa (Fort George)
The Hon. John Briceño (Orange Walk Central)

The Hon. Florencio Marin Jr. (Corozal South East)
 The Hon. Michael Espat (Toledo East)
 The Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia (Belize Rural Central)
 The Hon. Rodwell Ferguson (Stann Creek West)
 The Hon. Oscar Requena (Toledo West)

The Hon. Jose Mai (Orange Walk South)
 The Hon. Ramiro Ramirez (Corozal South West)

Members Absent:

The Hon. Frank Mena (Dangriga), Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security
 The Hon. Julius Espat (Cayo South)
 The Hon. Marco Tulio Mendez (Orange Walk East)

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRAYERS by Pastor Conrad Arzu.

PAPER

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table Sessional Paper No. HR276A/1/11 - Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Sessional Paper No. HR276A/1/11 is referred to the Committee of Supply for examination, consideration and report.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEE

HON. J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Reports from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on Sessional Papers No. HR277/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.3) Motion, 2015; No. HR278/1/11 -Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.4) Motion, 2015; No. HR279/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.5) Motion, 2015; No. HR280/1/11 -Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.6) Motion, 2015; No. HR281/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.7) Motion, 2015; No. HR282/1/11 -Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.8) Motion, 2015; No. HR283/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.9) Motion, 2015; No. HR284/1/11 -Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Write-Off (No.10) Motion, 2015; and No. HR285/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Reports are ordered to lie on the Table.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, with the consent of the House, I propose to vary the order of the Sitting today to allow the Introduction of Bills at item 12 on the order paper to be taken after the Committee of Supply at item 14. This is to allow the introduction of the General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2015/2016) (No.3) Bill, 2015, which, according to Standing Orders 71 of the House, cannot be introduced until the proposals have been approved by the Committee of Supply and agreed to by the House.

I therefore propose that the House resolve into a Committee of Supply under item "Government Business.

Is it the wish of the Honourable Members that the order be varied as suggested?

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. Government Business

I COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into a Committee of Supply under the Chairmanship of the Honourable Prime Minister as Minister of Finance. In accordance with Standing Order 65, the deliberations of this Committee shall not take place in public. I must therefore ask the visitors in the galleries to leave. They may, of course, return after the Committee of Supply has concluded its business.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

MR. SPEAKER left the Chair.

[In the Committee]

The Chairman in the Chair.

1. Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016.

The Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic

Development moved:

That the Committee approves the proposals set out in Sessional Paper No. HR276A/1/11 referred to the Committee of Supply.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman left the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

II MOTIONS

1. Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016 Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - THAT the Committee of Supply has met and approved the proposals set out in the Sessional Paper No. HR276A/1/11 - Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016. I now seek the indulgence of the House to agree with the proposals approved by the Committee of Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the House agrees with the proposal approved by the Committee of Supply for Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016 Motion, 2015.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

2. Write-off (No.3) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$60,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$60,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

3. Write-off (No.4) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and

Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$25,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$25,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

4. Write-off (No.5) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$29,977.16 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$29,977.16 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

5. Write-off (No.6) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$5,771.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$5,771.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

6. Write-off (No.7) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$19,687.50 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$19,687.50 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

7. Write-off (No.8) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$7,634.90 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$7,634.90 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

8. Write-off (No.9) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$9,465.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$9,465.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

9. Write-off (No.10) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with your permission not to repeat the recitals, I move, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$9,300.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$9,300.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2015/2016) (No.3) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a Bill for an Act to appropriate further sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending thirty-first day of March, two thousand and sixteen.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to appropriate further sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending on the thirty-first day of March, two thousand and sixteen, be read a first time and a second time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a first and second time.

2. Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a Bill for an Act to provide for the vesting in Heritage Bank Ltd. of the business in Belize of FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

In introducing the Bill, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me very quickly to say that this is in order to provide for the easy completion of the transfer of FirstCaribbean International Bank Limited's business in Belize through Heritage Bank. As I said publicly yesterday, and as Members will already have discovered from reading the provisions of the Bill, the idea is to pass this but not to appoint a commencement date until a number of things would have happened, including, we hope and believe, the settlement of outstanding matters between the management of FirstCaribbean and the staff of FirstCaribbean.

This Bill has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Bill is referred to the Finance and Economic Development Committee for examination, consideration and report.

Bill read a first time.

3. Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a Bill for an Act to facilitate the implementation of the terms of a deed of settlement and compromise between the Government, Dunkeld International Investment Ltd, British Caribbean Bank Limited and The Trustees of the BTL Employees Trust arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Telemedia Limited and rights under certain loans and security arrangements made by The British Caribbean Bank Limited; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Please allow me, Mr. Speaker, to make a brief statement in preliminary explanation of the contents and purposes of this Bill. The House and, indeed, the nation will recollect the circumstances in telecommunications that existed in the year 2009 when, in fact, the Government took the decision to nationalize BTL. At that time, BTL was majority owned by interests that were undoubtedly hostile to competition. BTL had been, in fact, given a so-called Accommodation

Agreement that allowed them to propagate and, in fact, implement that hostility to competition. There was an effective monopoly of telecom services. Small Belizean shareholders in BTL which had been privatized by the UDP Administration of Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel, small Belizean shareholders had been bought out, sort of sold out, at the time by the administration then in office. Dividends were being exported, and the company was openly defiant of the authority of the PUC, defiant, as I say again, Mr. Speaker, because they had been given a so-called agreement made completely in secret, that allowed them to thumb their nose at the PUC and to say, “We will not be regulated by the PUC”, the PUC being, of course, the independent regulatory authority that is set up under law in this country to hold the balance even between essential service providers and the consumers in this country.

In addition, the backbone of BTL at that time was being nakedly used to subsidize SMART, and that is because, as it turned out, the person, the individual that we considered to be the moving force in BTL was also the moving force behind a majority of the shareholding in SMART. All this contributed to a situation, Mr. Speaker, in which there was disorder in this vital public utility, disorder sewed by years of sweetheart deals dating back to June 1993, when George Cadle Price, on the instance and the urging of Ralph Fonseca, appointed Michael Ashcroft as a permitted person. The UDP had arranged things in such a way that only the Government could have been a permitted person so as to be able to own more than a 25%-shareholding in the company, always wanting to ensure that, while there would have been not a problem with a foreign investor, that investor would be limited to a minority position. Just before an election the then PUP Administration and Prime Minister Price, in fact, made a declaration, did an Instrument of Appointment so that Lord Ashcroft could become a permitted person.

That apart there was the 1998 Intelco hustle, the Prosser fiasco, and the scandalous buyback arrangement entered into by the Government at that time after it had procured Ashcroft to sell to Prosser. Prosser couldn't pay. Ashcroft was then asked to buy back but under terms and conditions that were scandalous.

This Settlement, Mr. Speaker, provides us with the opportunity to remind the voters that the background to our nationalization, the facts that existed at the time we nationalized, the circumstances that have been created by the People's United Party Administration represented one of the most sordid chapters in the history of PUP governance. (Applause) Order had to be restored by this Administration which pursued the nationalization on the following grounds:

1. Philosophical: it was, is, and remains our conviction that key public utilities in this country must be owned in the majority by the people of Belize; (Applause)
2. Economic: these services should be available at the most efficient prices to the Belizean consumers; and
3. Financial: we were motivated by the consideration that, to the extent possible, ownership and management of that particular public utility should be for the benefit of Belizean shareholders and professionals.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the financial elements of this Settlement are

straightforward. Government is paying down the equivalent of the NERA valuation. When we acquired, in fact, we always knew that we would have to pay compensation, the question always was, what is the level of that compensation? What was the true value of the company at the time we acquired it? We had a valuation which was arrived at based on the analysis and the advice of a company that we retained from the UK known as NERA. Of course, the previous owners had a different valuation, and that was part of the joining of issue. What we are paying down now is the equivalent of the NERA valuation, and that amounts to \$68.4 million. That is the NERA valuation for the entirety of the shareholding, and that is what we are paying. We continue to say then that our position is that nothing more ought to be due above and beyond that NERA valuation of \$68.4 million.

However, because there has been arbitration to determine objectively, by an impartial tribunal, what was the value of the company at the time of acquisition, whether it is our \$68.4 million or whether it is what the previous owners claim, we recognize that the arbitration panel charged with making that determination may end up providing for an award that is in excess of the NERA valuation. We have therefore secured favourable terms to pay any balance that that arbitration award might, in fact, record over and above NERA so that we would pay 50% of that balance upon the award being made, and the rest of it, the other 50%, after 12 months.

The third element of the Settlement is that any portion of the arbitration panel's award above NERA that is based on any element having to do with the Accommodation Agreement which we have condemned from the start and which we continue to say was one of the most pernicious, that's Minister Finnegan's word, pernicious and perfidious act, dastardly, ever perpetrated on the people of this country, any portion of the award made by the tribunal above NERA that is based on the Accommodation Agreement must be reserved and spent in Belize on projects beneficial to the Belizean people. (Applause) In other words, practically speaking we will not concede a penny of any Accommodation Agreement related claim, even where such amounts are awarded. The amounts go to Dunkeld and to the Trust but those amounts will have to be spent on the people of this country by way of projects that the Government will identify which identification must, of course, also be supported by the Trust. So when we said that we are not going to pay to anyone, any claimant, any portion of the Accommodation Agreement, any award based on the Accommodation Agreement, this represents a promise made and a promise kept.

What we are also doing is stopping the 16% interest clock from running on the BCB Loan. That was the loan made by British Caribbean Bank to BTL before we acquired, which loan we also had to seize because the entire assets of BTL were pledged against that loan. So when we acquired the company, if we didn't acquire the loan, the bank would have been able to wind up the company and seize the assets. So we had to acquire the BCB Loan as well. Now we've done everything to try to argue that that loan was illegal and therefore ought not to be repaid to the bank. But we have lost that argument even though we thought we were well advised. We have lost that argument in the courts, at least in one court here before the arbitrators and before a court in Washington DC. In that context we feel that in terms of the Settlement, in the overall scheme of the Settlement, the right decision is to pay off this obligation that has, in fact, been issued by the Arbitration Tribunal. We make the point again that while Government pays in the

first instance it is by way of a bridging loan because that loan is ultimately the liability of BTL, not of the Government of Belize. So at no point can the payment of that loan under the award made ever cost the Belizean taxpayers a single penny, not a red cent. Indeed, BTL is already contributing \$25 million towards the Settlement of that amount.

Government pays no cost for all the litigation that ended up in front of the CCJ for which a decision was pending at the time we reach the Settlement. We pay no cost. We pay no damages for all the years that we have kept the company and made money off the company. And we think that as well to be a major negotiating achievement. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say this much more. Even if the arbitration panel comes down somewhere at a sort of midpoint between our NERA valuation and the other side's valuation, that would be looking at something like \$5.85 per share. We already, shortly after we acquired the company, were able to sell shares for \$5.00. So that would be perfectly manageable, if the arbitration panel decided to give an award in that region. There's a proven market already at \$5.00, and we can always sell more shares because remember, while all this was done on the basis of our philosophical conviction that the people need to own the majority of BTL, there is such a huge excess over the 51% that we can sell additional shares, and we plan to do that. Now that the company is ours, once and for all, we plan to sell more shares to the Belizean public but as well we do not at all exclude the possibility of bringing in a minority strategic investor to help BTL going forward in terms of technology, transfer and capital.

Now this means that Government has finally, legally, attained majority Belizean ownership of this vital utility without incurring any additional public debt, a stunning achievement when the PUP, other GOB opponents, the rating agencies and the IFIs had all predicted new debt to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. (Applause) There is a simple accounting/financial argument for why this Administration has been confident all along that acquiring these shares would not be a financial burden on the Belizean people. That is that the acquired shares would ultimately pay for themselves. If GOB acquired the value of the shares which is based on the dividend flow/asset values, then the very flow of those dividends, the value of the assets would pay for the shares over time. But what has actually happened is even better. The share price proved now in the case of BEL, and we believe this will be the same in the case of BTL, has actually gone up since acquisition. But we pay at the price at the time of acquisition. So we have secured majority public ownership and can pay for those shares and would now be securing additional value over and above what is to be paid to the former owners. Public ownership and Belizean management have both been vindicated.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has the recommendation of the Cabinet. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Bill is referred to the Finance and Economic Development Committee for examination, consideration and report.

Bill read a first time.

HON. D. BRROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and

Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Orders 49(1), I move that the Bill be taken though all its stages forthwith.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the next stages of the Bill be taken forthwith.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

One second, Clerk, Prime Minister, you had a similar Motion for all the readings of the Bill to be taken forthwith regarding the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill. Do you abandon that Motion? Or do you wish to proceed with that Motion?

HON. D. BRROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): No, can I ask that?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

HON. D. BRROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Again, in accordance with Standing Orders 49(1), I move that the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015, be taken though all its stages forthwith.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the next stages of the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015, be taken though all its stages forthwith.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

HON. D. BRROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move that at its rising today, the House adjourn to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the House at its rising today, adjourn to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been agreed that the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015, and the Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015, pass this day.

As you know, under Standing Order No. 74, all proposed Legislation, Messages, Petitions, Motions and other matters relating to the subject mentioned under the title of each Standing Committee shall be referred by the House to such Committee for examination, consideration and report to the House.

The only logical way for this to be done, other than by suspension of the Standing Orders, is for me to suspend the Sitting to enable the Finance and Economic Development Committee to examine, consider and report to the House on the Bills.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

The Sitting is therefore suspended until the Finance and Economic Development Committee has concluded its business.

The Meeting suspended at 10:50 A.M.

The Meeting resumed at 11:16 A.M.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEE

HON. J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015, and the Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Reports are ordered to lie on the Table.

III BILLS FOR SECOND READING

1. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003, to introduce the third stage of reduction of customs duties in regards to the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the European Union; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003, to introduce the third stage of reduction of customs duties in regards to the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the European Union; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a second time.

2. Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to provide for the vesting in Heritage Bank Ltd. of the business in Belize of FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill which seeks our approval for the vesting in Heritage Bank Limited of the business in Belize of FirstCaribbean International Barbados Bank Limited. Indeed, I think, as the public is well aware, and this is a private transaction governed by transfer agreement entered into between these two parties, the two banks. Under any ordinary circumstances, Mr. Speaker, our support for such a Bill would be easily forthcoming given the importance of the banking sector to Belize's economy. But I think we certainly have a duty and an obligation, Mr. Speaker, to express some concerns that have been raised with us by the workers and their representatives in the union. FCIB closing its doors, these are not after all ordinary circumstances. FirstCaribbean International Bank closing its doors is serious business, and it impacts a lot of people, not the least of which are the employees, those who work there, their families.

It is our understanding that there are some 60 employees who, to use their words, find themselves in limbo. They find themselves facing growing uncertainty about their current status and their futures, and I think we all can appreciate what they are going through, Mr. Speaker. These are real men and women, with families, with obligations, with responsibilities. And so we, those of us who sit in this Chamber, have a special duty and a special obligation to these workers and their families, (Applause) to ensure that they are treated fairly and justly and that before we pass this Vesting Bill we at the very least get an absolute undertaking from the Honourable Prime Minister, who is the Minister of Finance, that this FirstCaribbean International Bank Belize Branch has fulfill each and every of its legal obligations to these employees, Mr. Speaker, including but not limited to the negotiation and conclusion of what they have termed their exit packages.

And I don't, Mr. Speaker, at all want to suggest that FirstCaribbean International Bank and in particular its General Manager, Mr. Glen Smith, are acting in bad fate, not at all. I don't want to suggest that at all. I know Mr. Smith to be a just man, a fair man, who I believe does, indeed, have the interest of his employees at heart. But, nevertheless, it is critically important that we speak out on this issue to ensure, to absolutely ensure that, in fact, these workers know and understand that we are here to support them and to ensure that their interest are protected and that they are treated fairly and justly. (Applause)

The Christian Workers Union has written to me on this matter, Mr. Speaker. I won't go through the letter. They have outlined very serious concerns,

not the least of which is the absolute, in their view, lack of response from the Government on this matter. They have written, as they have, I think, stated publicly, at least two letters which they have copied to the Honourable Prime Minister, to which they say they have gotten no response. They have written to the Labour Commissioner, Mr. Ivan Williams. (Now we know he was occupied for a period of weeks campaigning in Stann Creek West, and that's an entirely other matter. This man is now back as the Commissioner of Labour which is not at all comforting to many of our workers.) So they wrote to him, no response for weeks and weeks.

Finally, they got a very generic response saying, "We will meet at some point". They wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Speaker. Again, I have a copy of that letter, and essentially the Governor of the Central Bank wrote back, and I am paraphrasing his response, to say, well, really the truth is we have no obligation to the workers of FirstCaribbean International Bank, no advice, no guidance, no effort to be helpful, just a basic standard letter. We really have nothing to do with you. You are essentially on your own, paddle your own canoe. So all of these things, Mr. Speaker, all to no avail, letters copied to the Prime Minister, letters to the Governor of the Central Bank, letter to the Labour Commissioner, and really no positive response at all, which we find to be very shameful, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

We are not at all, Mr. Speaker, letting, as I said, FCIB International off the hook. We expect, as I said earlier, and we demand that they act responsibly, and I believe they will in ensuring that their employees, many of whom, Mr. Speaker, have served the bank loyally for many, many years. I understand you have employees who are caught in this limbo, who have been there for 20 plus years. You have other employees who have recently joined the bank who are there for 18 months or so or some even a little less. But these are people who many of whom have been dedicated employees of the bank, previously Barclays Bank, and who have dedicated themselves to building that institution and have given that same loyalty to FirstCaribbean International Bank. And they expect, Mr. Speaker, and they deserve to be treated fairly and reasonably in terms of their exit strategy. (Applause)

But, as I said, Mr. Speaker, we also expect and demand that our Government and our local authorities will do everything to support our local employees in achieving this objective. And for us, Mr. Speaker, that is where we are as it relates to this Bill. We certainly want an undertaking from the Minister of Finance. And I know the Prime Minister said that there will not be a commencement date for this Bill. But we certainly want it to go beyond that. We want to make sure that there is an undertaking by the Minister of Finance that these employees will be assured a fair and reasonable exit strategy before we pass this Bill. (Applause) We certainly won't get an opportunity to determine when the commencement date will be. That is a matter solely for the Prime Minister. So it's an important issue, Mr. Speaker, and we have an absolute duty and obligation to place the concerns and fears and uncertainty of these good workers on the table.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me make the point that while we talk about the plight of our workers let us not lose sight of the bigger picture. These employees are losing their jobs. They are losing their jobs because FirstCaribbean International Bank is closing its doors, closing its doors, (Applause) shutting down, and leaving Belize. That is the reality. And the question is, why, Mr.

Speaker? And the answer is loud and clear. Belize under this UDP Government, Mr. Speaker, has become a risky place to do banking. It's a risky place to do business, period, (Applause) or to do banking. It is an unprofitable place to do banking as well. FirstCaribbean International Bank, Mr. Speaker, walked away from Belize because they were losing money. First of all, you can't argue with them. "We are not making money anymore in Belize." So that's what their Directors and shareholders demand. The bottom line is "not making any more money in Belize", Mr. Speaker, unprofitable. And given the weak fundamentals of the Belizean economy, the weak foundation, and the dim outlook, Mr. Speaker, for economic growth, they simply wanted to waste no more time, and they cut their losses and walked away from Belize. That is why these workers are in the position they are today, and that is why we are here today with this Vesting Bill. (Applause)

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Belize's growing reputation, and it's critically important, this is why we are losing these correspondent banking relations, Belize's growing reputation as a violent drug trafficking, money laundering country, human trafficking country. (Applause) That is our international reputation, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) Those things and that growing reputation under this UDP Government have made it increasingly risky for international banks to do business here, Mr. Speaker. This is the reality.

So we can't support this Bill, Mr. Speaker, while these 60 workers and their families remain in the dark about their exit packages. We certainly expect and I expect that the bank will act in good fate. I know the people involved. I certainly expect that from them. But we certainly have to place on the record here in this House today our absolute deep concerns about this matter, and we demand, Mr. Speaker, this undertaking from the Honourable of Finance, the Prime Minister. Thank you, Sir. (Applause)

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, first of all, before I get into my detail, there can be no exit strategy and no benefit to the workers, if the union is not competent or do not want to sit down with FirstCaribbean to work out benefits for the workers, first of all. (Applause) But, Mr. Speaker, let me break down this whole scenario in small people's language so that the small man could understand. Mr. FirstCaribbean Bank decides, "I don't want to do anymore banking business; I want to get out of this banking business not because I am doing bad but I just want to move on to other things, and I don't want to do banking in Belize anymore." This is not the first time banks sell out their interests to other banks. Belize Bank bought out Royal Bank, etcetera, etcetera. And this happened under the PUP when all the sellout was going on. That didn't mean that the economy was doing badly, that the economy was on the ground, and that you had to be shouting, "Hallelujah, Belize is doing bad," and that you wanted to see the country doing bad. Of course, Sir, that is not the case.

Anyhow let me get back to my point. Mr. FirstCaribbean Bank, yes, he wants to get out of the business. So he decided that he will sell to Mr. Heritage, and Mr. Heritage decided now, "Well, alright, I want to buy for Mr. Royal Belize Bank". Now what the UDP Administration of Dean Barrow or the UDP Government has to do with a private transaction? If I want to sell my business to Said Musa, Dean Barrow Administration can't stop me from selling my business to Said Musa. Dean Barrow Administration has to facilitate us in conducting the transaction. Do you understand me, Sir? That is a simple thing that a small-eyed

and small-mind Jamsey should know. So how can the Government be blame because Mr. FirstCaribbean Bank wants to sell out to Mr. Heritage? What do we got to do with that? How can we interfere with that? We cannot interfere with that.

Now, when Mr. FirstCaribbean sells out to Mr. Heritage and Mr. Heritage takes over from Mr. FirstCaribbean, and when he looks at his staff members and says, "All these staff I don't want", that is Mr. Heritage's business. That has no business to do with the Dean Barrow Administration. We are not taking away any job from anybody. Mr. FirstCaribbean sells out to Mr. Heritage, and, when Mr. Heritage buys and takes over, Mr. Heritage says, "I don't want all these workers. I will cut down on the staff that I have there". So how can you turn around and blame the Barrow Administration because a private transaction went on and the final person in the transaction said, "All these employees here, I don't want them, I will take some and I will get rid of some"? How did we get into that? How are you going to blame us for that?

Now this Vesting Bill that we are passing here doesn't have anything to do with that, Sir. We are only facilitating the process. And this Vesting Bill will not come into law until certain obligations and certain things are met by the buyers, Sir. Can't you understand that? We are not taking away anybody's job. But what this lady should do is, first of all, and I won't call her an empty vessel. I won't be unfair to her, and I won't say she is a low-grade attorney. I will not do that. I will be very fair to the lady. (Applause) But the lady must do her job, as head of the union, properly and stop behaving quarrelsome, man. When you behave quarrelsome, Sir, for my 65 years of experience, you do not get things done, especially if you are representing people. If you are representing your own self and you want to be an idiot and you want to be quarrelsome, that is different because nobody else gets hurt in the process. But when you are representing people you have to give and take, you have to conduct yourself with dignity, with decorum, etcetera, Sir, so that the workers at the end of the day may benefit from your representation.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what will happen? Those union people one of these days, and I don't want to use the word "lynch" because that is such a strong word. They used to lynch us black men way back then, and that is not a good word to use. But she will run into trouble with those workers. Those workers eventually will chase her because she is not representing the workers' interest. They have an agenda there, Mr. Speaker. You know that every Belizean know that anytime this union leader gets up and talks all she talks about is Dean Barrow and that Dean Barrow this and that Dean Barrow that. I don't know what Dean Barrow did to that lady, (Applause) or why that lady doesn't like this man. But you must have done that lady something because every time that lady gets up she is disrespectful of the Prime Minister of this country, Sir. I will not say that. I will be very respectful to the lady because I think the lady has some abilities too, Sir. The lady obviously has some abilities. But she is not using the abilities that she has in the interest of the workers and in the interest of building her image. No one becomes an attorney at law and is a dunce and a fool. I don't agree with you. The lady must have some abilities and talents, Sir. But you see, Sir, I learned many years ago that when you use personalization in everything, and you personalize everything, and you begin to get petty, this is when you get carried away, Sir. So anything you want to do, you will never achieve anything. All you will achieve is noise and people laughing after you.

So, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up and in support of this Bill, I want to repeat again, Sir, so that people can understand. FirstCaribbean Bank sells to Mr. Heritage. Mr. Heritage pays to Mr. FirstCaribbean Bank for his bank that he bought from him. Mr. Heritage then looks at his employees and his staff and says, "I can't handle all the staff". But Mr. Heritage didn't say that. Mr. Heritage wants to meet to find out who he will keep and who he will take off. But I am giving you the extreme. If Mr. Heritage wants to get rid of some of his staff or get rid of all of his staff that he gets from Mr. First Caribbean, what does that have to do with us? Of course, we want to see that Mr. Heritage takes on all the staff or takes on most of the staff because no one wants to see anybody lose their job. And that is what the union must work to do. And if she cannot do it she can call me so I can help by talking to Mr. Heritage, and I could go in with them and sit down with them and convince Mr. Heritage that those people have their children, their families, their loans and their bills to meet and to take it easy. But why would you blame me? I don't have anything to do with that.

Then finally, Sir, if the Barrow Administration decides that it will get foolish and get involved in a private transaction and stop a private transaction, if the Barrow Administration tries to do that, do you know the lashing that the Chamber of Commerce will put on us? They will say, "Well, the UDP is a socialist Government. I was telling you a long time ago that Barrow is a communist, and he is a socialist. Look at this, this is a private transaction". Then when the Chamber is finished, do you know who we will hear from? We will begin to hear from the Canadian Government, the Obama Administration, and we will begin to hear from the European Union. How can a Government get involved in a private transaction and these people have their citizens who are investors in these private institutions, Sir? The Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand the gravity of the situation. Sir, on that note, thank you for my time. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for Mesopotamia purported to give us some banking history today. But in doing so he got his facts totally wrong. First of all, the sale of the Royal Bank of Canada to the Belize Bank took place under the UDP Administration. (Applause) It doesn't matter but let's get it right, if we want to talk history. The second thing is this. If you want to get into conduction, let's talk proper history, man. The second thing is this. The sale of Barclays Bank to FirstCaribbean International Bank took place, yes, under the People's United Party, under my administration then, if you like. But what is interesting about it, Mr. Speaker, about that compared to now, is that when that Vesting Act was passed at the time in 2002, I believe, there was not any concern expressed by the workers (Applause) because we satisfied them. We ensured that every single staff member of Barclays Bank was fully protected when the transfer took place. (Applause)

You see the very fact that you posed that question, Mr. Speaker, he is asking, how do you protect the staff? You protect them by meeting with the people and discussing with the principals involved to ensure that their interest is protected, to ensure that they get their pension right, to ensure that they get all their benefits, to ensure that when, for instance, you have a health insurance group scheme when should they put in their claims, when will it stop and when will be the appointed date. They need to know all these things, man. These people are Belizeans you know. (Applause) We are talking about Belizean workers. We

have a right to be involved. And this Government, if it had any sense of responsibility, if it is such a nationalistic government, should be concerned about the workers of Belize. (Applause)

There are some very little things, Mr. Speaker. I understand, for instance, FirstCaribbean Bank has a point-scheme, for instance, that if you use their credit card, I believe its visa whatever, you are allotted certain points. And when you use that card often enough these points have a value. What is going to happen to that value? Many of these staff members who have been using that card, indeed, customers, they would want to know what is going to happen to their point system that can amount to hundreds and hundreds of dollars you know. So all of these things need to be cleared up, man.

As you rightly said, Member for Mesopotamia, this is a matter of serious gravity. It is a matter, not only the fact that a bank is moving out of Belize that in itself is a serious issue but the fact that the bank is selling out, lock, stock and barrel, like the Governor used to say about my party. (Applause) You remember that part of history.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we need to understand that it's a very good example of the difference between how the People's United Party operates in a situation like this and how that party over there operates. (Applause) They are not showing any real concern for the workers of the bank. You know we get the impression sometimes that they are bank people. They can take care of themselves. Mr. Speaker, that is not so you know. These bank staff people are under vigorous management just like any other worker in any industry, and a Government that is concerned, a Government that is humanitarian concerned about the welfare of its people, should be concerned.

And it's not good enough for the Prime Minister to say that he will not announce the appointed date because he or his Government wants to ensure that other things are put in place. I look at the Bill itself. The Bill itself doesn't say anything about that you know. It doesn't give any assurance. All the Vesting Act says is that the Government will not announce the appointed day or it will not be fixed "Provided that no such day shall be appointed until such time as all the taxes, stamp duties, registration fees, and other duties and charges payable to the Government of Belize in respect of the transfer of the Undertaking from the Transferor to the Transferee have been duly paid". So this Bill is a callous demonstration of how all this Government is concerned about is to ensure it gets its taxes before the law is passed. (Applause)

Now I understand it is a standard form to use that language but all the more reason why the Prime Minister should have given this clear assurance to this House that he will not announce the appointed date until the Government is fully satisfied that the workers have been fully protected and their benefits. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, you know earlier on I saw the Member for Fort George making notes when I was talking about the BTL (Settlement) Bill, and I said to myself, "Please, dear God, I hope that man will not open his mouth with respect to BTL." (Applause) I don't feel quite as strongly about this particular Bill about which he has gotten up to speak. But, to some extent, here as

well he ought to have kept his mouth shut. I will get into the larger issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition and to some extent by him in a minute. But in conceding that passage of the Bill it does not foreclose on the opportunity for the staff at FCIB to negotiate a proper exit passage. The Member said, “Well, yes, indeed, that is because once the Bill becomes law it doesn’t actually takes effect” until I appoint a commencement date. I have said that I will not appoint a commencement date until all matters pertaining to the acquisition have been settled. And all matters include the question of the negotiations between the staff and FCIB. (Applause) But he said, “No”. He said, “Well, at least insofar as the Bill itself is concern the only requirement to postpone the appointment of a commencement date”, he says, “is found in the proviso to clause 4(5) of the Act”, which says this, “Provided that no such day shall be appointed until such time as all the taxes, stamp duties, registration fees, and other duties and charges payable to the Government of Belize in respect of the transfer of the Undertaking from the Transferor to the Transferee have been duly paid.” So he said that shows that all we are concerned about is collecting our fees and taxes. Well, that is absolutely not so. But to the extent that we are so concerned that that is one consideration we ought to be, we have to be, especially given the history of those on the other side, given his history with respect to Vesting Acts. (Applause)

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, about when he passed a Vesting Bill with respect to BTL. Do you remember when Belize BTL became Belize Telemedia and he passed a Vesting Act? And this is what he did, and I am referring to the archives from Channel 7. This is a post for May 24, 2007, which I am going to read. Channel 7 Report for that day said this. “The Universal Motion is off the table.” This was when they were getting into all sorts of rapscaillon behavior, when they were shafting the Belizean people right, left, and center, when we discovered that UHS Guarantee that he had done in secret, he and witnessed by the now Leader of the Opposition, when people were rioting, when people were threatening to bring them down by force, when they were coming to Parliament to pass a Motion to regularize what had been done with respect to that UHS Guarantee. So the news report said that Universal Regularization Motion is off the table because people were going to, you said you don’t want to use the word “lynch”, that’s what they were going to do with them.

“The Universal Motion is off the table but the BTL Vesting Act is still on the table for tomorrow’s House Meeting. That may not evoke the visceral tug of the Universal Motion but it is quite a piece of work and may trump the Chalillo Bill as the worse piece of legislation ever proffered by the Musa Administration.” (Applause) “First, it seeks to legislate against what the Supreme Court has ordered, and, second, it seeks to discard the BTL Articles and disenfranchise a thousand small Belizean shareholders who owned shares in the current BTL. But that’s only the start of it. We got our hands on this highly secretive, hurry-come-up legislation today, and trust us it is nothing nice”, Jules Vasquez reporting.

“The BTL Vesting Bill”, he goes on. The first part is the news anchor and then the News Director comes in reporting as it were from the fields. Jules Vasquez reporting, “The BTL Vesting Bill refers to a still secret business transfer agreement, dated 15th September 2006, four day before the Supreme Court judgment was issued, reinstalling Jeffrey Prosser as the Chairman. But this agreement goes right over the ruling of the Supreme Court. It will transfer all BTL’s assets, liabilities, rights, obligations, and other property into the new

company, Belize Telemedia Limited.

Normally any such transfer would attract millions of dollars in stamp duty at a rate of 5%.” But your Vesting Bill says that “this transfer shall not give rise to any taxes, stamp duty, registration fees, or other duties or charges payable to the Government of Belize. With BTL’s estimated \$250 million in assets, the estimated tax loss on stamp duty is \$12.5 million. Add to these a few more hundred thousand dollars that the new company would normally have to pay for a license. But this new company wouldn’t even have to apply for a new license from the PUC as BTL’s license will just be switched over, same for the name in the Register of Companies which by an Act of Parliament like a magic wand will make Belize Telecommunications Limited simply dissolved into Telemedia on the day after the Act is signed into law. There are several reasons why the trade unions have already keyed in on this legislation as their reason for going to Belmopan tomorrow to demonstrate.” (Applause) That is what you did by way of a Vesting Bill. You should commend us for being so completely different from you, (Applause) and for ensuring that under this Vesting Bill all taxes, stamp duties, registration fees, and other duties, will redound, will be collected by the Government for the benefit of the people of Belize. (Applause)

And, Mr. Speaker, after all that is really all the Vesting Bill is about. It is facilitating what the Member for Mesopotamia, the Minister of Housing, truly described as a private transaction, one company, one bank buying the assets of another bank. It is a transaction that, as he said, we can’t stop. If we don’t pass the Vesting Bill, that makes no difference because the purpose of the Vesting Bill is really to make sure that the laborious process of registering the transfer of each individual mortgage and other securities from FCIB to Heritage is avoided. We are just facilitating so they can do it all in one-fell soup, making sure that we don’t lose any of the tax that arises on the consequence of those transfers. So, if we decided, “No, no, we are not going to pass the Vesting Bill”, how does that help the workers? All it does is to have the two banks say, “Alright, well, then we’ll transfer the individual mortgage securities one by one at the Registry and go through the laborious process.”

So, both in terms of himself and the Leader of the Opposition, I can’t, I would like to think that it is ignorant and stupidity, ignorance in the sense of a lack of knowledge. But I know both of them enough to know that that can’t be so. This is straightforward, and they perfectly understand what is happening, all that is happening, and know that is merely this facilitation on the part of Government by law with respect to the transfer of these securities.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 (8), I move that the proceedings on the matter on the Order Paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day’s Sitting at any hour though opposed.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the proceedings on the matter on the Order Paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day’s Sitting at any hour though opposed.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it. Proceed, Prime Minister.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and

Economic Development): So, boy, don't talk on BTL you know because I have more for you. Don't talk! (Applause) Anyway, Mr. Speaker, given that that is all that is taking place here today, I suppose I understand the difficulties, the contortions of the Leader of the Opposition because what he wants to do is to try to make political capital out of this. And so he says things that are non sequiturs, that are illogical, that are internally inconsistent and contradictory. For example, he says, "I want the Government, the Minister of Finance, to demand from FirstCaribbean International Bank that they will treat with the workers fairly". Then he turns right around and says, "But I know Glenn Smith to be an exceptional fellow, and I have no doubt that they will treat with the workers fairly." So why are you making the demand? (Applause) Just so you can try to pass yourself off to the workers as some champion!

People see through this sort of thing, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken to Glenn Smith. He hasn't. I have spoken to Glenn Smith and received the assurance which he claims, that in effect he didn't have to speak to Glenn Smith to get that absolutely FCIB is never going to walk away from its obligations. While, as Glenn Smith says, he's not going to negotiate in public, he has assured me that what they will offer to the workers is by all sorts of multiples far better in terms of an exit package than what the Labour Act demands as a bare minimum. (Applause)

And, again, we need not have come to this pass with respect to the disquiet that the workers experience over their exit package because all that sort of thing is taken care of in a Collective Bargaining Agreement. Whose fault is it that the Collective Bargaining Agreement which lapse over a year and a half ago was never renegotiated, the only effort made to do so, taking place one week before the announcement of the sale of FCIB to Heritage Bank? That is the fault of the union. And it doesn't absolve us from our responsibility to sympathize with those workers. But we must point out what the facts are. In this case the fact is those workers have been absolutely, unutterably, intolerably let down by the leadership of the Christian Workers Union. (Applause)

To say that, as the Leader of the Opposition did, they wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank and the Governor of the Central Bank said, "Well, this is not my business in terms of your exit packages and your protection", and to make out that somehow the Governor of the Central Bank is inhuman, what he is saying is the truth. It is no business of the Central Bank. That is the business of the Christian Workers Union. (Applause) And the negligence and the fault of the Christian Workers Unions cannot now be laid at the door of either the Governor of the Central Bank or this Administration. Exactly, when the bank invited them to begin negotiations, they wrote back, initially Floyd Neal, and then afterward Matura, telling the people, "No, no, in effect you will hear from us when we decide". Eventually you know when they did submit proposals and the bank said, "Okay, we have our counter-proposals. So let us meet. Let us come together. Floyd, I'm not sure whether Matura was in that meeting as well, went to the meeting and, because FCIB had two of their most senior people who are here in Belize to lead the negotiations but wanted to have two from head office participate by way of video conference, Floyd walked out. He said, "No, no, you will bring those ones from head office here to talk to us face-to-face". I mean how arrogant. That is the sort of behavior of which CWU is guilty. The bank said, "Fine". That, of course, further delayed getting to the heart of the matter,

and, when the bank brought somebody from head office, do you know the union found another excuse not to attend the meeting? Now all of a sudden it is urgent because the bank is selling out and the workers need, in fact, to be reassured that the bank will not do so without looking after them.

So don't try to lay your distress, I'm talking about the union not about the workers, at Government's door. In terms, though, of the actual negotiations that are now going to take place, I don't understand, again, the Member for Fort George. We can't tell FCIB that "this is the result you need to guarantee us you will arrive at in consequence of those negotiations". That's ridiculous and outrageous. We can't interfere with the free bargaining power of FCIB or the members of staff, absolutely. And, as outrageous as you are, I bet you never tried that at the time you said you got some understanding from Barclays. The most you can get which is what we have gotten from FCIB is that they will treat the workers with dignity, they will honour their fundamental obligations, that FCIB has a brand and an international reputation to protect their long established history, their record shows that they will never turn their backs on the obligations to the staff of the FCIB. (Applause) But that general assurance being what it is, with respect to the details, that must be left to the process that is taking place between FCIB and the staff. I don't know how that man was ever Prime Minister. (Applause) But thankfully it can never ever happen again.

Mr. Speaker, finally, for the Leader of the Opposition to say that FCIB is leaving because of the climate in Belize, that FCIB isn't making money, but you know there are no doubt all sorts of reasons why FCIB's business model is no longer successful in Belize. I won't get into that. I won't suggest that maybe they didn't know how to handle their candle. No, no, what matters is this. They are not walking away and the business is collapsing. It is being bought by Heritage. So, if it is that the climate is so bad, if it is that banking is in such a way, why on earth would Heritage buy the bank? (Applause) Mr. Speaker, do you know what? Enough! Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to provide for the vesting in Heritage Bank Ltd. of the business in Belize of FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a second time.

3. Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to facilitate the implementation of the terms of a deed of settlement and compromise between the Government, Dunkeld International Investment Ltd, British Caribbean Bank Limited and The Trustees of the BTL Employees Trust arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Telemedia Limited and rights under certain loans and security arrangements made by The British Caribbean Bank Limited; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

I won't say anything in starting the debate, except to say to that former Prime Minister, I have reams of documentation from the archives. I want to show you this one that I pulled off the Internet, part of a Channel 7 Report: The cost to GOB for the Prosser/Ashcroft war - with your fine picture here together, with Michael Ashcroft at the top, and then your fine picture down here with Ralph Fonseca and Jeffrey Prosser at the bottom. (Applause) You start!

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the first point we have to make and place on the record is our absolute condemnation of the fact that we received this Bill, what is clearly a very important Bill, at 8:00 P.M. last night electronically and the hard copies of it when we got here to the House Meeting this morning. So how can we, Mr. Speaker, first of all, be expected to meaningfully debate an important Bill of this nature when we on this side of the House received the Bill at that hour of the night? It is unacceptable, and it is disgraceful, and it's been a consistent pattern of behavior, Mr. Speaker. It makes a mockery of our role as Parliamentarians. (Man, close your mouth!)

But let us understand, Mr. Speaker, and we are under no illusions that this is a deliberate, (Calm down, none of your anger issues here today, please, alright.) Let us understand, Mr. Speaker, that this is a deliberate pattern of behavior. The Prime Minister specifically gives instructions that these things are not to be given out until the very latest hour for the very purpose of preventing us from properly reviewing the Bill, from seeking legal advice on these matters, from discussing it among ourselves as a parliamentary caucus. We had our meeting as we always do before these House Meetings, Mr. Speaker, so that we can discuss these matters. We take that responsibility very seriously. We had nothing at our caucus meeting yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill essentially has three components, and I'll talk very briefly about them. One is, as you know, the Settlement in full of the permanent Court of Arbitration Award. That's the British Caribbean Bank and the Government of Belize which amounts to some \$97 million, and really, Mr. Speaker, the scandal here is that we are paying 16% interest over 6 years, this \$97 million, let's be clear. The original loan was US\$22.5 million which is BZ\$45 million with interest of 16% over 6 years. That has now amounted to BZ\$97 million. It went from \$45 million to BZ\$97 million all because of one man's stubborn pettiness. That is what we have here. (Applause)

The Prime Minister knew fully well, Mr. Speaker, that compulsorily acquiring the bank's rights under the loan it had concluded with Telemedia was absolutely unlawful and illegal. He knew that at the time. He knew it but because he was advancing this personal petty agenda he went ahead and did it in any case. (Applause) And now the Belizean people must pay \$52 million for that stubborn pettiness. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers, as I said, will pay for that pettiness. The Belizean people, Mr. Speaker, will pay for that pettiness, interest over 6 years, \$52 million.

The other component of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, is the down payment towards future settlement of the arbitration award, the permanent Court of Arbitration Award, what they called the Dunkeld/Government of Belize case. And that, Mr. Speaker, is something I think we can agree on based on the NERA fair market valuation, \$65.5 million. That is not an issue we have to quarrel over.

That is the second component of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, that NERA valuation. We talked about NERA last week or the last House Meeting we had in relation to BEL and Fortis, and we know that they paid substantially more than the NERA valuation at the time. They will end up doing the same here. But this part of the Settlement deals specifically with providing this \$65.5 million for down payment towards the future settlement of the Arbitration Award which we understand and accept.

The third part of the Settlement, Mr. Speaker, is basically this blank cheque, and we have the Supplementary Appropriation Bill which will come up after this Bill to deal with that \$97 million and the \$65.5 million, and then it has a head for Part II which is blank. It's open. I don't understand that at all. But we are being asked to approve that. And it's calling for additional amounts as maybe required to satisfy in full the permanent Court of Arbitration Award in this Dunkeld/Government of Belize matter. And that is being tabled as a pledge on the Consolidated Fund to be paid within such time as the permanent Court of Arbitration may determine. So we really don't have a full settlement, Mr. Speaker.

This third item is the big issue, the big elephant in the room because it's open-ended, it's unquantifiable. We don't know. The Prime Minister made mention of some figures earlier in his introduction, I believe, when he talked about specific share values, and he suggested that perhaps we may end up somewhere with a \$5.00 or \$5.85 share value. If you use even the \$5.00 number, what you are looking at the very least is an additional \$230 million. That is what this blank cheque is all about, and it may very well turn out to be more than that. We are being asked to approve a Settlement and compromise which is still not very clear. We don't know what the full terms and costs of it will be, Mr. Speaker. It could end up being \$300 plus million or more. We don't know. And then they have under that Appropriation Bill the source of financing, the Petrocaribe financing, \$200 and whatever it will be, Mr. Speaker. Petrocaribe Funds, they say.

So that, Mr. Speaker, is the, if you like, the summary of this Bill, the three essential limbs, components of this Bill. And while all of that, Mr. Speaker, is going on, BTL, we still have high costs. Internet costs are the highest in the region. There are still many rural communities, Mr. Speaker, which have no access to the Internet. You heard my Honourable friends talked about the BEL and the lack of electricity in many of their rural communities. Well, the same thing applies to the Internet. Young people in schools have no access to the Internet in many, many rural communities across the country, after 6 years, Mr. Speaker.

So who really has benefited, Mr. Speaker? We know the Prime Minister's son is the Chairman of the Executive Committee, (Applause) earning, as I understand it, some say it's over, almost \$30,000.00 per month. I don't know. I understand it's certainly over \$20,000.00 per month. He's involved in a number of telecommunications related businesses which benefit from his role and position at BTL. So they certainly are benefitting, Mr. Speaker. And, of course, we know the long sordid tale of legal fees under this Prime Minister and this Government. Certainly we know Barrow and Company is involved with this Settlement deal. I'm not sure about Barrow and Williams. They may or may not be involved. To date it was reported to me that the Financial Secretary said they have spent about

\$4 million on legal fees. But, of course, the final bill has not been submitted, and that is what, Mr. Speaker, of course, I understand that that will amount to at least another \$4 million to \$6 million, the final bill coming on the backs of this settlement yesterday, again, Mr. Speaker, nepotism, corruption. (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, for all his grandstanding, demonizing Ashcroft, and he's been making a lot of trips. He talked about a picture with Ashcroft. He can't meet with Ashcroft in Belize. So he's a frequent, he's been wrapping up the miles flying every time to Miami (Applause) and other exotic locations to meet with Ashcroft for the past couple months because he don't want Jules take his picture. So all the grandstanding and demonizing Ashcroft and demonizing what he calls the Ashcroft Alliance, the Prime Minister has turned out, Mr. Speaker, to be nothing more than who he has always been, all glitter and no substance. (Applause) All his shenanigans, nationalizing, renationalizing BTL, nationalizing BEL, destroying investor confidence, the investment climate, and investment in Belize on a whole, Mr. Speaker, permanently damaging our economy, causing great loss to all of us, where did he land us? He landed us right on that proverbial reef that Crazy Glue, Hubert Elrington, so aptly forecasted we would land so many years ago. (Applause) We are wrecked and crashed on the reef.

So, Mr. Speaker, the games that our Prime Minister has played have cost the Belizean people. He will boast, well, they've won the elections. They've certainly enriched the people around him. But the rest of the Belizean people are getting poorer and poorer under this UDP Government. (Applause) And when you look at BTL, Mr. Speaker, the Government took away the company and, as I said, bestowed, anointed his son leader. And what have they done? Really, literally they've run the company into the ground. Even with Government, Mr. Speaker, remember subsidizing BTL by reducing business taxes from 24.5% to 19%, they did that. Even with the removal of interest payments from the expenses of BTL, the profits have shrunk. I think they've gone down from \$30 odd million to last time \$17 million. So, Mr. Speaker, that is the reality of BTL under this UDP Government and under the Prime Minister's family.

And, while the people have not really gained anything, certainly the Prime Minister has gained with this Settlement and this Compromise the silencing of the courts, what was to come out of the CCJ. That is what was frightening them. What were they so afraid of, Mr. Speaker? And that is the real objective behind all of this sudden scurry that you see taking place for settlements, Mr. Speaker, with Ashcroft, with Fortis. All of this scurry for Settlement that was at the heart of all of this, Mr. Speaker, is to snuff out what was clearly an eminent castigation by the court, reprimand by the court. (Applause) But, of course, the Compromise and Settlement, Mr. Speaker, keeps that from happening.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have is a sinister plan, tragic, disastrous, effect. The Compromise and Settlement, as I said, Mr. Speaker, there are 3 elements. The element involving the NERA valuation, the fair market valuation is not something we disagree with. But certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have to condemn, again, this \$52-million waste by the Government of Belize, \$52 million in interest payments growing over 6 years because of the bad, wrongheaded, petty decisions of this Government. (Applause) And then, Mr. Speaker, to put this farce in front of us and say to us, "We must pass this Bill", when it is absolutely unclear to anybody in the nation what it will ultimately cost us, this third component of the Bill, what it will cost us, the final award of the Arbitration Court, Mr. Speaker, is

absolutely something we cannot support at all, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Minister, let me recognize the Member for Belize Rural Central because I'm sure that you will be more than 5 minutes, right.

HON. D. B. GARCIA (Belize Rural Central): Mr. Speaker, I will be extremely brief. But I believe, as an individual, as a legislator, a lawmaker, a representative of my people, I owe it to them to put on record my displeasure about not giving us time to look at legislation before it is presented to us. Mr. Speaker, I call this Government-by-ambush because what we are seeing here is that we are expected to make a decent and a proper contribution to the debate on something that we have not had time to look at. How can I check my computer, my laptop at 5:00 and 6:00 in the evening and this, what we have in front of us in hard copy, the Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015, it's being sent to us electronically hours before a meeting, and then the hard copy we have to come and meet it here at 10:00 A.M., Mr. Speaker? I certainly don't have the ability to go through in detail something like this that deserves, for the sake of the people of this country, a proper debate when we are doing business. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I repeat, Government-by-ambush robs us of our democracy. It robs us of our ability to make a contribution, and it takes away, it erodes all the freedoms that we have. Mr. Speaker, clearly, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, the BTL (Settlement) Bill has been thrust before us. We have not had the proper time to look at it. We don't have the information, and yet we are here holding our hands and doing the best that we can under the circumstances. But I repeat, and I put on the record that this is not proper governance. This is not correct for the people of this country, and the people of this country deserve better. (Applause) I am here because I will not shirk my responsibility to represent my people but at the same time we have to be given time to do it properly.

Mr. Speaker, I can see that these settlements that have come before us in very short order it is because the Prime Minister and his Government are afraid that the court rulings are going to go fully against them. That is the recognition and the reality of this situation. So no amount of grandstanding, and name-calling, and rock-throwing and stone-throwing across the aisle, will take away the fact that the reality of the situation today, Mr. Speaker, is that the Prime Minister has had to swallow his words and eat his vomit. (Applause) He has had to swallow his words that, "Oh, as there is a good Lord above, I am not going to pay! I am not going to pay! I am not going to pay, as there is a good Lord above!" Well, let him eat his vomit today because that is what he has to do. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that I will go on much longer. Clearly the best that we can do is to make the point that the Belizean people need to know that the benefit is really redounding, as the Prime Minister said, to family members, cronies, colleagues, etcetera, (Applause) while on the backs of the Belizean people millions and multi-millions of dollars in interest will now have to be cough up because of the Prime Minister's wrongheadedness. (Applause)

I only wish to repeat for the record, Mr. Speaker. This Government-by-ambush has to stop. It is not correct for governance. It is not right for democracy,

and I for one have had to stand here today to place that on record before yourself, Mr. Speaker, and this Honourable House. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. W. ELRINGTON (Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs): I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying that this is perhaps one of the happiest days in my life. It's one of the happiest days in my life because I have seen a full circle. This thing started some 22 years 3 months ago when, in fact, the Right Honourable George Price influenced by Ralph Fonseca persuaded the Government to give over majority control of BTL to Lord Ashcroft. I remember, Mr. Speaker, being particularly upset and angry at the fact that 25% of the shares which was then owned by Social Security was actually sold to Lord Ashcroft by the PUP Government. And I said to myself, what kind of madness is this? Why would the Government want to sell 25% of the shares which is owned by the Social Security, which is supposed to provide for the retirement for the illness benefits and others benefits of poor Belizeans to Lord Ashcroft? I could not comprehend. But that was only the beginning of what turned out to be a long and very dark period and perhaps the most shameful period in the history of our country.

The passage of this Bill has to be seen in its context, Mr. Speaker. It is very important that we see it in the context. I will start off by giving you our context in the UDP, and then I will give you the PUP context. And then I will go back and give you the UDP context, showing, in fact, relying on deeds not words. Now, Mr. Speaker, in response to a question posed to the Prime Minister yesterday in his press conference by one of the journalists in relation to the amount of workers that are in BTL as opposed to the amount of workers that are in SMART, I think the journalist suggested that BTL has 450 employees and SMART has only 5. And this was the response of the Prime Minister in essence. He says because the suggestion was that, in fact, we may want to do something about the workers in BTL. That was the suggestion coming from the journalist. And this was what the Prime Minister said in essence. He says, "From a social justice point of view, if we have to sacrifice some profits to ensure that the people can have secure employment, by God, that is a decision we are resolve to make." (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that I applauded that spontaneously. That is the speech of a true patriot and a person who truly loves his people and his country. (Applause) It was a clearest manifestation of his principle that we believe in people before profits. (Applause) And we believe in our people. That is the response of what I describe as a caring, competent leader, one who has the interest of his people at heart. And I will show you before I finish my presentation, Mr. Speaker, that contrary to the articulation of another Elrington, whose name I will not call, the Prime Minister has a very clear plan of development for our country, an absolute clear plan of development for our country, one, the likes of which have not ever been seen by the country before. (Applause)

You know Samuel Haynes said that we had a country, a rich country, wealth untold, very, very fortunate. We have a country with great fortune but during the 10 years of the last PUP Administration that great fortune was turned into great misfortune. The period of abuse along with misinformation and disinformation that was given out was absolutely incredible. And the abuse that was being perpetrated was disclosed not by the Opposition, not by the journalists,

but some of the most senior and brightest Members of the People's United Party called the G-7 and the G-8. They were so appalled at the extent of the corruption and mismanagement that was going on during that 10-year period that they sought twice to overthrow the advisor to the Prime Minister, unfortunately in like manner in which the present G-11 is making no way in trying to get democracy operating in their party by having them hold an open convention, in the same way the G-8 went no way, in fact, getting rid of that particular Minister who was controlling the People's United Party, bringing the party to ruin and whom my own competitor in Pickstock, Mr. Smith, is still deathly afraid. He doesn't seem to want to have anything to do with anybody named Musa, and Fonseca, neither the father, the son, the brother nor the cousin. (Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that the sale of BTL was part and parcel of a huge corrupt scheme which was being implemented through the Government of Belize during the period of 1998 to 2002. The intention was to steal everything that was of value in our country from the people of our country. Talking about the people of our country have to pay tax and have to pay interest on this deal, the truth is that if, in fact, we had not gotten into Government there would have been nothing left in the country for anybody to benefit from because everything was being stolen. (Applause) And I will list the things that were being stolen because Belizeans need to be reminded of these things.

When we got into office in 2008, we had the biggest debt in the history of our country. It was over \$2 billion. And the tragedy of it is that up to this day we can't show what was done with it. (Applause) I know that the Member from Toledo West likes to state how well things were done in Punta Gorda. But, while he says those things, every time he comes into this House he complains about how bad things are in his constituency. Now, if the PUP had done so much, who is it that the situation is so bad? It's incredible, just absolutely incredible. But the debt was \$2 billion. The DFC was broke. The Social Security was seriously compromise. There was a Mahogany Heights scam where millions of dollars were thrown away. We have the very BTL that we are talking about now.

Yesterday the Chairman stated that in 2 years, I think he said, the Directors of that company gave themselves dividends amounting to as much as \$70 million when, in fact, the company had only made profit of \$35 million. He said it was the worse management ever of a company in the history of this country. This same BTL we are talking about. And remember now that \$70 million, which was generated or is given in profit, was all expatriated. It was all expatriated because it was sent abroad. It didn't remain here.

The difficulty of selling your vital assets to foreign enterprises and foreign owners is that they expatriate the profit, and at the end of the day the local people remain poorer than before they came. With local ownership, these assets now and the dividends that are derived from them can be used to help to further the development of our country, to help to pay for education, to help to pay for housing, to help to pay for health. It is my own hope and view, my sincere hope, that, in fact, the dividends now which we will be getting from the BTL will be dedicated to the provision of free education at the primary and pre-primary level at least, (Applause) so that all our children at the primary and pre-primary level when time for them to go to school simply have to go with their clothes. And when they go there they will have all their books and all their uniform or whatever it is. That is my hope because now the country will be getting that.

Those millions that we were sending abroad now will be at home. It's going to be left home for the development of our people.

But the Mahogany Heights scam, do you remember the Port scam, the sale of the Port just after they had done some \$35 million worth of so-called development in the area of the Port? We built a number of public buildings which I call to this day monument to corruption. The market on Albert Street, do you remember they broke down that beautiful market and they put a monstrosity there? Then they built some police station and some fire station, the ugliest buildings in the county and the most expensive buildings. Those I call monument to corruption. We had, and, of course, it was not only buildings that disappeared, we had lands, all the barracks were divided up. Today now you have beautiful buildings like the Marina Tower and the Barracks. Those are places where our people should have been playing you know. Those are places where our children should have been playing football and basketball and baseball. Now it has what it's called a Marina Towers on it, and then you have clubs on the other side of it.

The premises, all the buildings that belong to Government, you had a whole host of buildings right along Princess Margaret Drive that belong to Government you know that used to house professionals in. Those buildings, they used to belong to the Central Bank and they used to belong to the Government to house public officers. All those buildings now are owned by People's United Party officials, including the leadership of the present PUP now. Everybody get the people's property. It would be interesting to see the price that, in fact, they paid for those assets. Buildings were sold. Mechanic shops were sold. Graders were sold. Equipment was sold. The forestry building was sold. You had large amounts of lands which were sold in the southern district, in the cayes, in the Mountain Pine Ridge. There was the Maya Galeria scam. You had the Intelco scam. You had the Universal Hospital scam. You had widespread loss of jobs. People were losing their homes. People were scrambling for foreign exchange. You know when we got into office people could not find foreign exchange at the Central Bank. You had people gambling with the foreign exchange and buying Yens and not knowing what they were doing, causing us to lose lots of monies, millions of dollars.

The situation got so bad, as I said, that the very members of the party revolted and were told summarily by their leadership, "Nobody is going to get between the love I have for Ralph and myself." (Applause) You can't forget these things. The situation was so bad, and when people criticized the then Prime Minister said, "This will pass over like a little breeze". Talk about people who doesn't care, this is going to be a little breeze. The truth is that, when they lost in 2008, it wasn't so much that we won you know because they didn't have any money in Pickstock, and I was not close to Lord Ashcroft. But the people voted you out. Notwithstanding all the hustle, people were so disgusted that, in fact, the people swept the House clean.

Now then what our leadership did, what did our leadership do? As soon as we got into office, we decided to reschedule the super bond. And we immediately got relief from it. We not only got relief from the super bond but we also got relief in terms of access now to borrowing at concessionary rates. (Applause) We restored the DFC, the SSB, back to health. We sought to gain ownership of all our utilities, and in seven years we did it. (Applause) Now the importance, and that has directly relation to this Bill, the importance of that is that it is only if you

own and control the means of generating wealth that you can attain economic independence. If you are going to sell it to outsiders, you are, in fact, voluntarily putting yourself back in economic slavery.

So this measure to reacquire these assets does not only ensure that the assets remain here but it also ensures that our own locals are place in all positions of power and authority in these enterprises. They manage it. (Applause) We don't bring in foreigners to manage it. We don't import foreigners to manage it because it is not our view that foreigners can manage better than us. We can do it, and we have established, in fact, that we have done it. We have done it so well that, in the case of Fortis, they have asked us, "Please, let us continue to partner with us". And, in fact, you heard the Prime Minister say in the press conference yesterday that, in fact, Mr. Carlos Slim, one of the richest men in the world, wants to invest in little BTL, and DigiCell wants to invest in it. (Applause)

So in terms of confidence you can't get a greater vote of confidence than that, the richest people in the world want to associate with you. Some of the biggest international companies want to associate with you. So what we get from renationalizing, we are taking economic control of our country. At independence time we took over what is called constitutional control. The British left, and we took over constitutionally. But that did not give us economic control. That did not give us economic independence. It is when you have the wherewithal and control of the means of production and the generation of wealth that, in fact, you now become an independent nation.

Consistently with the PUP they did everything to try to sell out our primary assets. They sold out the water. They sold out the rights to the river. They sold out BTL. They sold out BEL, and in some cases they did not even received money for it, like in the case of Prosser. And then they told lies. They didn't tell the nation the truth. It is as if they have a deep conviction that we the Belize people don't have the capacity to run our economic affairs. That is the impression they give me. Let us give it to a foreigner because we are still in this colonial mode. Only the foreigners can do it. That was not the position of our Prime Minister. Notwithstanding the criticism we receive from the people of the Chamber of Commerce and people in other sectors, he would not be deterred.

I will tell you personally my private view on that. I was completely impressed by his performance. (Applause) I was absolutely impressed, and I'm saying this publicly now because what he did took very great courage. And even if those of you on the other side can't see right now the benefits to be derived from it I will tell you that future generations will remember him just like how they remember Samuel Haynes for the great work that he did. (Applause) His name will not go down for perfidy and perniciousness and dishonesty and fraud and mismanagement of the economy. (Applause) That is not going to be his legacy. His legacy is going to be one where he sought to nationalize the productive sectors of our country and one where he believed, he preached, he practiced what he believed, Belizeans first, people before profit. (Applause)

I am not finish yet. You will never believe that Jamaica celebrated ten years of Petrocaribe last year, and the other countries they did so well from the Petrocaribe money, hugely well, ten years. Their deal was signed by the former Leader of the Opposition, the Member from Fort George. And what he did with this great bonanza? He gave it to a few cronies down south. He gave it to a few

cronies down south. It seems to me that he did not appreciate that that Petrocaribe deal was our version of the Marshal Plan that brought Europe, in fact, out of the doldrums after the Second World War. It was a combination of the Marshal Plan and the plan which the Americans used in the 1930s to bring back the economy.

A wonderful plan and what has the Prime Minister done with that in the three years that we have had the benefit of exploiting it? We have transformed the face of Belize. (Applause) I remember talking only yesterday to a very good friend of mine, we called him Pice, a very staunch member of the PUP on Albert Street, or used to be because I'm not sure if he is still a member. He said, "Boy, Belize City is looking like L.A.". The transformation that has been taking place in this country is just awesome, and everybody who comes to the country sees it. And the beauty of it is that everybody benefits. It's not a few people, from the ex-convict to the man who has his own business on Albert Street, everybody, whether he sells sand, whether he sells cement, whether he sells steel, whatever it is, everybody benefits. Everybody is able to carry home a pay cheque, thanks to the Petrocaribe. (Applause)

In truth and in fact, when we tell people that Petrocaribe was available to Belize for ten years, they want to know what your leadership was doing, if they were sleeping. It wasn't sleeping. It was part of a scheme to feather the nest of a few specialized people because millions were made. It is just that it was not made for the poor. We talk about social justice but we have no interest in social justice. If you disbelieve me, you go and take a walk in Majestic Alley, you who talk about social justice. (Applause)

And it's not personal. I know Majestic Alley from I was growing up. We have to try to do something about those places, and I'm sure that in time the Prime Minister is going to get around to doing it. (Applause) We can't do everything.

I can tell you that before I got into Pickstock it was a doldrums. Pickstock was really in bad, bad shape. I want to invite you to go around and see it now. (Applause) The place is being transformed, all those beautiful cement streets. The streets are landscaped you know. You check the canal sides and the bridges, there are no longer London bridges in Pickstock. Things have never been better, yes, Lakeview Street, Sittee Street, Sibun Street. And I will tell you that at present I can't pass a street in Pickstock without seeing work being done, either a house being done or repaired or a step being put up. (Applause) I will tell you that things have never been better.

When I heard the Prime Minister say that we have BZ\$1 billion in the Central Bank in reserve, US\$500 million, that has never happened in the history of this country. (Applause) And the Prime Minister has no interest in touching it. He has no interest in touching it you know. Five hundred million dollars, can you believe that? And that's in US, a billion in Belize. When you see a billion written in Belize, it's hard for you to recognize that you know. That's a lot of zeros, a billion with a "B". How you can talk about that? If we had had that Petrocaribe operational for ten years, do you know where we would have been? Do you know where we would have been?

You talked about selfishness and self-interest and looking after family, it's either that you were looking after your family eminently or that you were

incompetent because how can you have such a bonanza and create such a disaster with it. I will leave you to decide. It's either incompetence or intense corruption. (Applause) And we know from what is happening in the neighbouring republics and down south and the like that, in fact, leaders of countries, some of them believe in corruption. So it is not anything that you can pass up on.

So, yes, we have a combination of what is called by the Americans the New Deal and the Marshal Plan. And I have said that. I have said that to Ambassadors who come and see me. I said never before in the history of the country have we had so much resource to assets. And what the Prime Minister is doing with it? He's retiring the bad deals that you all made. Do you know how proud I felt when we paid off Fortis? (Applause) Do you know how proud I feel when we are paying off BTL? (Applause) That is a macro pride. We enter into our obligation. We pay off our obligation. We are honourable people. (Applause) We sought to work on our infrastructure roads, drains, bridges, playgrounds countrywide.

Another matter of very great pride to me, and I'm sure to all of us across here, is that never in the history of our country has any of our athletes done as well in the world as our football team is doing. (Applause) And I will tell you this. I will tell you this. The Member that sits next to me, left hand, I did not know that he was so committed and forceful and so visionary but when he came into office football was in the doldrums. (Applause) And in seven years time, he was able to fly to Canada to watch our team playing Canada. And they acquitted themselves so well. As a matter of fact, they've performed much better than some of the teams that performed in the last Olympic game. They did a great job. So we are putting in the money where it deserves to me.

It is my hope and prayer that, as soon as we have more monies, more monies is going to be put into sports as well, football, baseball, and that kind of thing. It is the people that make a country. It is the people that need to be developed. You can't keep people like some of us want to keep those poor people in Fort George and Pickstock. (Applause) It's a tragedy and a travesty. We live in nice homes and we have these people living in such terrible conditions. That is being transformed. It is happening. We have worked on infrastructure in that Fort George area now, and we're going to transform it.

So we're spending millions on education. Again, say what you like, I will tell you that you will never find as much money having being spent on education as has being spent under the Minister there, (Applause) millions and millions and millions! And he is not only educating the people in the city, commercial center, but the people out the districts too. As a matter of fact, I thought I heard him say that the best high school building and facilities are in the constituency of the Stann Creek West Member of the House. I will tell you, growing up as a young boy, the Lynam College was the best in the country. Without doubt it was the best. I went there with the students. It was the People's United Party who deliberately closed it down. They deliberately closed it down because they had no interest in educating those people in the south. You can check with Father Crema. You can check with Father Stubby or whatever his name is. I lived down there at that time. I was familiar with it. I know the people who were there. I know the story behind it. It was deliberately closed down in the same way in which Technical College was deliberately closed down, all misguided and confused policies. That was the institution that trained all our chemists, our surveyors, our

technicians, our pharmacists. We closed it down. It's absolutely senseless. But that was what we got under the good leadership of the Member from Fort George.

Can you imagine that? In the short space of time we have not established only one National Bank. We have 2 branches now. Can you imagine that? The National Bank, we are talking about one bank being bought out. Well, we have a National Bank in Belize, and we have a branch in Belmopan. And the last report we got is that they had so many loans. It is doing thriving business, and I will go further and tell you this. The banking system has never had as much liquidity as it now has. (Applause) It has never in the history of this country had more liquidity than it now has.

So, when I think about the Administration of the Honourable Dean Oliver Barrow over the last seven years to eight years, it reminds me of the maxim. We've gone from poverty to near prosperity in seven years time. It's not a matter for you to look so despondent about, Member for Stann Creek West. I know you are depressed by these facts and figures. But really it is something for us to be joyful about.

When the tide rises, everybody is lifted up. We have given unprecedented wage increase to every public officer. (Applause) We helped the citrus industry when it got into trouble. We helped the sugar industry when it got into trouble. We helped the tourism industry when it gets into trouble. And we will help the shrimp industry. We will make a special effort to help you down there. We have attracted huge investment in agro industry, in tourism. We have programs that we cannot service enough. Do you know how many Belizeans in my constituency are saying, "Mr. Elrington, can we expand the Pantry Program?? Can we expand the BOOST Program?" The wonderful results that we get from those programs, people want them expanded, and I am sure that with increased earnings from these utilities now the Prime Minister may have more space. I am hoping to do that. Of course, we have also had the Mother's Day cheers and the Christmas time cheers. We were able to do what Intelco had promised and the administration had promised years ago, a computer for every child. We did that. Our administration gave computers to tertiary level schools.

So, Mr. Speaker, the reason why I went into all of those things is because I am trying to make a contrast between a 10-year period, a two-term period, when the order of the day was fraud, corruption, misinformation, disinformation and the like. And then you have another two-term period that followed. To those first two periods was the seven lean years spoken about in biblical times. The last seven years which we have had have been the seven years of plenty, (Applause) when we have brought sanity back into the system, restore law and order, restore confidence in our Government, and we are taking charge of our economic fortunes. We are well on the way to attaining economic independence. (Applause) I can do nothing but support this Bill.

And before I sit let me say that I had no more time than the Member from Belize Rural Central to read the Bill. I had no more time but there is a question of priorities. It is either I sleep long and don't read or I read long and sleep a little bit. I chose to do the latter, read long and sleep a little bit so that I can discharge the functions and obligations of the people who put me here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West): Mr. Speaker, I will yield to the Right Honourable Member from Fort George.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Pickstock was giving a political speech today. It looks like election is coming for real. In fact, it's more than a political speech. He was singing for his supper. That's what he was doing. (Applause) (Why are you leaving the room?) You were singing for your supper, praising the Prime Minister because your job is on the line. That's right. Your job is on the line, Member for Pickstock, because you really messed up with the Sarstoon issue. You've been so negligent and asleep that now we are losing the Sarstoon. Your job is on the line, Member.

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, what does that have to do with the BTL?

MR. SPEAKER: Go ahead, Member.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It looks like the Member for Collet wants me to speak about him.

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): You don't throw stones because you live in a glass house.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Oh, is that the only one you've learned in school? Anyway, Mr. Speaker, the Member from Pickstock was so phony and subservient and obsequious to his leader, the Prime Minister, that I can only assume that he realizes that his job was on the line so he's trying to hold on. You see, Mr. Speaker, we are here to debate the BTL issue, the Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill. That is what we are doing today. And the Prime Minister laid it out for us you know in his introductory remarks. He pointed out that the Settlement includes the Arbitration Award to British Caribbean Bank of \$97.4 million and that the Settlement of compensation, partial settlement, includes \$65.3 million for a total of \$162.7 million.

Now, first of all, to go back to the award, the British Caribbean Bank, as I recall it, the award was for US\$22.5 million, and the court ruled against the Government. But the Prime Minister was so enraged, so upset, and so rejecting of the court's decision that he actually said, "As God is my witness, I will not pay that award. As God is my witness, the UDP Government will not pay that award."

Well, Mr. Speaker, not only was that a blasphemous outburst from the Prime Minister, but it looks like God is no longer his witness. (Applause) It looks like the devil is the witness now because he is agreeing to pay not only that award but with interest, amounting to US\$48.5 million, no longer \$22 million, US\$48.5 million. So, Prime Minister, you shouldn't be swearing like that you know because it will come back to haunt you as it is happening today.

The second thing is this, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister is telling us that the Government will pay no cost before the Caribbean Court of Justice. I'm not sure to read between the lines, and he is admitting that we are paying cost for the court below and for the Court of Appeal, no cost. Alright! But we are paying the costs of litigating which, according to the Financial Secretary, is something

like \$4 million, right? Okay!

Well, the other thing is this, Mr. Speaker, and, indeed, the outrageous thing about this Settlement is twofold: one, that we are being asked in this Honourable House to approve a Settlement when we don't know what are the final terms of the Settlement. We are being asked to approve not only \$162 million but also for whatever the arbitration on the compensation issue comes up with, in addition to this \$162 million. And, according, again, to the Prime Minister, even if the Arbitral Award were to strike a balance, a middle road, so to speak, of \$5.00 per share, instead of the \$1.44 per share which he is agreeing to pay under the NERA valuation, that would mean, and the people of Belize need to hear and know this, Mr. Speaker, that we are being asked to approve what may turn out to be a \$400-million compensation to Michael Ashcroft or to BTL or to whoever are the owners or were the previous owners of BTL.

Why did I say \$400 million, Mr. Speaker? It is because if it is \$5.00 to \$6.00 per share which incidentally the UDP Government sold the shares to Social Security Board for that amount, which means that's a good guide, and I am sure the award people will look at that, the judges, it will mean an additional \$240 million, at least to \$300 million. If you add on that \$300 million, you are getting over \$400 million settlement already, or even if it is \$250 million you are talking about \$400 million in total that we are paying for BTL, that the people of Belize are paying for BTL. Mr. Prime Minister, we don't buy this argument that it's not the people of Belize paying because it's BTL. Well, who owns BTL? What was the whole point about? It's the Government that owns BTL. So if BTL has to pay a portion of this debt in compensation it's the people of Belize paying. (Applause) It's the people of Belize that will be deprived.

The other thing is this, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister can try to intimidate me and prevent me from speaking. That is what you call splitting hairs because if you own the thing and the thing is paying for something you are paying for that something as well. It is simple as that. That is simple logic, Member from Mesopotamia. Anyway, that's the first point.

The second point is this. Not only did the Prime Minister say he was not going to pay the award, as God was his witness, but also he criticized me severely for what he called "terrible acts of the PUP Government when I was Prime Minister", as if though that would intimidate me from speaking today. Mr. Prime Minister, you cannot intimidate me. I want you to know that! (Applause) And you can accuse me of all kinds of things but you cannot accuse me of corruption, of benefitting. You cannot because I did not benefit from any of those matters, unlike what is happening now that you and your family are benefitting from this whole deal. (Applause) That is correct!

The second thing is this. You criticized me for agreeing to foreign judges deciding the fate of Belize, foreign judges, LCIA, no way will the UDP ever agree to that, surrendering our sovereignty. Well, just read the Agreement, Mr. Speaker. Clause 16.2 provides for arbitration under the London Court of International Arbitration.

The other thing is that earlier the Prime Minister criticized me because we agreed to waive taxes in the BTL matter. Well, what is he doing today? What is this Agreement agreeing to? Just read clause 4.2! All payments are exempt and

free of all taxes, duties, charges, fees or imposts. So it is the height of hypocrisy to be criticizing a Government, the PUP Government, for waiving taxes when you are doing the same thing, man. You are doing the very same thing. I haven't been provided with the figures to compute how much you are waiving in this instance today.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): That's not provided on a settlement and a court order. You know that.

RT. HON. S.MUSA (Fort George): No, no, I don't deal with that.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Then you are a worst lawyer than I thought.

RT. HON. S.MUSA (Fort George): So why put it in then? Why?

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Because those lawyers are as bad lawyers as you and they want to make assurance doubly sure.

RT. HON. S.MUSA (Fort George): Yes, that's what you want us to believe.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): But, Said, you know that.

RT. HON. S.MUSA (Fort George): I don't know that, Mr. Speaker.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Alright! Fine!

RT. HON. S.MUSA (Fort George): I don't know that. I am saying that that Agreement not only says, and the other thing the Prime Minister made an issue about is the Accommodation Agreement. Well, listen to me. You are accepting the Accommodation Agreement in this Agreement. You are accepting it because it says, okay, a portion of it may be included because of the Accommodation Agreement, and your justification for accepting it is because that portion will have to be spent in Belize. Yes, but that was agreed even at the time of the Accommodation Agreement under the Hayward Trust. Under the Hayward Trust it was a clear commitment that that money would be invested in Belize. So, Mr. Prime Minister, don't be disingenuous about this thing. You can criticize me as much as you want but it's your name that stink the road you know. (Applause)

And, as for the Member of Pickstock, you know I was beginning to feel that he is so cocky that he would win. But I do believe that Doctor Francis Smith will beat him in Pickstock Division now because he is talking lone fool. He is talking about all the things of the past. Well, listen to me. In 2008, PUP lost the election you know. You all have been running the Government from 2008. Member for Mesopotamia, do you remember you used to remind us about that? Do you remember you used to remind us when you were sitting over here? It is you all who are running the Government now for the past eight years. So don't be talking about what happened long before, as if though that is any justification for

all your misdeeds, corrupt acts, and nepotism. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, you know, as he was speaking just now, my friend from Fort George, the Right Honourable Member, I want to get his words correctly, Mr. Speaker. I wondered if I heard him correctly that he said just now that the Prime Minister can accuse him of many things but the Prime Minister cannot accuse him of corruption. I almost fell off my seat, Mr. Speaker. But then I looked around and quickly saw that I was not alone, and naturally my colleagues on this side felt the same way. But when I looked at the expression of my friend from Orange Walk Central, especially, but also from Toledo East, and, in fact, my other colleagues on that side, Mr. Speaker, all of them were equally shocked. (Applause) How could that man, the architect of corruption, the man who has led this country into the doldrums, Mr. Speaker, have the audacity to say that nobody can accuse him of corruption?

Mr. Speaker, the speakers before me, and even in the early morning, the Prime Minister outlined, when he introduced the Bill, how we got to the point where we got. Mr. Speaker, and as the Prime Minister described it, and, indeed, even my colleague from Pickstock, it is a sordid tale. We see all sorts of crookedness going on, Mr. Speaker. We know that from the beginning, and in fact, when BTL was first privatized, it was true, it happened under the United Democratic Party's Administration, under the then Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Manuel Esquivel. Mr. Speaker, but it was done with safeguard mechanisms in order to ensure that no one party would ever dominate and that Belizeans would stay in control of BTL. When that changed, Mr. Speaker, it was as a result of the People's United Party's crookedness and corruption.

I heard the Prime Minister tell the story of how they first made Michael Ashcroft a preferred person and then later did away with the golden share. Do you remember all of that, Mr. Speaker? It was they who created this whole situation. So that, Mr. Speaker, when we get to the point today and we look at what happened back in 2009, when the Prime Minister acquired BTL, Mr. Speaker, and I want to remind people right off that, in fact, when that acquisition was done, you will remember that their attorneys, the People United Party's attorneys, senior advisors to their leader and to the leadership of the Peoples United Party, were the very same attorneys who sided with Lord Ashcroft, Mr. Speaker, and went to court to challenge the constitutionality of the acquisition, so much, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister in a haste again in 2011 had to reacquire BTL. This is something that we, Mr. Speaker, praise the Prime Minister for because all Belizeans know what had been the deal in terms of these utilities having been sold off.

Mr. Speaker, I listened on the last occasion of the House Meeting, in fact, when we were dealing with the BEL matter, and I listened to my friend from Fort George again speak about how it is that he is a nationalist and he supports nationalism. Well, Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that he was behind, and he spoke about lock, stock, and barrel this morning, he was the person who was the chief architect in selling out these utilities lock, stock, and barrel to cronies. And we could get into all of the details, if we go back, all of the deals with Intelco, all of the loans from St. James and Social Security, which they had to do, all of this

wheeling and dealing with Jeffrey Prosser. When Prosser didn't pay, they had to take it back and then they had to sell it to Michael Ashcroft for less than it was worth. That is how we got into the mix that we were in. For them to stand up now and to have the audacity, Mr. Speaker, to proclaim themselves now and to try to make it look like it is the Prime Minister and this Government that is trying to do hanky-panky and trying to hustle underneath is just wrong. If, Mr. Speaker, they did not land us in the position where we were in 2009, where we were in 2011, and where we are today, that we have to settle this arrangement, none of whatever they can accuse this administration of which is completely false would even be on the table for them to accuse us of. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, spoke about the Settlement, and he said, Mr. Speaker, "We'll categorize it into three portions", as he put it. He said, "We'll talk about that portion which is the repayment of the loan", which he says, Mr. Speaker, grew from US\$22.5 million to US\$45 million and that it accumulated 16% interest over 6 years, and he went on. Mr. Speaker, the value is \$97 million now, and he ran down the Prime Minister for that, Mr. Speaker, so did my friend, the Member for Belize Rural Central. They went on, and they blamed the Prime Minister for this, Mr. Speaker. They blamed the Prime Minister because the Prime Minister in his nationalist view said that when there was that award that we will not pay a single cent. Well, I support the Prime Minister at that time, Mr. Speaker, for not paying. That was the right thing to do because we did not land ourselves into that situation, Mr. Speaker, and, again, I make the point that this is something that they landed us in. And you can understand our position of trying to fight and fight against all of this that was unjustly put on us.

He said, Mr. Speaker, and the Member for Fort George did the same thing, that it is not BTL that will pay and that, in fact, it is the taxpayers that will pay because BTL is owned by the Government and people of Belize. Well, BTL is a private company that the Government owns and the people of Belize own shares in but it is its own entity. And, like my friend from Mesopotamia just whispered, that will be paid not from the Consolidated Revenue Fund which primarily comes from the revenue from taxes and so on. This will come from the profits of the private company that the Government, yes, does have shares in. (Applause) It is as simple as that.

He was quick, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, to agree. He said, "We agree with the NERA valuation and the fact that the Prime Minister has agreed to pay at that value that NERA had suggested", which is, I believe, \$1.44 per share. If it was the PUP, Mr. Speaker, they would not have paid that you know. This is solving this problem, if they had any intention. Let's say, for arguments sake, that they would have been put in this position. They would never have reached this far because, in fact, if it were up to them, they would have already hand back Michael Ashcroft the company a long time. (Applause) And, in fact, they were praying for the 2012 elections to go in their favour as they already had Ashcroft lined up, and you know that he owns SMART too. The Prime Minister told us, in fact, that at the time of the acquisition all will remember that they were basically bleeding the assets of BTL in order to move over to SMART. Now my friend from Orange Walk Central would be very quiet on that issue. But you know that they were the ones who were bleeding us. So that he agreed readily with the \$1.44 compensation. Well, if the PUP were in power, they would have been settling this agreement by paying Lord Ashcroft

\$10.00 to \$12.00 per share which is what he requested because that is the way how the People's United Party does business. (Applause)

Under the Prime Minister, you know I will get into, in fact, how lucky, and he can't accuse me, the Member for Fort George, of singing for my supper. In fact, I don't think it was fair of him to put that on my friend, the Member for Pickstock, who I think does an excellent job. Some there, some twisted elements out there who want to, and, if I can, I am pretty sure that I could speak for my boss when I tell those persons who are clamouring for his resignation that they could clamour all they want it ain't going to happen. (Applause) It is because I have not met among my colleagues, maybe equal, but not more than equal to anybody, the Member from Pickstock, in terms of his nationality, his nationalist view, and his patriotic view to this country. It is unmatched in the Cabinet. (Applause) Maybe it's equal but it is certainly not. So he ain't got anywhere to go.

The big part though, Mr. Speaker, that he said, both the Member for Freetown, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Member for Fort George, the former Prime Minister, the big part that they say bothers them about this Settlement Deed is the fact that there is, as the Leader of the Opposition puts it, a blank cheque portion, that portion, of course, that will be determined by the arbitration panel, Mr. Speaker, as to what else compensation should be paid. Mr. Speaker, and you know this is what bothers me about, the fact that those two, in particular, would raised the issue and complained about the fact that this is a blank cheque when, in fact, if that thing gets out of order, if that payment gets out of order, it will be primarily for the reason that the arbitration panel would have decided to include awards as a result of the Accommodation Agreement signed by those said two individuals because that is on the table.

He will say nonsense, my friend from Fort George, about, well, this is the Prime Minister accepting and agreeing with the Accommodation Agreement because he is saying now that this money must be spent in Belize and a whole lot of nonsense. He was the one who signed the Accommodation Agreement, and then he goes on to say, what, that, in fact, that was always in the Agreement because there was the establishment of the Hayward Trust which would distribute this money to charities locally. How idiotic can you be as Minister of Finance? This is money, Mr. Speaker, that would have come to the Government and people of Belize naturally as a form of taxation. Do you remember that is what the Accommodation Agreement did? It gave this company the right to not pay those taxes if they did not receive a certain rate of return. I think it was 15% or something, Prime Minister, right. So what he did was to say to Lord Ashcroft and BTL at the time, "Listen, if you don't make 15% rate of return on your investment, don't worry about it. We will wipe away your taxes to that tune". So for him to now tell us, Mr. Speaker, that, in fact, that money, he agreed to that Accommodation Agreement because it would have been spent on the Belizean people through charitable organizations anyway, so we don't have to worry about it, is nonsensical. He takes us for idiots, Mr. Speaker. This was money that could have gone directly into the Government's coffers, for him to decide, if he had any decency, how he would spend it to alleviate the conditions of poverty in the country without having to go through Ashcroft and his Hayward Trust or whatever it was called.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you this that this Settlement Deed along with the

last one that we signed for BEL puts on record the ability, not that it was ever in question, Prime Minister, not that it was ever doubted because we have seen this Prime Minister lead this country out of adversity repeatedly. (Applause) But this Settlement Deed now places on record because you see, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that they have a lot of things to say. Do you remember when the Prime Minister told them that we'll settle the loan, the super bond? The Prime Minister told them, "We will not pay if the people don't give us a haircut. We want that super bond to be restructured." Oh, all of them started to shout. The same ones from the PUP along with the Ashcroft people went to Washington DC. They badmouthed the Government. Do you remember? And they tried their very best to make sure that the super bond was not restructured. But guess what happened? The Prime Minister successfully restructured that super bond. (Applause)

They fought, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that BTL was not nationalized. They went to the court. They fought, and they got it reverse, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister had to reacquire the company. If it was up to them, that would not have happened. They believed that the Prime Minister should not have succeeded in that. But guess what happened? He succeeded nonetheless. (Applause)

When the whole issue of the raise and the teachers came up, they were happy. When the public servants and the teachers were jumping up, they say we would never be able to appease the teachers and public servant. They were saying that this was the 2005 of the UDP Administration. They expected people to be breaking up the steps. Well, guess what happened now? The Prime Minister has been able to solve that problem. (Applause) The Prime Minister, whether we like to admit it, or they want to admit it or not, is the saving grace of this nation, and the people of this country know that. This is why they voted for him twice in a row now as Prime Minister of this country. (Applause) And it is the main reason, Mr. Speaker, why whenever my boss decides to call these elections again that it will be a sure win. We are going to make sure that we make history (Applause) and be the party who delivers government for a third consecutive time or, as they say in basketball, three-peat, back-to-back-to-back. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I think that enough is not said about these intricate workings. They criticized you know. They talked a lot of nonsense. They condemned the Prime Minister about the legal fees. Well, who caused these legal fees to come about? Did the Prime Minister go out and pick these fights with these people? And this is why I am grateful for the knowledge. In fact, I lived through it. I was here when, in fact, some of these things happened in the House, sitting on the other side. I was right here, Mr. Speaker. So I know the history myself. And we know who are the people who are responsible for creating these situations. So when they come to this Honourable House now and hold their hands together, bow their heads, and pretend like they are so holy and righteous, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to these dealings that are now happening, that the Prime Minister is trying to fix, he didn't come up with these things on his own, he is trying to fix it, then they play holy and righteous. They are to be whipped, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, you know that I have advocated and, in fact, successfully removed corporal punishment from schools. But I am telling you that those two over there they deserve to be hanged at the bridge foot and administered a few lashes, in addition to jail time. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I won't be any longer. I know that the Prime Minister has reserve a special tongue-lashing for my friend, the Member from Fort George. He

promised him. (Applause) You know that all Belizeans are aware that, and, in fact, the Prime Minister was right. He should never have gotten up and opened his mouth because it is on the record. It is not only the UDPs who are saying that this man was so terribly wrong in governing this country. It is all the international organizations. The Caribbean Court of Justice, Mr. Speaker, dubbed him as a malignant tumor along with my friend, the Leader of the Opposition. (Applause) It is not us who are saying that. The record is there against him. This man has, as my friend, the Member for Mesopotamia, would say, more nerves than ten bad teeth. He gets up in this House and talks as if he is so good. But I won't say anymore, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave the rest to the Prime Minister who I know we will all enjoy the whipping. (Applause)

But I close, Mr. Speaker, by saying, on behalf of the constituency which I represent, the wonderful people of the Collet constituency who I know, Mr. Speaker, and I don't even have to take a poll because I am sure that they would jump up and support every single day the acquisition of BTL or BEL or any of the utilities once they were in the claws of people who clearly did not have the interest of our country at heart. They would support these acquisitions ten times. And thankfully we don't have to worry about that again. It is now enshrined in the Constitution. But I am sure that they will support me, and I close finally by placing on record our support on this side. They could not want to support, if they don't want. On behalf of all the Belizean people out there who you will see agree with me when those elections are called, we place on the record our undiluted praise and appreciation for the Prime Minister of Belize for helping this country one more time out of the mess that the People's United Party and their cronies have put us in. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution this afternoon on the Belize Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015. Mr. Speaker, in the next six days Belize will be celebrating its Independence, and what should be a time of celebration and reaffirmation of Belize's sovereignty and territorial integrity we are certainly at a crossroads, Mr. Speaker, where our national sovereignty and integrity comes into question. Why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? I say that in the context of developments that have been taking place over the last weeks. We see Guatemala reasserting its claim over Sarstoon Island. We see where our sovereignty and integrity, as a nation, is being called into question.

Mr. Speaker, one would believe that issues of national sovereignty and integrity would be a national priority. One would believe that issues of our health system, where just in the last few weeks we saw the terrible situation at the Belmopan Hospital where a young baby was being bitten by a rat, that those would be national priorities and that this Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet would be dealing with those national matters. But what was revealed yesterday, Mr. Speaker, by our very own Prime Minister is that the last five months he spent them negotiating with the person whom he once referred to as the devil. He often called that individual by several despicable names.

But here we are today, Mr. Speaker, where he revealed to the nation that since May he has been to parties, he has been to cocktails, negotiating with Lord Ashcroft, forgetting that we have our nation's sovereignty at stake. Mr. Speaker, we often heard the Prime Minister speak about how he would do everything to

defend Belize from the tentacles of this person whom he so despise. Well, one must question, Mr. Speaker, what has happened. We seem to have gone through a complete turnaround, Mr. Speaker, where we do not only see the Prime Minister sitting at the table but where we see millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, being compensated to this individual and his companies whom he so once despise.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the last six years we have had a lot of chest thumping about nationalization. But, Mr. Speaker, the real truth is that it is not about nationalization and the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker. It is about theatrics and about moneymaking, particularly for the so-called best lawyers, friends and associates, of this UDP Government, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the last seven years our nation has seen where this Government has been marred in litigation after litigation, costing our country, costing Belizeans, millions and millions of dollars in legal fees, thus depriving, Mr. Speaker, our country from much needed revenue that could help to contribute to the economic and social development of this country.

Mr. Speaker, but above that, in addition to costing our country millions of dollars, we have seen where this Government, the UDP Government, has chosen to fight with everybody, everybody who dares to speak up and raise their voice about the terrible things that are going on in this country, Mr. Speaker. The UDP Government has chosen to fight with civil society and the NGOs, with COLA, with the churches, with the Maya Leaders Alliance, the BTV, with the Opposition, and everyone who dares to speak up and put their voice to the issues and the concerns that are negatively affecting our nation.

Mr. Speaker, we have also seen over the last years where the Prime Minister and this Government have gone out of their way to even amending the Constitution to facilitate the process of nationalization of the major public utilities companies. And, of course, Belizeans were sold a dream that once Government gained control of these national utilities companies that Belizeans would benefit, Mr. Speaker, that the bills would be lower and that Belizeans would be getting more for their dollar.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that after the last seven years Belizeans are not seeing meaningful and tangible benefits, particularly as it relates to BTL and even BEL, Mr. Speaker, because during the debate of that Bill a few days ago it is obvious that the cost of acquiring electricity has gone up. But more so for BTL, when one looks at the cost, Mr. Speaker, the average cost of a BTL call per minute during peak hours, we are talking about \$0.65 per minute, Mr. Speaker. That is not a direct benefit to the poor Belizean man and woman out there. That's what Belizeans want to know. They want to know that they can get on their phone and that they are going to have cheaper rates. That is what the benefits should be for our Belizean people.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen where all statistics show that the price of Internet in Belize is the highest in the region. Yet we have the slowest speed. That is not a direct benefit to the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker. We have seen, Mr. Speaker, where the Government at the time when they were changing and amending the Constitution to acquire BTL where they promised that once the acquisition was completed that our schools would be connected to Internet across those countries. That still continues to remain a very great challenge, Mr. Speaker. I speak particularly for the area I represent. You have more schools,

they still lack electricity and worse they lack connection to the Internet. This is what we should be speaking about, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I'm concerned when Government in its bad decision not to honour the court's ruling, to have paid the initial \$22 million to the British Caribbean Development Bank, when it refused to honour that payment and rather decided to take the hard road of saying, "We are not going to pay it", as the Prime Minister said. This is now costing us, Mr. Speaker, from \$22 million, a whopping \$44.5 million. It has doubled.

Now they will come to the House and argue, "Well, this is not costing the Belizean people. It's the company." But at the end of the day, if we own the utility company, whatever monies are taken those are monies that can be put into the education system to ensure that all our children have their relevant textbooks. That is money that can be put into our health system to make sure that rats are not biting our children in hospitals, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) That is where the money should be going. That is money that can be used, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the Southern Regional Hospital has all the necessary equipment to ensure that our pregnant women can get the necessary attention.

I am saddened to speak here today, Mr. Speaker. I am saddened to speak here today. Just Sunday we buried a young mother in Big Falls because allegedly she had to be transported to Belmopan Western Regional Hospital because they lack a basic oxygen valve in the Southern Regional Hospital, and eventually she died at the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital. This is where the millions of dollars should be going to ensure that our people have basic health care, education, and that our economy can grow and create opportunities for our people.

Mr. Speaker, to be able to look at the overall cost in this Bill, this Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, where it is proposing to spend \$162.7 million, this is a huge amount of money, Mr. Speaker. This is no peanuts. And, of course, we know, as other speakers have said, this does not represent the final settlement as it relates to this litigation in process. So we have every right to speak out, and Belizeans have every right to be concerned, Mr. Speaker, that our Government can do better and should do better, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, in listening to him yesterday, it is obvious that he was ill-advised because whilst he said that he had asked his best lawyers to advise him, and at the time, Mr. Speaker, he said he was advised not to pay. Well, we saw him yesterday where he conceded that he was ill-advised. Well, it wouldn't be so much of a concern to Belizeans if it wasn't costing the Belizean taxpayers that his mistake is now costing us additional millions of dollars that could have gone into other areas that are in much need of this money, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the real beneficiaries, and this is what I am very concerned about, as the Representative of my constituency. Who are the real beneficiaries of all these theatrics, of all this big game that is being played, Mr. Speaker? The real beneficiaries are the best lawyers, Mr. Speaker. The real beneficiaries are Ashcroft and his companies, Mr. Speaker. The real beneficiaries are those who control BTL. Those are the real beneficiaries, Mr. Speaker, because they have a cash-cow to milk whenever they have to milk it. It's not the Belizean people, and this is what our Belizean people are concerned about. The beneficiaries, Mr. Speaker, are those super buyers who buy huge credits from BTL Company and then resell it to the retailers. Those are the real beneficiaries like

Mytheon Company, who is making millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. Those are the people who are benefitting while the real losers, Mr. Speaker, are the Belizean people.

Mr. Speaker, now, where is this money coming from? The Prime Minister made it absolutely clear, we are seeing in the Supplementary Bill that is before us here, where he is going to be taking huge amounts of money from Petrocaribe to pay for this cost that we have before us. So it is obvious, Mr. Speaker, that much money is being used to pay for this. The question is, why is it that all this Petrocaribe money that is being used, why is it that it was not invested in agriculture? That's a question being asked by many people out there. Invest it in the productive sector where we can get much more returns, not only BTL. We need to make sure, and infrastructure is fine, but we also need to make sure that we invest it in the productive sector, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious, and I want to conclude by saying that it is obvious that the party is over. The party is over. The Petrocaribe money is finished. It is finished, and that is why the Belizeans know that the elections are here. The elections are here, and that is what it's all about. It's an election gimmick, Mr. Speaker, and that is why Belizeans are fully awake, and they will not stand for this when millions of dollars are being lost that could have gone into being more beneficial to the Belizean people. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, just a brief moment, BTL has about 45 million shares, and I will say the same thing, and we bought a share for \$1.44 per share. As the Prime Minister said, the medium point in what Ashcroft is claiming and what the consultancy firm says is about \$5.85 per share. So we still owe, if we go to the medium point, \$4.41 per share which is equivalent to over \$200 million. So, again, this is showing you that at the end of the day we are going to pay BTL in excess of some \$350 million. And, as the Honourable Member for Toledo West said, education and health need the assistance.

I also want to use the opportunity to appeal to the Minister of Education that there is a concern about the bus runs in my constituency since Friday of last week. (I want to say something else on the adjournment. So I will use that opportunity.) I hope that the Minister can address that situation as quickly as possible because it's a major concern for the schools. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to contribute to this debate because I said to myself that I was just going to repeat what my good friend, the Member from Collet, just said. But I just have to get one point here straight, Mr. Speaker. How the Member from Stann Creek West and the Member from Toledo West arrived at their numbers, Honourable Johnny? Only God knows. They just got up and pulled out numbers from the air, and they made their conclusions that one change to four change equivalents to \$350 million, and that \$350 million could have been spent on education and healthcare, as if though no money is being spent on education. Well, the voters of Mesopotamia Division are very happy with the Government and the Ministry of Education because we have helped every single person who is attending school in the Mesopotamia Division with some kind of educational assistance. So I want to thank the Government and thank the Minister.

Being a man who is troubled with major health problems, I could tell you about the competence of our medical system in this country. You all behave like if Doctor Sosa, Doctor Pitts, Doctor Habet and all of those doctors in Belize are nonsense. We have Doctor Gabourel, Doctor Mark Musa and Doctor Smith, the same Doctor Smith who is running for the PUP, those people are competent, good doctors. You all don't have anything good to say about them? Doctor Musa is one of my doctors. You all don't have anything good to say about the doctors in Belize? All you do is to run down the health service.

Now look at what you all glorify, and it looks like you all are happy because you all think that it will give you all a political advantage over the Government, a rat which ended up in the incubator and bitted the baby. Oh, God, we are sorry for that. But it is not Mr. Barrow who sent the rat in the place to go and bit the baby. (Applause) It is not Mr. Finnegan who sent the rat in the place to bit the baby. (Applause) The hospital in Belmopan is run by the public service. Some public officer is in charge of maintaining and keeping the hospital or maintaining the competence of the hospital and is not doing his job. So what are you going to do? Are you going to lash Mr. Barrow for that? Do you think that it was actually Mr. Barrow who took the rat into the incubator, dropped it there and told the rat to bit the baby? Boy, you don't clap for that. You don't glorify that. All of us must get up and try to make sure that these things don't happen and that we ensure that the competent people are placed in these positions so that those things don't happen.

Look at what the Leader of the Opposition did this morning, and he screamed on the top of his voice. "Oh, the world knows that Belize is a drug trafficking country and a violent country." Now he is boasting and he is glad that we are killing one another, that the young people are killing each other. So he is boasting that the world knows that, and he is glorified in that. Instead of him coming and standing here and bringing solutions to the problems that we face in this country and merging it with the initiatives from this side, when you merge it and bring them together, Mr. Speaker, we may find solutions to our problem. Why are you going to glorify over that by saying that your country is the most violent?

Let me go one step further, Mr. Speaker. When people used to come into the country to visit Belize and to see me, sometimes I used to be ashamed you know. Do you know why I was ashamed? When they used to go on the *keynel* side and go on our downtown street, the Albert Street, all there used to be broken up, and the cars used to be dropping in the holes. When it used to rain, water splashed on people. Man, those things make you feel ashamed. Are you with me, Mr. Speaker? But thank God we have rectified those situations there. The situation has changed. We ride three-street now. We ride free *keynel* side now. We could walk and run on the street. The people who went on the carnival the other day for the 10th September Parade said that now when you're marching you don't have to be watching and jumping the holes like a rat because your feet might get into a hole and twist. We must solve our problems. And not because we are in Opposition we must glorify on the problems that the country faces.

And the last point I will make, Mr. Speaker. All of them are saying how much money we are going to pay, and all of them came up with their own

imaginary figures. They didn't come up with the Prime Minister's figure, their own figures. How they arrived at it only God knows. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not like we took \$162 million and pushed it in Mr. Ashcroft's hand, and we gave him. We have BTL. We have a profitable institution, an institution that is earning money.

And before I sit down, finally now, Mr. Speaker, Anwar Barrow, he is like my nephew. I held him from he was small. So he is like my nephew, like how Dean Lindo says it, *nephew*. Now listen to me good, Mr. Speaker. Anwar's mother or father sent him to primary school, to high school, to sixth form, and they sent him to the university. Anwar is a university graduate with a degree. So, Mr. Speaker, if Anwar is the manager of BTL and Anwar wasn't academically equipped and university trained, you could say and shout, how Mr. Barrow will put his son there or the Board will put him there when he is not equipped for the job? That is not the case. This young man is eminently qualified. This young man has a personality that is second to none. This young man is eminently trained. This young man is successful in his own business adventures. Mr. Speaker, this young man, because of his own business, is a wealthy young man in terms of Belizean wealth. So, because Anwar Barrow so happens to be my nephew and so happens to be the Prime Minister's son, Anwar is not supposed to live and work and help the Government in Belize? Man, it is ludicrous.

Mr. Speaker, finally again, he is executing himself as the Head of BTL. BTL is growing. There is no worker's issue. There are no workers' problems at BTL. I get the impression that everybody is happy. We are receiving our dividends because I have a little money in there you know, Sir. I get my dividends, and everybody get theirs. BTL is moving along quite properly. The company is growing. The advanced technology is being added to the company every year under this young man's leadership. So what is wrong with that? I think we ought to congratulate Anwar Barrow for his excellent stewardship, Mr. Speaker. And I want to congratulate him publicly together with Mr. Net Vasquez for the excellent stewardship that they have provided to this profitable institution.

And, Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of your Government and, as the parliamentary whip of your Government, on behalf of every Member across this side, again, I want to congratulate you on the execution of this deal that you have made, this conclusion. (Applause) And, Mr. Speaker, now that I am sitting I want to tell you, Mr. Prime Minister, and coming from my heart and from every Member of this side, you are a national treasure. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must thank those on this side of the House for their contributions and for their very kind words, to the Minister of Housing, the Minister of Education, and, of course, the Attorney General. Very quickly in responding, the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Belize Rural Central complained about the short notice. Well, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, as they will see from the Settlement Deeds attached to the Bill, they were only signed on Friday. So it was not, as somebody said, a deliberate instruction of mine to keep back the details. We only got through on Friday, and so that is why they didn't see those Bills until yesterday.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition insisted that we well

knew that it was illegal to acquire the BCB/Telemedia Loan. I have explained that all the assets of Telemedia were pledged to the bank, and so when we acquired the company, if we had not acquired the loan, they would have used the fact of the pledge of the assets to wind up the company. So there is no question at all but that both things went together hand-in-hand. We couldn't have one without the other.

Then the criticisms are that you ought to have paid back the Telemedia loan earlier than you did. Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the advice, as to the illegality of that loan, did not originate with any opinion that the Government sought. I explained that when BTL did attempted to pay back the loan and sought financing from FirstCaribbean their lawyers in Barbados indicated that while we would want to approve this loan we can't because that loan is illegal. The circumstances in which the previous owners of BTL had borrowed the money, they said, were illegal.

We didn't just stop there. We did, at that point, seek legal opinion from people abroad, not from the local legal experts but from, as I said, Dr. Lloyd Barnett from Jamaica and from the firm of Charles Russell in London, and they too thought that the loan was illegal. It was on that basis that we didn't pay. We felt that we could challenge the legality of the loan in court, and no local court ruled against us. The matter was never decided here. But the Arbitration Tribunal listened to those arguments and found that in their view the loan was not illegal, or that since the bank was out of pocket even if the previous owners of Telemedia were guilty of any illegality the loan still had to be repaid. In that time, indeed, interest did accrue.

What I will make clear is this. It wasn't just the decision of the Government based on the legal advice from the foreign counsel not to pay the loan but to challenge the illegality in front of the tribunal. This was a decision of the BTL Board under its Chairman, Net Vasquez. That Board knew that, in fact, we were taking a chance, there was litigation risk, but the Board felt very strongly that we should run that risk. In the end we lost at the tribunal, and so we have had to pay the additional interest.

Again, let me make clear that it is convoluted and simply wrongheaded to say that the taxpayers of this country are finding even a penny to pay that BCB loan award. It comes from the company, Belize Telemedia, and you cannot say, "Well, because the Government and people own Telemedia, this is somehow to be equated with costing the taxpayers of the country." That is ridiculous. First of all, there are small shareholders in BTL. Somebody pointed out, I think it was the Minister of Housing, that he, as a small shareholder, is getting his dividend payment. There is SSB, there is, I believe, the Central Bank, so there are all those entities involved in the ownership of BTL, and that is why, as a private company even though it is majority owned by Government, BTL is run in an autonomous sovereign fashion by its Board of Directors. And that Board of Directors thought it well worth the risk. That Board of Directors will now have to pay for the fact that that course of action proved not to be successful, the course of action to resist.

One thing that I must also make clear, I have never said that I will not pay the BCB award. That's an award that just came down. The award that I said I would not pay is the Accommodation Agreement award, (Applause) because from

the start we refused to honour the Accommodation Agreement when its existence was finally revealed to us. The previous owners took us to arbitration over our breach, our refusal to honour the Accommodation Agreement, and they got an award, and it was that award that I said I would not pay, and I still maintain that I will not pay it. We have not paid it. They got the award. They got an enforcement order from a US court. They have not come to Belize to try to enforce it because, I think, no court in Belize will countenance it because it is an award for an agreement, an Accommodation Agreement that is flagrantly, blatantly, illegal. And so that was what I said I would not pay, and I said it, and I mean it. I will not pay that Accommodation Agreement award.

Then, Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition also said, well, we scramble to settle because we knew that we would lose at the CCJ. I don't know how he can say that we knew that we would lose. Well, we must confess he is more familiar with CCJ than we are because it is the same CCJ that called him a malignant tumor. (Applause) Anyway, the point is, Mr. Speaker, precisely, and to say that we scramble to settle because we were scared of the award, in neither the case of BEL or BTL were we the ones to approach the people on the other side you know. I told you that Mr. Perry, when he came to visit as the new CEO and President of BEL, had a meeting with me, and he was the one who proposed a settlement. I told you that in May, and some fool is saying something about I went to cocktail parties to negotiate. Man, look here, I could barely walk, and I will go to cocktail parties to stand up to engage in anything. I told you that I was approached by Lord Ashcroft about a settlement. So how can you all say that it was because I was afraid of the CCJ judgment?

And then, Mr. Speaker, the last point made by the Leader of the Opposition was that I was afraid because I would be castigated by the CCJ. Well, again, I don't know how he can say that. I don't know how he knows how the result would have turned out. So that is the worst kind of baseless speculation. But what is a fact, what is in the record, is that the CCJ already castigated him and the Member for Fort George. (Applause) They are the two described by the CCJ as malignant tumors.

And then very quickly, just to deal with the Member for Fort George, Mr. Speaker, I am certain that his initials, S.M., that the "M" in those initials, S.M., doesn't stand for Musa. It stands for masochist which is a word used to describe somebody who enjoys feeling pain, who enjoys inflicting punishment on himself because in speaking in this debate that is exactly what he did.

Now let me come to the records that I told you I would speak about. First of all, when both the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Toledo West talked about rates not having come down under the Government's stewardship of BTL, that is nonsense. And one way, one factor in the plummeting of rates is the Government's freeing of VOIP, Voice Over Internet Protocol. That is what allows people to make calls for free on Viber, on Tango, and WhatsApp. I'm sure all of them have those free applications that allow you to text and to make calls for free. As a consequence, that can only happen, that could only have happened as a consequence of BTL setting this country free with respect to VOIP. And what I want to tell you is this. If it had continued under the previous ownership, there would have been no VOIP because part of the Accommodation Agreement was that the Member for Fort George, the Leader of the Opposition, and the people on that side agreed that there would never be any release of VOIP that the company would forever be able to continue without freeing up VOIP.

And let me go back now to the archives of that hallowed institution, Channel 7. (Boy, for such a hallowed place, you have to do something about appearances you know. You think we should start to pass around the hats so that, but the Mayor gave you a paint job, but anyway let us not go there.) This was posted on October 10, 2006: Fonseca Gave BTL Assurance About Ban on VOIP. This is what that fearless and peerless reporter, Jules Vasquez, had to say. “Has Government made another secret telecom agreement that will mean more expensive phone calls for you? The first secret agreement, seven of them actually, were contained in a letter that the Prime Minister wrote to then majority shareholder, Jeffrey Prosser, in February of 2004, when he agreed to illegalize Voice Over Internet Calls.” That is what you all did. “Well, it seems that Government has made similar promises to Michael Ashcroft’s companies when they replaced Prosser as majority shareholders.

The UDP today released a September 18 letter from BTL Managing Director, Dean Boyce, to Minister Ralph Fonseca and the PUC Chairman, Roberto Young. It says basically that the Voice Over Internet guidelines which were finalized in June after many months of debate and a massive public forum”, so they took the people for fools, had people come and attend consultations about how to free up the company from VOIP, but all the while it was a charade, “after many months of debate and a massive public forum are just words on a paper because Government will not, in fact, cannot implement them.

Boyce’s letter says, ‘BTL has received assurances from the Minister that the guidelines are not enforceable obligations. And that the PUC will take no steps to enforce or implement their contents in any way.’ And while a ministerial assurance is one thing”, according to Jules, “a Government undertaking is another, and that’s just what Boyce says he got in the next paragraph.”

That next paragraph says, “BTL has been given an undertaking that no class license holder will be able to use, or permit use of Voice Over Internet for any telecommunications traffic originating or terminating within Belize. Boyce’s letter closes by saying that BTL will continue to operate on the basis of those assurances.”

So BTL would not free up VOIP, and nobody else that was an internet service provider would be allowed to. That is how far these people went to keep the cost of services from the previous owners of BTL, including the cost of calls, sky high. It is this Government, it is BTL, under the stewardship of this Administration that has completely freed up the Voice Over Internet Protocol. (Applause)

But turning particularly to that masochist, Mr. Speaker, again, turning to the locus classicus of the historical record, with respect to their sordid BTL saga, I quote now from a Friday, March 18, 2005, Channel 7 posting. “Last night we told you about the settlement agreement that Michael Ashcroft has put on the table presumably as the price for bailing the Government out of the BTL imbroglio.” Remember they first got Ashcroft to sell to Prosser. When Prosser didn’t pay, they had to ask Ashcroft to buy back. But Ashcroft demanded more than his pound of flesh. This is what they did with BTL.

“According to the agreement, Ashcroft would drop his claims under the

still secret buyback clause”, everything done in secret. But, of course, that intrepid fellow was able to deal with Deep Throat sources, I think he got some in Cabinet you know, and we have to watch that, that provided him with these secret agreements. “According to the agreement, Ashcroft would drop his claims under the still secret buyback clause which is being arbitrated in London, and in exchange Government would have to write off whatever taxes are owing by the Belize Bank which the Government says is \$12 million and which the unions say is \$17 million.” That was part of what they agreed to do after they had got themselves into such trouble with the Prosser deal for Ashcroft to bail them out of that deal, write-off \$17 million in taxes.

And when Jules interviewed Said Musa, Prime Minister of Belize, or quoted from what he had said in the House, “Madam Speaker,” something, something here, “I do not propose to engage in a debate today with the Leader of the Opposition about the status of BTL because Government has a responsibility in this matter. We are acting responsibly.” Writing-off \$17 million in taxes so the people could bail you out, that is acting responsibly? “We are going about it cautiously and legally, and therefore, I believe I can say to this Honourable House that at the appropriate time I will be making a statement to the Belizean people.” Well, he never made that statement.

And Channel 7 went on, “While the Prime Minister urge caution, he did not deny that the concession is still on the table. And while the Prime Minister chose not to speak on it, the Albert PUP, Albert backbencher, Mark Espat, did weigh in. He said that the government,” his government, your government, “has repeatedly sold out and in doing so messed up its chances to set BTL right for phone users.” And you will complain now when we have lowered rates across the board.

Mark Espat, “From the outset, and I have advanced this position when I was a Minister of Government, privately at the time, of course, I felt that the way to create competition was to regulate rates and to offer licenses using the Public Utilities Commission. I think that our Government back in 1993, when it allowed Carlisle to become a permitted person,” Mark is tracing from the start because of corruption. That one talked about nobody can accuse him of corruption.

“I think that our Government back in 1993, when it allowed Carlisle to become a permitted person, I think that was a mistake. We then turned around and facilitated the acquisition of majority shareholding in BTL which led us inevitably to the problem of the majority shareholder not wanting competition. While we were doing that, we adopted this Intelco company”, Glenn Godfrey, one of their cronies, “not just giving it a 15-year secret exclusive contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but we also put at risk Social Security funds. We gave Intelco a license. In fact, many of the schools”, the one from Toledo West, “many of the schools are still waiting for those 5,000 computers that we promised to them. That aside now, back to the BTL issue, I think for the right reasons the Government decided to buy back the shares but it did so again in secret. The House of Representatives did not approve a loan for the purchase of those shares, and I don’t think there is any justification for allowing Carlisle to have the option to buy back the shares and then to invite Jeffrey Prosser in and to say that he paid for the shares and then it turns out that he did not pay for the shares.”

Who was the one who said that he paid for the shares and lied to the

House and the nation? It was the Member for Fort George. “This is certainly, I think, an issue that is of paramount concern to Belizeans, and many people are asking one question, who is responsible for this? And I think whoever it is that is responsible for this litany of decisions has to be held to account.”

“Espat added that Government has squandered every opportunity it had to put Belizean shareholders back in charge of BTL.” That is what this United Democratic Party Government has done. (Applause)

The post of September 22, 2005: Sunshine Deal Closed; BTL Workers Say GOB Sold Them Out; that one got up and talked about interest of workers at FCIB. They have a history of selling out the workers. By the way, nobody has mentioned that in the Settlement Deed the \$10 million that their Government caused SSB to lend to the Ashcroft interests so that the Sunshine Trust could buy shares that is to be deducted from any further award that we are to repay and given back to Social Security Board, to the workers of this country. As well, the \$10 million that they on their own also loaned, that will be deducted from any further award so that the Government and the taxpayers get back their \$10 million.

But Channel 7 says that “It’s a done deal and either you take it or leave it, that’s basically what the Prime Minister told BTL’s Communication Workers Union leaders this morning at the Central Bank.”

“At the Prime Minister’s side were Dean Boyce, who is a Michael Ashcroft employee and a BTL Director, and Attorney General Francis Fonseca.” This was when they went to shaft the workers, the now Leader of the Opposition, not the Member for Orange Walk Central, who is always a more conscientious fellow and a smarter fellow than those other two.

“At the Prime Minister’s side were Dean Boyce who is a Michael Ashcroft employee, and Attorney General Francis Fonseca. The Prime Minister explained that the shares, representing 20% of BTL, have been transferred and registered in the name of Sunshine Holdings, and Government has been paid for those shares. That means Sunshine Holdings, an investment company registered at Michael Ashcroft’s Corporate Headquarters, owns the shares. The Prime Minister further explained that Sunshine’s two Directors on the BTL Boards will be Dean Boyce and Keith Arnold.”

“For the 15 years it takes to pay back the loan, Sunshine will control, administer and effectively own the shares. The understanding is that these will be held in trust for the BTL workers. But President of the Communication Workers Union at BTL said it is a betrayal of all that was promised to the union and a repudiation of all the union worked and fought for.” All that is part of the BTL’s history as written by the Member for Fort George and the Leader of the Opposition. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I’m almost finished. A post September 1, 2005: BTL’s New Articles Will Squeeze Small Shareholders, remember that we have sold shares to the small shareholders who continue to get their dividends. But September 1, 2005, “Yesterday when we checked it wasn’t there but today BTL’s new amended Articles of Association were in the file at the Company Register in Belmopan, Utilities Minister Ralph Fonseca”. You know that is why people don’t want

anybody with the name Fonseca back in Government you know. And the one beside him who is there who said nothing will come between the love and the friendship he had for the first Fonseca is there on TV, when the media talks about the split in the PUP, saying that Francis Fonseca is the best thing since slice bread. And he will support Francis Fonseca until the end. And not just we on this side, not just Belizeans but so many on that side are saying “a plague on both their houses”. Nobody will forgive the Member for Fort George ever and the Leader of the Opposition who was tee-tie-toe with him in Government and they’ve reverse, rose now, the cancer from Fort George is tee-tie-toe behind the Leader of the Opposition. The two of them will be sent to Hades to perdition by the people of this country and even before then from those in their own party.

But anyway, “The Articles show that force of statute Minister Fonseca has amended thirteen articles of this private sector company. All those articles have references to the Special Share that Jeffrey Prosser refused to return to the Government of Belize. And while removing Prosser’s rights is one thing, removing those of small Belizean shareholders, about 1,000 of them, is quite another.” Do you see why we had to nationalize? “But that’s just what Minister Fonseca did when he amended Article 127 which protects the small shareholders’ entitlement to a dividend.” So, if it was them, my cousin, you would not have been getting any dividend.

“The Article 127 ensures that 45% of BTL’s profits are paid out in dividends.” And that’s what the UDP had done when it first wrote the Articles of Association when it privatized. “It does that by declaring that the dividend will be paid unless there is an agreement to do otherwise by the holder of the B Shares and the holder of the Special Share which should be Government.” But since they had sold the special share, “Well, now it only says that the holder of the majority B Shares alone can decide otherwise, and that holder is, you guessed it, Michael Ashcroft and his affiliated companies. So now Ashcroft and his company’s directors exclusively will decide if that dividend of 45% of profits is or is not paid. It is an important point to those 1,000 shareholders who invested based on the assurance in the company’s articles. But now that their rights have varied in the Minister’s new amended Articles of Association, when it comes to dividends, what Lord Ashcroft says goes.” I won’t get into the question of how and what they did with the special shares.

So I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, with this. The article posted on May 17, 2007: The Cost to GOB, you all are talking about legal cost, The Cost To GOB For The Prosser/Ashcroft War. “Over the past weeks, so much has been said over the \$33 million Universal guarantee. But if you are counting numbers \$33 million ain’t much in the vast scheme of Government deals gone wrong”. This was under the PUP.

“Earlier this week we showed you that Government says that, in direct and contingent sums, Glenn Godfrey related companies have Government in the hole for \$64 million.” Whatever we are paying we get BTL for it. What did you get for the \$64 million to the Glenn Godfrey companies?

“Coming in very close to that is the entire BTL fiasco. From November of 2003, when Government decided it would get Michael Ashcroft out of the picture and get a new owner for BTL, the bill has been running. In terms of additional cost to Government, it’s worked out to one of the most expensive ventures in

modern history and may be a textbook case on how not to sell a utility company. Jules Vasquez has been crunching the numbers.” And you know what Ms. Schakron said, “You have to ask Jules when it comes to numbers”. “Jules Vasquez has been crunching the numbers and the total he came up with might make you shudder.” That’s a wrong use of words, might make you shudder, will make you shudder.

“Jules Vasquez reporting: Michael Ashcroft and the Prime Minister”, and he showed you their picture you know. “Michael Ashcroft and the Prime Minister, indeed, they go way back and, as Belize’s wealthiest investor and his favored Prime Minister, they should. In fact, Ashcroft saw PM Musa as the alternative to the often glacial and thoroughly difficult relationship he had with Musa’s predecessor, Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel.”

“But, when Ashcroft and the PUP did fight, their fallout was enormous, and when the Musa Administration lost that fight taxpayers have been and will be paying for the collateral damage. When Prime Minister Musa decided to sell BTL to Jeffrey Prosser in December of 2003, he let Ashcroft who was selling the shares dictate some of the terms of the sale, and that’s come back to haunt taxpayers.”

“The cost of the entire Prosser/Ashcroft scenario is in the tens of millions of dollars:

- First, Government paid Ashcroft a premium of US\$5 million for his controlling interest, a cost that was never passed on to Prosser;
- Next, and then when Prosser didn’t pay US\$2.6 million for a million Class C Shares;
- Next, and then when Prosser’s ICC defaulted Government had to pay another US\$1.983 million to the International Bank of Miami to re-profile that debt;
- Next, the interest cost on that debt with the International Bank of Miami was US\$913,000.00 and the interest cost on the re-profile notes was another US\$3.3 million.” And now you all are talking about legal fees.
- “And then, of course, there was an ensuing battle with ICC, and that costs the Government another US\$2.8 million.”

“And while that was happening Ashcroft then initiated international arbitration proceedings against the Government basically because of all that they had done with Prosser.” Boy, this is operatic. I mean soap operatic. No matter how much imagination you have no writer could have invented this sort of thing.

- “To get him to stop that arbitration Government had to pay Ashcroft’s Carlisle Holdings US\$123,000.00 and another \$7,000.00 in arbitration fees.
- So add another \$130,000.00 more to the tab.”

Aye, Jules, man, you could have overlooked that. In the larger scheme of things with those millions and millions, what is that \$130,000.00? But it did add up.

“Of course, Ashcroft wasn’t finished there. Government would pay dearly for crossing him.

- It also had to forego collection of some \$17 million in business tax, what was legally term as ‘set off’.
- But that innocuous legal euphemism hardly captures the public loss of a settlement that cost the Government and taxpayers those \$17 million, particularly in a time of austerity.
- And there was still the Sunshine venture: Government would have to get Social Security to make \$10 million available via low cost financing.
- And Government itself would have to pay \$10 million to that venture for shares which Ashcroft’s companies presently control.”

“Add it all up and it comes to a cost of \$70,788,104 million, a staggering figure, and when we look at the total we are not sure how it all benefits Belize.”

Again, brother, you are not sure. Why not state it in the affirmative? And it does not in the slightest iota benefits Belize. But then you redeemed yourself. You go on to say, “But maybe Ashcroft had it right in March of 2004, when he told us, ‘You get the politicians you vote for. One thing that we didn’t put in there but which does pertain is the \$6 million in business tax credits to BTL that Government has agreed to as a refund for a Glenn Godfrey’s property which Prosser’s BTL had agreed to buy but Ashcroft’s BTL wanted no part of it.’” And then he noted that the unusual piece of legislation, the Vesting Bill, which wrote off another \$17 million, was going to the House on the following day.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it important to read all this into the records so that people can have a clear understanding of the entire picture and how much those on the other side, in particular the Member for Fort George and the Leader of the Opposition, are responsible for in terms of the way they absolutely wrecked this country, the way they plundered, the way they pillaged, the way they had no regard for the interest of the country, no regard for the canons of democracy, how they did everything in secret. They, as I said, are the last ones to talk, and none of those two ought ever to have opened his mouth in terms of intervening in this BTL Settlement Deed debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to facilitate the implementation of the terms of a deed of settlement and compromise between the Government, Dunkeld International Investment Ltd, British Caribbean Bank Limited and The Trustees of the BTL Employees Trust arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Telemedia Limited and rights under certain loans and security

arrangements made by The British Caribbean Bank Limited; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a second time.

IV COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE ON BILLS

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bills that were read a second time.

I would like to ask the public in the galleries to leave during this portion of the Sitting.

[In the Committee]

The Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

2. Bank Undertaking (First Caribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015.

Clauses 1 to 6 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

3. Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

Clauses 1 to 8 agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

V BILLS FOR THIRD READING

1. General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2015/2016) (No.3) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move the third reading of a Bill for an Act to appropriate further sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending on the thirty-first day of March, two thousand and sixteen.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to appropriate further sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending on the thirty-first day of March, two thousand and sixteen, be read a third time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a third time.

2. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole has met and considered the Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2015, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003, to introduce the third stage of reduction of customs duties in regards to the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the European Union; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a third time.

3. Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole has met and considered the Bank Undertaking (FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited Belize Branch) Vesting Bill, 2015, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to provide for the vesting in Heritage Bank Ltd. of the business in Belize of FirstCaribbean International Bank (Barbados) Limited; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a third time.

4. Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole has met and considered the Telecommunications Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to facilitate the implementation of the terms of a deed of settlement and compromise between the Government, Dunkeld International Investment Ltd, British Caribbean Bank Limited and The Trustees of the BTL Employees Trust arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Telemedia Limited and rights under certain loans and security arrangements made by The British Caribbean Bank Limited; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency and it's a matter of national concern. I received a message from a constituency I represent to relay a question to this national House, and it relates to the situation in the Sarstoon and the Guatemala issue with Belize. And they asked if there could be a disclosure to the people of Belize the protest diplomatic note sent and received from Guatemala. So I just the convey the message and hope that I get a response.

MR. SPEAKER: What you can do, Member, is to put it in the form of a written question. And then it will be answered by the Minister of National Security.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Okay, I will do it in writing.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

The House now stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 3:05 P.M. to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

SPEAKER.

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