

BELIZE

No. HR 28/1/11

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, 2nd September 2015

10:10 AM.

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Pursuant to the directions of Mr. Speaker on the 28th August 2015, the House met on Wednesday, 2nd September 2015, in the National Assembly Chamber, Belmopan, at 10:10 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. 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 Longsworth (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. Frank Mena (Dangriga), Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security
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. Julius Espat (Cayo South)
 The Hon. Oscar Requena (Toledo West)
 The Hon. Jose Mai (Orange Walk South)
 The Hon. Ramiro Ramirez (Corozal South West)

Members Absent:

The Hon. John Saldivar (Belmopan), Minister of National Security
 The Hon. Elvin Penner (Cayo North East)
 The Hon. Marco Tulio Mendez (Orange Walk East)

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRAYERS by Pastor Lancelott Lewis.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE OF A NEW MEMBER

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, kindly administer the Oath of Allegiance to the newly elected Member for Dangriga, the Honourable Frank Mena. (Applause)

HON. F. MENA (Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security): I, **FRANK MENA**, do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize, and will uphold the Constitution and the law, and that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as **MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES** and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. **SO HELP ME GOD.** (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Dangriga, it is customary that when a new Member is sworn in you are given the opportunity to say a few words. So you may, if you choose to, and may I officially welcome you to this Honourable House of Representatives.

HON. F. MENA (Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Good morning one and all, my colleagues, I want to take this opportunity to say thanks to, of course, first, the creator, to God be the glory, so give him praise. I want to also thank my family and my dear friends for being a formidable support, as usual to all my colleagues for believing and standing firm and steadfast. I want to say thanks to my campaigners, supporters, to the wonderful people of Dangriga, Hope Creek and Sarawee. (Applause) Thank you very much for believing and standing firm.

I need to say that this is a new journey and a new journey that is not mine but ours. And so I beg of you that we trod this path and go through this journey together as a team. I want to especially ask that we stand firm in unity for the development of the south.

Mr. Speaker, if I may say a few words in Garifuna, and, of course, I will

translate thereafter.

The time to unite is now. We need to unite as one. With the deep hope of our ancestors, we are a great people, intelligent and strong. (Applause) We come from greatness. It's in unity that we have development. May God be the leader of all our undertakings. I thank you very much. (Applause)

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been represented to me that there is a vacancy in the Chairmanship of the Works Committee of the House of Representatives.

Pursuant to Standing Order 73, the Committee of Selection, comprising of Honourable Michael Finnegan, Chairman, Honourable Wilfred Elrington, Honourable Edmond Castro, Honourable Santino Castillo, Honourable Florencio Marin Jr., and Honourable Dolores Balderamos Garcia, is charged with the task to recommend to the House the names of Members to serve on each Standing Committee.

Therefore, I propose, with the concurrence of the House, of course, to suspend the Sitting to enable the Committee of Selection to consider and report to the House on the appointment of a Member to fill the vacancy of a Chairman in the Works Committee.

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

The Meeting suspended at 10:19 A.M.

The Meeting resumed at 10:25 A.M.

PRESENTATION OF REPORT FROM COMMITTEE

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, I present the Report from the Committee of Selection on the Appointment of a Member to fill the vacancy of the Chairmanship of the Works Committee of the House of Representatives.

Your Committee held its meeting a short while ago, 2nd September 2015, and agreed to the following:

“That Honourable Frank Mena fills the vacancy as Chairman in the Works Committee of the House of Representatives.”

The meeting was attended by all Members and may I just list the names: Chairperson – Honourable Michael Finnegan; Honourable Wilfred Elrington; Honourable Edmond Castro; Honourable Santiago Castillo; Honourable Florencio Marin Jr.; and Honourable Dolores Balderamos Garcia.

Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Report is ordered to lie on the Table.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

I MOTION

1. **Adoption of the Report from the Committee of Selection Motion, 2015.**

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - BE IT RESOLVED that the Report from the Committee of Selection on the Appointment of a Member to fill the vacancy of the Chairmanship of the Works Committee of the House of Representatives be adopted.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, BE IT RESOLVED that the Report from the Committee of Selection on the Appointment of a Member to fill the vacancy of the Chairmanship of the Works Committee of the House of Representatives be adopted.

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

PAPERS

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table Sessional Papers No. HR271/1/11 - Development Finance Corporation - Annual Report 2014; and No. HR271A/1/11 - Supplementary Appropriation (No.2) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Sessional Paper No. HR271A/1/11 is referred to the Committee of Supply for examination, consideration and report and Sessional Paper No. HR271/1/11 is ordered to lie on the Table.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEE

HON. W. ELRINGTON (Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present Sessional Papers No. HR272/1/11 - Report from the Natural Resources and Environment Committee on the National Protected Areas System Bill, 2015; and No. HR273/1/11 - Report from the Natural Resources and Environment Committee on the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Reports are also 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.2) 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 at this time. 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]

1. Supplementary Appropriation (No.2) 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. HR271A/1/11 referred to the Committee of Supply.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman left the Chair.

The Meeting resumed at 10:31 A.M.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

II MOTIONS

1. Supplementary Appropriation (No.2) 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, having met and approved the proposals set out in the Sessional Paper No. HR271A/1/11 - Supplementary Appropriation (No.2) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2015/2016, that 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.2) 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. Caribbean Development Bank – Belize Education Sector Reform Programme II Loan Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, section 3(1) of the Loans (Caribbean Development Bank) Act, Chapter 74 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2003, provides that subject to such conditions as may be agreed between the Government and the Caribbean Development Bank (“the Bank”), the Government may borrow from the Bank from time to time such sums as may be required by the Government;

AND WHEREAS, section 3(2) of the said Act further provides that no agreement in respect of sums borrowed under the powers conferred by section 3(1) shall be executed unless the terms and conditions thereof have been first approved by a Resolution of the House of Representatives to that effect;

AND WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of the Bank has recently approved a Loan to the Government of Belize in the sum of US\$35,000,000;

AND WHEREAS, the purpose of the Loan is to continue the good efforts of the Belize Education Sector Reform Programme I to enhance the learning outcomes across all levels of the education sector in Belize; – (together referred to as “the Programme”);

AND WHEREAS, the primary objectives of the Programme are to enhance the learning environment by constructing and equipping thirty-five (35) new schools at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels; and to enhance the mechanisms and capacity for quality service delivery;

AND WHEREAS, the Bank has offered to lend to the Government the sum of US\$35,000,000 (“the Loan”) to finance the Programme on the following terms and conditions:

Ordinary Capital Resources Portion

- (a) US \$21,000,000 Ordinary Capital Resources (OCR) – to be repaid in sixty-eight (68) equal or approximately equal and consecutive quarterly installments commencing five (5) years after the date of the Loan Agreement;
- (b) Interest at the rate of 3.90% per annum (variable) to be paid quarterly on the outstanding OCR portion of the loan;
- (c) A Commitment Fee of 1% to be paid quarterly on the un-withdrawn portion of the loan from time to time, to accrue from the sixtieth (60th) day after the date of the Loan Agreement;

Special Funds Resources Portion

- (a) US \$14,000,000.00 Special Funds Resources (SFR) – to be repaid in eighty (80) equal or approximately equal and consecutive quarterly installments commencing five (5) years after the date of the Loan Agreement;
- (b) Interest at the rate of 2.5% per annum to be paid quarterly on the outstanding SFR portion of the loan;

The Loan shall be fully disbursed by April 30, 2021, or such later date as the Bank may specify in writing;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Programme will significantly contribute to the Government’s continued, dedicated efforts to improve the educational sector in Belize which will ultimately enhance human capital and reduce poverty in the country, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan Agreement with the Caribbean Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Agreement and all other documents associated therewith.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

and report.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the Honourable House to have the Motion be taken through all its stages this day.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that this Motion be taken through all its stages this day.

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

3. Inter-American Development Bank – George Price Highway Rehabilitation Loan Motion, 2015

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, Belize being a member of the Inter-American Development Bank (the “Bank”), is eligible for development assistance in the form of loans, grants, and technical assistance from the Bank on such terms and conditions as may be agreed between Belize and the Bank from time to time;

AND WHEREAS, the Government of Belize has approached the Bank for financial assistance in the execution of George Price Highway Rehabilitation Project;

AND WHEREAS, it is the intention of the Government to apply such financial assistance to substantially improve the road connectivity within Belize’s main districts and with Central America by rehabilitating the George Price Highway (hereinafter referred to as the “GPH”) road infrastructure between miles 47.9 in Belmopan and 67.3 in Santa Elena to national standards, decreasing travel time and costs, reducing road fatalities and injuries, and ensuring road accessibility by improving the climate change resilience of the corridor;

AND WHEREAS, such project consists of civil works for the rehabilitation of the GPH from mile 47.9 (Belmopan) to 67.3 (Santa Elena Bypass); replacement of the Roaring Creek Bridge (mile 48); supervision of the civil works; two years of maintenance of the civil works; and land acquisition, compensation and utilities relocation. The project will also finance activities to support the administration of the project and to strengthen the Ministry of Works and Transport, and particularly the Project Execution Unit and the Road Maintenance Unit;

AND WHEREAS, it is intended that the execution of the project shall be carried out on behalf of the Government by the Ministry of Works, acting as Executing Agency;

AND WHEREAS, the Bank has offered the Government financing of up to US\$27,000,000 from its Ordinary Capital Resources in support of the Rehabilitation of the George Price Highway under the following terms and conditions:

Lender: The Inter-American Development Bank;

Loan Principal Amount:	US\$27,000,000.00 Single Currency Facility Loan;
Disbursement Schedule:	Over a period of sixty (60) months from the date of signature of Loan Contract;
Loan Term:	Twenty five (25) Years inclusive of a sixty-six (66) month Grace Period on Principal Repayments;
Repayment Period:	To be repaid in 39 approximately equal, semi-annual, and consecutive installments of about US\$692,307.69;
Purpose:	To execute George Price Highway Rehabilitation;
Rate of Interest:	Lending Rate is based on the Single Currency Facility Loan with a LIBOR-Based Interest Rate plus the applicable lending spread for the Bank's ordinary capital loans, to be paid semi-annually beginning six months from date of signature of Loan Contract;
Credit Fee:	A Credit Fee will be at a percentage to be established by the Bank on a periodic basis, not exceeding 0.75% per annum;

AND WHEREAS, under the provisions of section 7 (2) of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, 2005, the Government of Belize is required to obtain the prior authorisation of the National Assembly, by way of a Resolution, for such a borrowing;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Loan proceeds would significantly assist the Government of Belize in its endeavor to rehabilitating the GPH road infrastructure between miles 47.9 in Belmopan and 67.3 in Santa Elena to national standards, decreasing travel time and costs, reducing road fatalities and injuries, and ensuring road accessibility by improving the climate change resilience of the corridor, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan Contract with the Inter-American Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above for financing the said Project, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Loan Contract and all other documents associated therewith.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the House to have the Motion be taken through all its stages this day.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that this Motion be taken through all its stages this day.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, on June 25, 2008, a security guard drove Government of Belize vehicle BMP B-0027 attached to the Ministry of Health without permission and overturned on the George Price Highway;

AND WHEREAS, the security guard was arrested, charged and imprisoned; the damage done to BMP B-0027 totaled \$60,000.00;

AND WHEREAS, recovery from employee was considered but the Solicitor General advised against it citing that “the matter is a litigation risk and may be categorized as a loss”;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$60,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me leave to sit while I read this Motion. I move - WHEREAS, on August 7, 2012, Government of Belize vehicle CYB-1778 was en route to Belmopan City when the driver lost control causing the vehicle to slide and overturned off the road;

AND WHEREAS, the vehicle was extensively damaged to the tune of \$25,000.00; the Police had informed that “at the time of the accident the road surface was wet due to rain”;

AND WHEREAS, the Accounting Officer did not make any recommendation for disciplinary action or surcharge;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$25,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, on March 17, 2014, whilst traveling from Bacalar Chico Reserve, the Reserve Manager was caught in a storm causing the vessel BCMRI to capsize;

AND WHEREAS, a number of items on board were lost at sea with major damage to the vessel and engine;

AND WHEREAS, the total loss and damages amounted to \$29,977.16; there was no recommendation for disciplinary action or surcharge;

AND WHEREAS, all relevant parties are supportive of the recommendation for the write-off of the loss of \$29,977.16;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House approve the write-off of \$29,977.16 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, sometime between February 26 and 27, 2010, the Southern Region's Regional Health Manager's Office was burglarized and a number of items totaling \$5,771.00 were stolen;

AND WHEREAS, the Accounting Officer did not make any recommendation for surcharge or disciplinary action; the Police has informed that the investigation has been closed and the matter undetected;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approve the write-off of \$5,771.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, on October 2, 2012, the Dangriga PCP Administrator reported that he parked the Ministry of Health's BMPB-0206 at his residence overnight and woke up to find the vehicle on fire;

AND WHEREAS, while the fire was promptly extinguished the entire cab and engine were destroyed to the tune of \$19,687.50;

AND WHEREAS, the Police and the Fire personnel have stated that the cause of the fire was unknown thus no recommendation for disciplinary action or surcharge was made;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approve the write-off of \$19,687.50 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, on December 28, 2012, the Magistrate's court cashier on her way and under police escort to deposit government revenue at the bank was robbed at gun point;

AND WHEREAS, the total amount stolen was \$7,634.90; no recommendation was made for disciplinary action or surcharge against the officer or the cashier;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approve the write-off of \$7,634.90 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, between September 23 and 24, 2014, Fisheries Department, Punta Gorda, was burglarized and assorted items were stolen;

AND WHEREAS, the total loss to Government amounted to \$9,465.00 and the Police has declared the case undetected and the investigation has been closed;

AND WHEREAS, the Ministry of Fisheries found no evidence of

negligence and no recommendation for disciplinary action or surcharge was made, especially since now additional security measures are in place;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approve the write-off of \$9,465.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

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

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - WHEREAS, on March 7, 2015, Government of Belize vehicle BMPB-0175 attached to the Immigration Department was extensively damaged when it ran off the road in order to avoid a collision with an oncoming vehicle;

AND WHEREAS, the Police visited the scene but no charge was levied on anyone and no recommendation for disciplinary action or surcharge was taken since it was deemed an accident and not an act of negligence;

AND WHEREAS, the total cost of repairs done to said vehicle amounted to \$9,300.00 and borne by the Government of Belize;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approve the write-off of \$9,300.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2015/2016) (No.2) 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.

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 time and a second time.

2. Electricity 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 and the Fortis Companies arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Electricity Limited held by the Fortis Companies, and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

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.

HON. D. BARROW (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 through 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.

3. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) 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 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.

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.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

HON. D. BARROW (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 Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015, the Caribbean Development Bank – Belize Education Sector Reform Programme II Loan Motion, 2015, and the Inter-American Development Bank – George Price Highway Rehabilitation Loan Motion, 2015, pass this day.

As you are well aware, 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 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 Bill and Motions.

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 10:55 A.M.

The Meeting resumed at 11:17 A.M.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEE

HON. A. MARTINEZ (Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation as Protem Chairman of the Finance and Economic Development Committee): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present Sessional Papers No. HR274/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Caribbean Development Bank – Belize Education Sector Reform Programme II Loan Motion, 2015; No. HR275/1/11 - Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Inter-American Development Bank – George Price Highway Rehabilitation Loan Motion, 2015; and No. HR276/1/11 -Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee on the Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Mr. Speaker, can I please make a presentation on these very same Motions, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: But you can't debate Motions that are about to be laid on the Table.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): I am not debating it. I just want to make the point that at the House Committee, since it is now the practice of the Government to bring these Bills and to rush them through all in one reading, that at the very least, if the Committee can have the CEOs available for us to question them. For instance, with the \$30 plus million loan for education, whilst I'm certainly not against it, I really wanted to get more information from the CEO who can explain to me more. We've discussed it in the Committee, and they tend to agree. But I just want to put it in the records of this Honourable House, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: Do you want to shed some light on it, Minister?

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, I wasn't sure as the Motion was introduced by the Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance. I wasn't sure where it is that we could make an input but I certainly want to shed some light as to what the monies from this Loan Motion will be used for. I think it can be of the benefit of all. So I just ask the Clerk now to, in fact, approach you about me getting that opportunity to share some light.

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

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

II MOTIONS

1. Caribbean Development Bank – Belize Education Sector Reform Programme II Loan 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 this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Programme will significantly contribute to the Government's continued, dedicated efforts to improve the educational sector in Belize which will ultimately enhance human capital and reduce poverty in the country, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan

Agreement with the Caribbean Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Agreement and all other documents associated therewith.

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, the US\$35 million or \$70 million investment is a significant investment. I agree with my colleague from Orange Walk Central. And, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it stands to benefit the Belizean people tremendously. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a minimum, I should say, of 35 schools that will be impacted directly: 22 at the pre-primary which is pre-school level, early childhood; 5 at the primary level; and 8 at the secondary level. This will entail, Mr. Speaker, a total of 148 classrooms and laboratories and, of course, furniture and equipment for these schools. We estimate about 5,300 students: 1,380 at the pre-primary level; 1,400 at the primary level; and about 2,500 or so at the secondary level; to be benefitting.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of being absolutely clear, let me say that this, again, is the second part of this Loan Agreement with the Caribbean Development Bank to improve education. Colleagues will remember that the first tranche of the loan was for US\$2.5 million or BZ\$5 million, and it was used for strengthening policy objectives and increasing equitable access to education at all levels. It was used for institutional strengthening, Mr. Speaker, and now we have this portion of \$70 million which will be used for infrastructure.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, let me just speak of these 35 schools minimum that will be benefitting and for the sake of the Belizean population as well who are to look forward to these changes. Pre-schools will be established in 22 areas, as I've explained: the Valley of Peace, Buena Vista, Billy White, Duck Run, St. Margaret's Village, San Pablo in Orange Walk, San Jose in Orange Walk, Douglas, San Juan in Orange Walk, San Antonio, Santa Cruz in Orange Walk, Trial Farm, (Deputy Prime Minister, you are cleaning up.) Cowpen, Caye Caulker, Belmopan, Bella Vista, San Ignacio, Santa Elena, Independence, Pomona, Punta Gorda, San Pedro Town, Corozal Town, and Dangriga. All of these areas, Mr. Speaker, will receive pre-schools under this initiative.

At the primary level, Mr. Speaker, 8 new classroom buildings will be constructed at Trial Farm, Black Water Creek. In San Pedro Town, and I make the point especially about San Pedro Town, Mr. Speaker, because all residents of San Pedro will know that there is a serious problem on the island as it relates to finding space for students at the primary level. We have 3 schools. One is on the south, the Adventist Primary School. We have the Roman Catholic one that is on Central San Pedro, and we have one in San Mateo just across the bridge, that is, Anglican School. And all 3 of these schools, Mr. Speaker, are running over, and it is a problem. In fact, even before my colleague was aware that this was coming through, he asked me this morning to please address this very, very important issue. So I want to send the signal to San Pedro that, in fact, a new school is in the pipeline, a new primary school, and, in fact, possibly a new high school you will see in a minute (Applause) so that we can address this situation.

Another primary school, Mr. Speaker, under this initiative will be built in the Gungulung area, and we will be in consultations, of course, with the different managements to see what are the possibilities. But, again, this is something that we are very proud of, Mr. Speaker, in the Lake Independence area. (Applause)

You will know, Mr. Speaker, that while there are other primary schools in the Lake Independence constituency we all know that Gungulung is in the area of the new bridge and that there is a large community back there with a lot of children who, in fact, need to come all the way out on Mahogany Street. You could see the parade of them, and, in fact, the public transportations, the \$1 taxi and all of this, are packed up coming out of the Gungulung area in the morning. So we will put a school in that area. (Applause)

As well with this money, Mr. Speaker, there will be primary schools for the Contiki area in San Ignacio and the Santa Cruz/Santa Elena area in San Ignacio. My colleague from Central, of course, is happy about that. And at the secondary level, Mr. Speaker, a school will be for the Billy White and the Duck Run area. This is in the Cayo District, Mr. Speaker. A lot of these students have to come to Santa Elena or San Ignacio to go to school or to Benque or to Succotz where we have new high school as well. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, last year I don't know if people noticed but there was some grumbling after we cancelled a run that saw students from Orange Walk travelling from Carmelita and going all the way to Calcutta in the Corozal District, passing through all of the Orange Walk District basically. Well, Mr. Speaker, when we checked it out, we realized that there were enough high school aged students for a school to be in the Carmelita Tower Hill area. So the Government with this Loan Motion will build a new high school in the Carmelita Tower Hill area. (Applause)

In the south of the country where my friend from Toledo West is, he knows, Mr. Speaker, because he has come to our meetings. In fact, he knows that we have long tried to establish a school now for some time in the Toledo West Constituency. By the way, when this administration took over, and he can attest to it as he was the Education Center Manager there before he resigned. We didn't fire him you see. He resigned. I don't want to start that up today. But at the time there were only two high schools in the entire Toledo District, Mr. Speaker, Julian Cho and TCC. Through the efforts of this administration, Mr. Speaker, we now have 2 additional high schools: one in Corazon Creek which is south of Punta Gorda Town so that the children don't have to wake up very early in the morning, around 3 and 4 in the morning, to ride the bad roads to get into Punta Gorda. They now go to school full cycle at Corazon Creek Technical. We also opened, Mr. Speaker, a new school in San Antonio Village which is managed by the Adventist, Providence Adventist, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, like I said, my colleague is aware that we were in dialogue with a church; I think it was from Texas, I'm not sure. But those negotiations, Honourable brother, have failed, and, in fact, now the Government under this initiative, this Loan Motion, will put a new high school in Pueblo Viejo (Applause) for the students of Jalacte, San Vicente, Pueblo Viejo and also Santa Cruz. (Help me there, brother. You know all of the communities.) But we visited with all of them, and, in fact, they know of our strong desire to put this school. And, if the partners and that relationship did not work out, the Government is going to do it now. (Applause)

We feel that there is the need as well for a school in rural Cayo, and we will do that. We will also put a new high school in the Valley area, Honourable Member for Stann Creek West. (Applause) The Stann Creek Rural Area is another area, Mr. Speaker, where education is in very high demand. In fact, some years ago my colleague will remember that I raised the issue of Georgetown

Technical, and with the help of the IDB, Mr. Speaker, Georgetown Technical has the best high school campus this country knows any at all, hands down. (Applause) But, Mr. Speaker, the problem in that area continues, and, in fact, in the northern part of the constituency of Stann Creek West we have problems, of course, of getting children, and, of course, it will serve the southern part of Cayo as well so that we can get more children to high school at that level. So that is coming.

Mr. Speaker, we have intentions to build or to support the high school in Caye Caulker which is the only high school that is there now. There is allocation for monies for a new high school in Caye Caulker but I don't think that they have the kind of numbers for 2 high schools, and it makes no sense for us to compete. That school has been struggling, in fact, to get government aid, and we are going to deliver on that. But we also want to help with the infrastructure. They have been struggling to find a piece of land and so on. So we pledge to work together with them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my friend from Belize Rural Central will be happy to hear that we intend to put a high school in the Hattieville Village as well to serve the community there. (Applause) So this money that we are borrowing, this is what the \$70 million is going to be spent on. And, Mr. Speaker, we intend to build a new high school on La Isla Bonita San Pedro because, as you've heard me describe, if we open a new primary school, you heard the numbers are running over at the primary school level, there is going to be a need for an addition high school that is more than likely, I will tell you now, going to be a government high school. That has been the lobbying effort of my colleague. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, you may ask us, why is it that we've designated these places? And let me point out that these are 35 schools at a minimum that, in fact, because there are certain contingencies put into place we might be able to squeeze far more out of this loan than just the 35 schools that I mentioned here. And we are going to try our very best to do that. You know this Government is the government of efficiency, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) And so we are going to try our very best to spread it even further than that. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that this loan is being sought not just from out of the sky. Mr. Speaker, a school mapping exercise was done, and we determined, Mr. Speaker, where it is proper for us to have schools, where expansions are necessary, and where we would put new schools, Mr. Speaker. That is how we came up with this. Scientifically it did not just come because we favoured one denomination or one village or one part of the country over the other. It came about because we conducted, with the help of the Caribbean Development Bank and professionals, a school mapping exercise.

And, Mr. Speaker, as a part of all of this, it's not just infrastructure. I could stand here and I could go on and on. But I know we have big issues today. (You don't like to hear about the good works you see.) (Applause) But, Mr. Speaker, it's not only the infrastructure that we are doing. We are doing so much more. But one point that I wish to nail home before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, it is this. (He is ailing. He is not sleeping. He is ailing.) The amalgamation of schools, Mr. Speaker, is important if we are going to see successful changes, that is, in the education system. All of this, Mr. Speaker, is good. We are going to put expansions in certain areas and we going to put new schools in certain areas but the amalgamation is very important. Yesterday, for instance, Mr. Speaker, in one of the areas, the few areas that we've had amalgamation spearheaded by the

Ministry, in the Belize Rural areas, do you remember, Mr. Speaker, there were 8 primary schools and we amalgamated 6 of them? I think one of the others is still operating, and one was closed down by a decision of the management. But, Mr. Speaker, by and large the amalgamation has been working well. I am raising this issue today, Mr. Speaker, because yesterday there was an accident where one of the buses...

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, Member?

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Forth George): Mr. Speaker, you were kind enough to allow the Minister to speak on a finance Motion concerning a loan of US\$35 million. Now he is going on to the whole Ministry of Education. (Applause) Perhaps the Minister would show a little bit of mercy to us by explaining just one thing. Why is it, according to this Motion, that US\$35 million will be spent to build 35 schools? That means a preschool will cost US\$1 million. (Applause)

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, you see I was going to be merciful but it is because of these kinds of comments coming from the Opposition, (Applause) it almost, Mr. Speaker, you see I said, in fact, that it is not merely 35 schools. I said that there are other components to the loan you know. But he does not listen. I wonder if he is getting deaf or senile. Mr. Speaker, if he'd like, I can go through all the components of what the monies will be used for. But I don't want to do that. He shouldn't try to pull my tongue, Mr. Speaker, because I can put it on the record. I have it right here. I could go through all the details of what else is going to be in this loan, if you want me to. And, in fact, I told you what the first portion of the loan was used for. So why is it that you are going to do that?

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted that, in fact, amalgamation is key to this Loan Motion as well because, Mr. Speaker, it is all in an effort to tidy up what it is we are doing in education. And there is a lot of wastage going on with these scattered schools all over the country, Mr. Speaker. Some of these schools were created when he, the Member for Fort George, was Minister of Education because he did not have the kind of foresight and vision. That's what he should talk about instead of getting up and talking nonsense. (Applause)

So we are now trying, Mr. Speaker, to tighten things up, and I ask for the support not only from my colleagues on this side who I know have been very gracious in supporting our efforts in reforming education but also my colleagues on that side, especially those who were former Ministers of Education like my friend, the Right Honourable Member for Fort George, and my other colleague, the Leader of Opposition. Mr. Speaker, I won't punish you any further, not that I was. I was just sharing the facts especially because my colleague, the Member from Orange Walk Central, requested it so. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Programme will significantly contribute to the Government's continued, dedicated efforts to improve the educational sector in Belize which will ultimately enhance human capital and reduce poverty in the country, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan Agreement with the Caribbean

Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Agreement and all other documents associated therewith.

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

2. Inter-American Development Bank – George Price Highway Rehabilitation Loan Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move - NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Loan proceeds would significantly assist the Government of Belize in its endeavor to rehabilitating the GPH road infrastructure between miles 47.9 in Belmopan and 67.3 in Santa Elena to national standards, decreasing travel time and costs, reducing road fatalities and injuries, and ensuring road accessibility by improving the climate change resilience of the corridor, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan Contract with the Inter-American Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above for financing the said Project, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Loan Contract and all other documents associated therewith.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, being satisfied that the Loan proceeds would significantly assist the Government of Belize in its endeavor to rehabilitating the GPH road infrastructure between miles 47.9 in Belmopan and 67.3 in Santa Elena to national standards, decreasing travel time and costs, reducing road fatalities and injuries, and ensuring road accessibility by improving the climate change resilience of the corridor, approve and confirm that the Government may enter into a Loan Contract with the Inter-American Development Bank on the terms and conditions set out above for financing the said Project, and further authorize the Minister of Finance to execute and deliver the said Loan Contract and all other documents associated therewith.

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

III BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: Members of the gallery on this side, as usual, if I can't figure out who it is, everybody will have to leave. Go ahead, Prime Minister.

1. Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the second reading of the Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015. This is a Bill for an Act to facilitate the implementation of the terms of a deed of settlement and compromise between the Government and the Fortis Companies arising from the acquisition

by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Electricity Limited held by the Fortis Companies, and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

In opening the debate, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that what's happening today closes the circle and represents final vindication of the government's policy and philosophy with respect to ownership, Belizean ownership, Belizean patrimonial ownership, of the essential utility companies in this country. Mr. Speaker, at the time we acquired the Fortis shares in BEL, at the time we in effect nationalized the Belize Electricity Limited, we made clear that we were doing so for two reasons:

1. Because, as I've just said, it is our unshakable, philosophical conviction that all essential utilities must be owned by the people and government of our country; (Applause)
2. But as well, Mr. Speaker, we acted for another reason that had to do not just with philosophy or ideology but, in fact, with the very practical circumstances that existed at the time.

Nobody must forget that when we nationalized BEL the country had been threatened, certainly was facing the prospect of rolling blackouts. BEL at that time had reached an impasse with the Public Utilities Commission, the body set up under law in this country to regulate utility companies and to hold the balance even between the companies and the consuming public. BEL at the time appeared to us to be illiquid, and in our view, and we were, I believe, supported in our position by the vast majority of Belizeans. In our view, the national interest demanded that we act to safeguard the wellbeing of the economy and the citizenry of this country.

Now here it is that, despite what the critics and the naysayers had to say at the time, here it is that we've, as I indicated, completed the circle and are today about the business of passing an Act which will see the challenge of Fortis, the company from which we acquired the shares, withdraw its CCJ challenge, withdraw its questioning of the legitimacy of the acquisition, and confirm and underline, as is mandated by the Constitution of this country, confirm and underline that now and forevermore BEL in the majority will belong to the people and government of this country. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, to achieve such an objective, I don't know how anyone could stop to count the cost in dollars and cents. But for those who do let me correct the blatant miscalculations, the wrong sums, the mathematical stupidity, that I have heard coming from some quarters. The Government of Belize is now paying BZ \$70 million for 37% of BEL. That's what it comes down to. We acquired 70%. We are giving back 33%, and we are remaining with 37%. (Applause) That together with the SSB shareholding means that the public ownership of BEL is something like 61% of the shareholding. But in terms of the particular 37% which the Government now gets to keep we are paying Fortis \$70 million. That is the totality of the cash settlement of their claim for compensation. That is it. That's all. There are no side deals. There are no hidden costs. That's not the modus operandi of this Government. (Applause) And every single provision of the Settlement Deed and relevant documents are set out as an attachment to the Bill we are now debating for not just Members, for the entire world to see.

Now let me return to the mathematics of this Settlement, \$70 million for 37% of BEL. In return for this \$70 million, Government actually gets a value of \$131 million because that is what 37% of BEL Shareholding was worth, according to the auditing financials at the close of the 2014 Financial Year. What's there not to like and what's there not to get in terms of those critics? So in effect, if we are paying \$70 million now for shares that are worth \$131 million, this represent a \$61-million clear net gain for the people of this country. (Applause) And it doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker, recollect that during the period we have had BEL, since the nationalization in 2011, Government has collected \$14 million in dividends. So you minus that from the \$70 million, and what it means is that the Settlement is now conferring on the people of Belize a gain that, with respect to its value in cash and shares, amounts to \$75 million. That is what we are walking away from the table. (Applause) You can look at the mathematics from any conceivable angle and the result is the same.

So let's take it from another dimension, that dimension being the compensation that Fortis was claiming after the acquisition. We have paid \$70 million minus the \$14 million that we have already collected in dividends, when the Fortis claim was \$310 million, plus, of course, interest for the 4 years since the acquisition and plus costs. That total then could have in the end amounted to as much as \$400 million, and we settle on terms that we pay \$70 million minus the \$14 million, and people will quarrel with the mathematics of that Settlement.

I was always extremely poor in high school at mathematics. I remember Father Hertz saying some hurtful things to me. But even my nonmathematical mind can so very easily grasp the plain, unarguable, irrebuttable facts of this transaction. So from the \$310 million just in principal compensation that Fortis was claiming plus the interests and costs what they actually received was \$70 million plus 33 1/3% of the shares of BEL. Now, if you want to go back again to the valuation of what they received by way of the shares based on the 2014 year end book value, at the close of 2014 that 33 1/3% that Fortis is getting back was valued at \$117.9 million. So even, if you want to look at it in the least possible favourable light to the government, then you can say we've given them 33 1/3% back that amounts to \$117.9 million, and then we've given them the \$70 million. So all that is a total of \$188 million for the entirety of the shareholding, if you are going to put a value on the 33 1/3% that they get back in shares, and that means that the Government in the framework of that kind of an analysis would have saved the people of Belize anywhere from \$120 million to \$200 million depending on your estimates of the costs, interests and perhaps damages that were done. (Applause)

If we look at the per share price, the \$70 million in cash means that in effect Government is paying \$2.74 for each share that constitutes the 37% obtained from Fortis. As I said, the book value of those shares for which we are paying \$2.74 was, at the close of 2014, \$5.15. There is a certain lip professor on a station here in Belmopan that, I won't even call his name, I won't dignify him with that kind of attention, giving him status as a named individual. But he said that, in fact, what we are paying for the shares now is more than Fortis paid when they bought the shares. So it's not a good deal. Well, when Fortis bought the shares, it was 19 years ago or more than that. Of course, the company has increased tremendously in value. So even if he was right he would be wrong but he is not right. I pulled the Channel 5 report for November 3, 1999, "Canadian Company buys additional BEL shares: On Monday night's newscast we reported that while government had sold the bulk of its shares", the PUP Government, "in

Belize Electricity Limited to a Canadian Company, Fortis Incorporated, it was also likely that Fortis would buy the additional block of shares owned by Carlyle Holdings. Today News 5 confirmed that Fortis had, indeed, purchased all the Carlyle shares and, as a result, now owns a controlling 63%.” Fortis paid Carlyle just under US\$ 8 million for the shares which were sold at the same price, as government had sold Fortis, around BZ\$2.75 per share. So even then what Fortis paid is more than we are paying now, years and years later with the company having quadrupled, having grown in value exponentially. So I gather the gentleman used to be a mathematics teacher at Belmopan Comprehensive. Thank goodness he is no longer there. (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, anyway one chooses to look at the terms of this Settlement the value accruing to the Belizean people there from is without precedent. Let me just repeat before I sit down and have the debate start. The net benefits to the people, we get 37% of BEL, maintaining the majority public ownership. We get the additional value over and above the cash paid out of \$75 million in cash and shares. We get Fortis back into the company as a vital, strategic but minority investor. We get the immediate discontinuance of all legal claims, including those before the CCJ. We have provided for and ensured that the independence and impartiality of the PUC will continue to be protected, and we take on no additional debt to settle Fortis’ claim. We pay no damages. We pay no interests, and we pay no costs. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 (8), I move that the proceedings on the matter on the order paper 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 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.

I would like to remind everyone who wants to debate on the issue to please confine your debate to that issue.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we welcome the closure of this longstanding 4-year legal standoff and battle between the Government of Belize and Fortis which in our view has hung like a dark cloud over Belize’s investment climate. But, as we do so, Mr. Speaker, a few important points must be made that I believe will expose clearly the emptiness of the Prime Minister’s boasts of how sweet this deal is for Belize. First of all, Mr. Speaker, let us not forget that the same Fortis that the Prime Minister now embraces today as a strategic investor he attacked and chastised in 2011, in furtherance of his expropriation of their assets in the face of a PUC engineered crisis. What hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker!

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it is public information, I’ve read it in the IMF Reports, that the Government of Belize offered Fortis, their offer to Fortis was payment of BZ\$75 million for the full 70% of the shares that had been acquired. That was some 48,473,737 shares. That was the official offer from the Government of Belize, BZ\$75 million for 70% of the shares. This, Mr. Speaker, was based on the advice of their expert, NERA Economic Consulting of London,

who placed a value of BZ\$1.54 per share. That was the Government's expert placing a value on these shares, and that was the offer made to Fortis. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Belize has agreed to pay BZ\$70 million for slightly more than half that amount, 36.9% or 25,489,075 shares. This is a price of \$2.74 per share. So this, Mr. Speaker, is a premium of BZ\$1.20 on the valuation given by the Government's very own experts, NERA. True, Fortis claimed much more but clearly that was to be expected by the property owners. They will always highball you. The issue of concern to the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker, is that this UDP Administration paid far more per share than they were advised to pay by NERA, their own consultants. (Applause)

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the Government has also, as you know, returned 33.3% of the shares of the company to Fortis, the clearest evidence, Mr. Speaker, that they were rash when they took the full 70% of BEL that Fortis owned in 2011. The (Eight Amendment) states that Government and SSB together must own 51%. Why then has Government kept so much of the shares for so long? During all that time, Mr. Speaker, they have incurred millions of dollars in legal fees, knowing fully well that they would have to return nearly half the shares they took. And what is the value of those shares, Mr. Speaker? At Government's valuation of \$2.74 per share, they have returned a value of around \$63 million to Fortis. Added to the \$70 million cash payment which is to be paid forthwith, this brings the compensation value to \$133 million. Compare this again, Mr. Speaker, to the advice from Government's experts, NERA, that Government could keep all the shares and pay Fortis BZ\$75 million for 70% of the shares, their very own experts.

And it doesn't end there, Mr. Speaker. Add to this the full exemption from all stamp duty on the share transfer. The share transfer of \$63 million would attract stamp duty of 5% or \$3.3 million given away by the Government. The Government has also waived the 1.25% stamp duty on the exchange control permit for the US\$35 million which amounts to \$790,000.00. And all future dividends, Mr. Speaker, paid in Belize dollars will be converted to US dollars and repatriated to Canada. All the permits will be exempt similarly. More than that all future dividends paid by BEL to Fortis will be exempt from income tax of 25%. This will amount to millions of dollars over time, Mr. Speaker, and, again, repatriated without stamp duty on the exchange control permits.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): I don't want to interrupt because I will respond you. But you shouldn't quote what is not the position. There is no withholding tax on the dividends. We are not conferring something that isn't there, and they were the ones that removed the withholding tax. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Proceed, Member.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Then look at the Put Option, Mr. Speaker, and this is very important here. Mr. Speaker, here you will see with this Put Option that Fortis can say to the Government of Belize, Mr. Speaker, and it's important for the Belizean people to understand this. With this Put Option, Fortis can say to the Government of Belize, "Take back this 33.3% of BEL shares and pay me cash". You talked about 4 years. Some interpreted it as 2 years which is 24 months. But Fortis has that Put Option to say to the Government of Belize, "Here is your 33.3% of shares, pay me cash," and, as the

Prime Minister himself has said, book value at the time, he has said today that the book value now is over \$5 and something per share. That something tells me, Mr. Speaker, that that is exactly what is going to happen, 24 months from now or 4 years from now. So that is a very serious matter.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the real sweetness in this Settlement is truly reserved for the Prime Minister's family, Barrow and Company, (Applause) the law firm of the Prime Minister's brother, Denys Barrow, smiling all the way to the bank, having collected millions of dollars in taxpayers' money in legal fees. And today, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Belizean people we demand that the Prime Minister come clean. Tell the Belizean people exactly how much taxpayers' dollars his brother's law firm has collected. (Applause) He is the Minister of Finance, and these are matters approved by him for his own brother and his own brother's law firm. (Applause) So come clean and tell us what he has collected and what other monies were paid to other lawyers by the Government in this matter, Mr. Speaker. Nepotism is corruption, and, Mr. Speaker, this is naked nepotism. (Applause)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me, because many others want to speak on this matter, let me be very clear. The next People's United Party Government will maintain BEL as a majority stake owned utility company. We believe that to be in the best interest of Belize and the Belizean people. But we will also, Mr. Speaker, make BEL work for the Belizean people, not only for the Prime Minister's family and a few cronies of the UDP. (Applause) Rural electrification, and my colleagues will talk about this in greater detail, rural electrification. For 4 years we have owned BEL, and they beat their chest and talk about we owning BEL and can't do any electrification in rural communities where people continue to suffer because they don't have basic electricity. (Applause) And they can't do anything. Not a single village in Toledo, Mr. Speaker, has been electrified in the 8 years under this UDP Government. It's a shame and disgrace, man, shame and disgrace, (Applause) not a single village. When they took over BEL, even my colleague said, "Well, maybe something will happen now." Not a thing has happened over the past 4 years. The rural people continue to be abandoned and neglected. That will change under the People's United Party. (Applause) So, Mr. Speaker, this Settlement comes at a high cost and heavy price that Belize will continue to pay well into the future, passed the point where Fortis is compensated. The reality of what we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a pseudo nationalist Prime Minister facing eminent defeat before the Caribbean Court of Justice, once again trying to beat his chest and claim victory. The emptiness of that has been fully exposed, Mr. Speaker, and we reject that victory. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, when the Prime Minister and his Government expropriated all the shares of Fortis in BEL, he claimed that BEL was being mismanaged and that he was acting out of a fervent sense of nationalism to take over BEL and that the people of Belize would benefit from this nationalization. Mr. Speaker, let me say at the very outset that we have no problem with nationalization but nationalization must benefit the people of Belize. (Applause) When it comes to nationalization of public utilities, when it comes to that, (Listen, I didn't interrupted you when you were talking, you know. You already talked enough nonsense about education, Minister. Remember that the way to hell is paved with good intentions, you know.) (Applause) Mr. Speaker, so now BEL, the big bad boy, BEL, the big bad wolf, that was causing and rolling blackouts and all of that, now to quote Don Emilio Awe, "She is pretty now." Fortis is pretty now. Yes, with so much so that the

Prime Minister wants Fortis, as a partner, to own BEL, and that is why he is returning, as part of this Settlement, 33% of this company to Fortis International. So she is pretty now! He was ever so anxious to get rid of Fortis so much so that he didn't just take 51% that the Government needed along with Social Security but took the whole hog. And now the day of reckoning has come because the Caribbean Court of Justice is about to make a ruling or was about to make a ruling very shortly, and so we are being rushed through now with indecent haste to make this Settlement with Fortis and BEL.

You see, Mr. Speaker, if the UDP Government was genuinely interested in gaining control of BEL for the Belizean people, then why is it that they took over all 70%, all issued shares of the company? Why is it that they are paying now \$70 million when, according to other people's mathematics, and the Prime Minister was clearly admitting that he wasn't that hot on mathematics that even Fr. Hertz had to hurt him many times. (No, I did not meet Father Hertz, and I was very good at mathematics in St. Michael's College. (Applause) In fact, there was only one person that got more high marks than me in my class and that was Winston Smiling. That's right, yes.)

So, Mr. Speaker, he wanted the whole hog, and he is now paying \$70 million and returning 33% to Fortis. Now he can play around with figures all day but, as the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out, the Government is settling at a premium. They are paying a premium to have this Settlement. If the truth be told, Mr. Speaker, and we only need to quote what NERA, their advisors or accountants, advised them what the value of the shares were, \$1.54 per share. That's what Fortis should have been paid, which, as the Honorable Leader of the Opposition pointed out, would have amounted to \$75 million for the whole 70% of the shares. Instead, Belize is paying now \$2.75 per share, \$70 million for 37%. Do the mathematics, Prime Minister, that is, \$2.75 per share, \$1.20 more per share. So how can he say now that Belize got a very good deal? How can he claim that this is a real sweet deal for Belize when he is paying over a dollar, \$1.20, more per share than what he was advised to pay?

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Fortis lawyers really had this Government over the barrel because of the very inept way they went about this compulsory acquisition. (Applause) You see now the Prime Minister has to eat crow and give to Fortis. I must commend him though that he has handled it very well even when he is eating crow, even when he has to swallow his own vomit. He is handling it very well, despite his very obvious physical ailments at this time, because he is also giving away the shop. You know they used to criticize me as Prime Minister and the PUP Government for all the tax exemptions we gave to a certain company. Yes, I was also criticized for agreeing to the International Arbitration by the London Court of International Arbitration, LCIA. I can never forget the words of the Prime Minister, "We are selling out our sovereignty to agree to have LCIA arbitrate for Belize. A Belize court should be the one to decide these issues." Well, just read the agreement, Ministers. (Applause) Just read the agreement and you will see it there that Mr. Prime Minister is now agreeing for the London Court of International Arbitration in the event of any dispute arising to arbitrate in this matter. So he has to really swallow his own vomit. (Applause)

He has also agreed to every conceivable tax exemption be granted to Fortis International and, indeed, not only to Fortis but to anybody that may buy the shares from Fortis. Any transferee of Fortis of that 33% will enjoy the very

same total, absolute full exemption stamp duty, income tax, business tax, exchange control fees. Every conceivable, every fee you can imagine, every imposts you imagine, Mr. Speaker, is being granted to Fortis. They will not pay a cent. They will do business in Belize and collect their dividends, and we are not envying them this. We are just pointing out that the only people who are really benefitting, as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition pointed out, Fortis for one is getting a good deal. They are getting a good deal. Otherwise they wouldn't have settled. They would have waited for the Caribbean Court's ruling.

Two, the lawyers, Byron Co., they are obviously the ones making millions, and you know when talking about that obviously the Prime Minister is not going to tell us how much brother Denys is making on this whole thing. But what we do know is that Barrow and Company also did another settlement for the Government of Belize back in January of 2014. That was the Pachanga; what's the name of that vessel that ran up on the reef? Oh, the Paranga, when a settlement was made for a little over \$2.7 million paid to the Government of Belize and of that Barrow and Company collected 20% of that, over \$500,000.00. (Applause) Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, the records are right there. One-day settlement made and a sit down for about 6 hours, \$500,000.00 plus paid to Barrow and Company. That is only one of them that we know about. (You should check up about the kinds of fees that your Government is paying, Minister.) In fact, Mr. Speaker, when all is said and done, the only people to benefit, as I said, from the whole BEL nationalization and settlement was the high paid lawyer. (Applause) The case for the Government all the way to the CCJ was argued by, yes, brother Denys, and he is a very competent lawyer you know. I'm not in any way criticizing his competence. I am just saying that the Prime Minister should come clean with the Belizean people and tell us exactly how much the people of Belize are paying for these shares. (Applause)

One final point I would wish to make and that is this, Mr. Speaker. It has been said that Fortis in his aggregate only paid BZ\$35 million for the shares when they came to own up to \$70 million. I have not seen anything to dispute that. I have not heard the Prime Minister really contradict that, except to mention that when they bought the shares of Carlyle they only paid US\$8 million. (You said Carlyle, Prime Minister. So it's US\$16 million then.) Yes, in other words, they paid BZ\$35 million for those shares. That's right. Now they are paying \$70 million, doubled, huge profit, and 100% profit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. D. B. GARCIA (Belize Rural Central): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me just a few brief remarks on this matter. Mr. Speaker, when we learned of this Settlement, the first that entered my mind was really, what does it mean for the Belizean people? What does it mean for children, women, poor working fathers and mothers out there? Electrification is needed in our country, Mr. Speaker, and the Settlement that was made we must ask ourselves, at what cost to the Belizean people? People are still getting light bills that are prohibitive for working mothers and fathers, Mr. Speaker, prohibitive. We are looking at a situation, I believe, where profits are being place above the Belizean people. Profits, yes, Mr. Speaker, massive profits, this past year BEL posted but what is the reality of our working mothers and fathers out there? Massive profits, the shareholders are happy with their dividends, very happy with their dividends. But what is the reality for the Belizean people?

In Belize Rural Central, for example, Mr. Speaker, there hasn't been any expansion of electrification. Mr. Speaker, on Old Well Road, for example, the people are waiting for their, give me a chance, it's my turn. On Old Well Road the people are waiting for their electricity. Some lampposts went down but the political officers are telling the people, Mr. Speaker, we put the lamppost, now you must go and get the transformer, this and that, and you must go and get everything. In Old Hattieville, Mr. Speaker, people are waiting for their electrification. In Gracie Rock a simple street light and the people of Belize Rural Central are not seeing the attention from Belize Electricity Limited. Where are the expansion and the real services?

If I talk about nationalization, Mr. Speaker, I want to see that that nationalization has real meaning. Today, Mr. Speaker, I believe, "Oh, it's a wonderful, a beautiful day for Fortis and a beautiful day for shareholders who are going to be getting their dividends". But where is the benefit to the consumers of Belize Rural Central and Belize on a whole? Where is that real benefit? Nationalization must have meaning. We must not tout it as a simple, simple word. And we've had a hell of an admission this afternoon from the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, that he was extremely thickheaded and poor at mathematics. (Applause) So I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side have a responsibility to point out the shortcomings and the reality of what is going before the Belizean people in this Settlement. I think it was almost like the Member from Belize Rural North when it was clear that the judge in court was going to rule against him he hurriedly went and settled. (Applause) He hurry pulled back and withdraw and went and settled. But the question is, Mr. Speaker, and I repeat, I must be getting to them for real because they can't shut up.

Give me a chance. I will wrap up by saying this, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about what the Belize Electricity Limited and the provision of electricity for our people means to the Belizean people. Are we getting value for money? In the nationalization, are the Belizean people feeling the benefit of that majority ownership even though Fortis now has the 33 1/3%? And that is my question to this Honourable House this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Toledo West, I had recognized earlier the Member for Cayo South. So I recognize the Member for Cayo South, unless you want to give your time to Toledo West. No, I recognize you. Are you yielding to the Minister? Proceed, Minister from Mesopotamia.

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition, and in my view it was an empty vessel. I listened to my good friend, the Member from Fort George, and you are really dropping off, my friend. You are getting scrappy because there was no meat at all in your stew. I will deal, Mr. Speaker, with one issue, Barrow and Company, and I will explain to you the difference between them and the difference between this Dean-Barrow-led Administration. (Applause) When they did business while they were in government, and there were the Michael Ashcroft deals and Jeffrey Prosser deals, and this deal and that deal, do you know which lawyers benefitted from it? It was Musa and Balderamos. (Applause) Do you know the other set of lawyers who benefitted from it, Mr. Speaker? It was Courtenay and Company. No disrespect to my friend from Fort George's law firm and no disrespect to the Courtenay and

Company law firm, I am just explaining to you, Sir, how they operate when they were in government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the point I am making to you is that when you walk in the rooms of Musa and Balderamos there are no UDP lawyer sitting around in there. (Applause) When you walk in Courtenay and Company, there are no UDP lawyers sitting in there. When you walk in Godfrey Smith law firm, etcetera, there are no UDP lawyers sitting in there. But, Mr. Speaker, when we operate, we don't look for a law firm, and when we look in it it's not all UDP lawyers sitting in that law firm. Let me explain from my little knowledge what is Barrow and Company. Barrow and Company is Denys Barrow, Senior Counsel, who most Belizeans think or believe is the best attorney in this entire country of Belize. (Applause) His number one partner is one Andrew Marshalleck, who is the legal and political advisor to the Leader of the Opposition and the People's United Party. (Applause) So why they don't say to you, Sir, and to this Honourable House that when business goes from this Government and ends up in Barrow and Company that Andrew Marshalleck, the number one partner to Denys, is taking a mighty chunk of whatever Barrow and Company make? (Applause) But they don't tell you. Who is the advisor to my very good friend, you know he is my very good friend and I like him a lot, the Member from Cayo South? He is the legal advisor to my friend from Cayo South. Nothing is wrong with that. Andrew is also a very brilliant lawyer.

So don't come to this Honourable House and try to blaspheme Denys Barrow's name and let everyone believe that Denys Barrow got all these jobs for government and that he is collecting millions of dollars and that the millions are going in poor brother Barrow's pocket and that it is only brother Barrow benefitting. You all need to let them know that Andrew, his wife and other PUP lawyers who are participants in Barrow and Company are also taking their rightful pound of flesh. And what is this Government doing? We are not doing anything illegal, and we don't pick a law firm, for example, like Pitts and Elrington where only UDP lawyers up there are eating or Dean Barrow law firm, where there are only UDPs. We operate different from you people. We are a different crowd from you people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up let me come to my friend, the Member from Belize Rural Central. Do you remember some years ago when I said to this very House that she will not return as Area Representative for Port Loyola? (Applause) And I said to the House, Mr. Speaker, back then, and this was before the 1998 election. "Mr. Boots Martinez get ready. In fact, I have a couple of guayaberas for you because she is not coming back." (Applause) And, Mr. Speaker, I was right because she didn't come back. So she danced around like a tap and ended up at Belize Rural Central and beat poor Hutchinson by a few votes. Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make another prediction. I am prepared to bet my life against a bucket of those things that they used to carry to the *keynels* that she will not come back. She will not come back when the Prime Minister decide to call the election. They are too dishonest, man. They are intellectually dishonest. She will not come back. Ms. Castillo will beat her and beat her bad. (Applause) Member from Fort George, I swear to the good Lord Beverly will beat her. I am telling you. Those people are hard to like.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, you see she comes here and the first thing she tells you, (Boy, be careful you know.) Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, she came here now and

she asked, what benefits Belizeans get by the acquisition of BEL? My God, man, look how much time the light bill has gone down. (Applause) Man, look how lower is your light bill. Do you know what they said, Mr. Speaker, when we acquired BEL? You all said, “They have millions of dollars hanging over the head of the Belizean public. Where are they going to get the money to pay back BEL? And where are they going to get back money to pay for BTL? They will never get the money to pay BTL when the time comes up to pay the white man. Where is the money going to come?” Well, Mr. Barrow just found \$75 million to pay them. (Applause) For God sake, Mr. Speaker, those people are so dishonest, man. The Member for Belize Rural Central just said that there has been no electricity expansion in her constituency. My goodness, I am back there with Beverly Castillo and there is the expansion of electricity in the Lords Bank right there in her own back yard. But she just came and lied to this House and told this House that there is no electricity expansion in her constituency. That means she is sleeping somewhere else and living somewhere else, Sir. She has no idea what is happening in the division she represents. And she is supposed to live there. She is one of the fortunate persons like brother Boots. They can vote for themselves.

But, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up, we couldn’t find the money, they said, to pay to BEL when we finally get to a settlement. They said that we are driving away foreign investors, that Fortis will be going and they will never come back to Belize, and that no investors will come back to Belize and invest in Belize because what we are doing is driving out the investors’ confidence and a lot of things. Now, Mr. Speaker, the same people from whom we acquired the electricity company came back and said to us, “I would want to partner back with you all. You all are a good government.” (Applause) “You all are moving this country into the correct and proper direction. Sir, Prime Minister Barrow, can I partner back with you?”

The Leader of the Opposition said that we said all kinds of things about the Fortis Company when they were taking advantage of them. You got it right. But we put them in their place. They realized that the Barrow Administration and this Government will not tolerate any investor (Applause) to come into this country and corrupt for a shadow and to take advantage of the people. And they came to their senses, and we are prepared to work with any investing company, Sir, once they respect our government, they respect our people, and they are prepared to respect the laws that govern this country. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, and on that note, on behalf of every Member on this side of this House, I want to congratulate our Honourable Prime Minister for his distinguished and eloquent resolution to this matter. We congratulate you, Sir. We respect you, Sir, for your intellectual. (Applause) We respect you, Sir, for your capacity to think. We respect you, Sir, for your capacity to produce. And, Sir, most importantly, do you know why I respect you? It is not only because you and I have been friends for 50 years, but do you know why I respect you, Sir? You are not a thief! (Applause)

HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South): I am glad, Mr. Speaker, that I’m speaking after the Honourable Finnegan. Mr. Speaker, let’s start from the beginning. I think people need to refresh their memories and understand why we are here now. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister Dean Oliver Barrow came to the Belizean people selling this concept that he is a patriot and that he is a nationalist, backing it up by nationalizing two utility companies, BEL and BTL.

He also enshrined that concept in the Constitution making sure that Government has majority shares in these utilities. He subsequently refused to make payment to both these utility companies, and, as international companies, they took this serious and they took him to court. This case, Mr. Speaker, is presently lodged with the Caribbean Court of Justice, and a decision, well, probably a decision won't be due anytime soon because of this Act.

That brings us to today, Mr. Speaker, and the reason we are here to debate the Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015. So, Mr. Speaker, the question is, why is Dean Oliver Barrow, the Prime Minister of this country, doing this deal? Why? Member for Queen's Square, my apologies, this is the multimillion-dollar question, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is how this premeditated and wicked plot starts to unravel.

1. The Prime Minister installed his law partner, Rodwell Williams, as Chairman of BEL.

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Member is clearly reading. Is it that he has asked your permission, Mr. Speaker? Or is it that he does not have the ability to debate, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, if he reads continuously, then I will ask him. But so far you're fine. Go ahead.

HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South): So I'll repeat, the Prime Minister installed his law partner, Rodwell Williams, as the Chairman of BEL. That's number one. The Prime Minister then installed his son, Anwar Barrow, as Chairman of BTL. Both receiving exorbitant and unimaginable dollar rewards for their services. The Prime Minister then appointed his wife, Lois Young Barrow, his brother, Denys Barrow, and his niece, Naima Barrow, as the attorneys for both cases, making sure that they did everything possible, Mr. Speaker, to drag on this case all the way to the CCJ, therefore justifying the large amount of legal fees that they are collecting. Mr. Speaker, and the Prime Minister can correct me, if I'm wrong, the legal fees are in excess of tenths of millions of dollars. And, if he wants to refute it, then tell us how much it is. I know it's over \$10 million. And that's just the start of it, Mr. Speaker. And these are not accusations. They are cold, hard facts.

Mr. Speaker, and now you wonder why is it that the Prime Minister does not want the rule of law to be done in this country or to be followed in this country. Why is it that he refuses to have any accountability in his decisions? Why it is that transparency is just a word that he utilizes? I believe that it is because of the multimillion-dollar benefits his family gets. That's one of the reasons. Mr. Speaker, backing up what I am saying, he refuses to implement the Integrity Commission, he refuses to appoint the 13th Senator.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, stick to the debate. That has nothing to do with the acquisition.

HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South): I'm sticking to it, Mr. Speaker. He refuses because it is accountability, Mr. Speaker. I just got off listening to the Honourable Finnegan, and I am sticking to my point. The second phase, Mr.

Speaker, of the premeditated plot now is to, as the Right Honourable Member for Fort George said, save face. The Prime Minister now needs to come to the Belizean people and explain to them why this is a good deal and how we are benefitting, as a nation, from this Settlement and what is the true price of this Settlement deal, the true price, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's start:

- (a) \$70 million paid to Fortis, tax free, not only tax free, facilitating that they can deposit this money into an offshore company in the Cayman Islands;
- (b) 33.3% of the total shares of BEL which is about 22,984,662 shares, similar to the cash payment in value, approximately giving away \$10 million per year in profits.

And, as the Prime Minister Musa had said, guaranteeing this company after 4 years a buyback clause where they will have a buyback clause based on book value. And, if the book value right now is five point something per share, imagine what it will be in 5 years time. Fortis and their lawyers, do you think that what the Member for Mesopotamia said that they are in such love with this Prime Minister that they came back to make a deal? These are international companies that know how to make money. They have come back because they know that they have a deal that's beneficial to them, and they have seen this Government as fools to facilitate it for them. (Applause) But wait, Mr. Speaker, it gets better. Fortis will now be exempted from all taxes, including withholding taxes and which, by the way, deprives the people of Belize of approximately half a million dollars per year from just the withholding tax.

And now, Mr. Speaker, we come to the real reason as to why this one-sided deal was agreed to by Fortis, by our so-called patriotic and nationalistic Prime Minister. The real reason why the attorneys for Fortis, and Fortis came down to bamboozled our Prime Minister and as such bamboozled the people of Belize. Well, you see, Mr. Speaker, it goes into what is in the Act itself, and it goes to the extent of the exemptions, Mr. Speaker. And I will read this part, and here it says, "First Schedule, [Section 3], EXTENT OF EXEMPTIONS, 1. The Fortis Companies (and any transferee of the Shares] shall be exempt from all taxes imposed on dividends and distributions paid: (a) by BEL to the Fortis Shareholder (or its transferee)." So, Mr. Speaker, what that is telling us now, and they made it clear, is that after this agreement is signed Fortis can now transfer their shares to BECOL, and you have to understand BECOL is this mega monster. What we're talking about, \$70 million and \$150 million is insignificant to the amount of money that BECOL generates and what they represent. Mr. Speaker, we buy 60% of our power from BECOL. And just by them having this exemption on taxes alone you are talking that the Belizean people will be deprived of hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, and that is why Fortis and their attorneys agreed to the Prime Minister's presentation. It is not because they love him. (Applause) It is because they have fooled him. It is because he is in bed with the agreement so that he and his brothers can make money from the Settlement and Fortis takes home hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. And that is the problem we are facing, Mr. Speaker.

You see he might not be intelligent when it comes to mathematics but he is a devious attorney that understands why he puts the things in small letters and in parenthesis. And that, Mr. Speaker, he will not live it down because history will

show the Belizean how they have been deprived of millions and millions of dollars. And so, Mr. Speaker, Dean Barrow is not only doing this. He is also making these tax exemptions go well beyond his term in office, and I apologize to the Honourable Prime Minister. I don't even know which area you come from, Queen's Square, okay. That is the reality, Mr. Speaker, and the people have to see him for what he is. What a shame, Prime Minister! What an evil plot devised by an evil person! And I do congratulate you by the way for the deal. I do congratulate you that you are doing this for your personal gain, and I do congratulate you because this will be the end of your term in office, because the only way to change you is to have the people of Belize vote you out. That's the only way. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on the Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015, that is before us. Mr. Speaker, I want to associate myself with the statements made by our Honourable Leader of the Opposition as well as other Members of this side of the House who have said that they welcome the fact that this matter is being settled because certainly living in an atmosphere or doing business in an atmosphere of uncertainty for our investors is certainly not a good one. And we have seen over the last 7 years of this UDP Administration how this kind of business climate has affected the economy of this country. And that is why today, Mr. Speaker, that is why today the economy is in such shambles and difficulties, where our Belizean people are not benefitting from a robust economy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, back then, 4 years ago, when the now infamous (Eighth Amendment) to the Constitution was crafted and we had the government side going out to all the districts, carrying out consultations, they said consultations, and I still clearly recall, Mr. Speaker, in which they transported people in buses from all the villages and all the districts to the major towns under the guise that this (Eighth Amendment) was beneficial to the country and that we had the government who was so patriotic and that they were saving this nation and that we were now going to own BEL and, as a direct result of owning BEL and BTL, Mr. Speaker, that the rates would go down and that our people would have greater access to these utilities. Well, my friends, and Mr. Speaker, it is now evident. History will now be recorded, Mr. Speaker, that 4 years after it was all under the guise of fooling the people, Mr. Speaker, (Applause) because we know for a fact, and particularly the constituency that I represent, Mr. Speaker, Toledo West has not seen a single benefit under this takeover of government for BEL, Mr. Speaker, absolutely no benefits. And I want to make that absolutely clear. I challenge the Prime Minister and his UDP Government, all those who are sitting there, I challenge them here today, Mr. Speaker, I want them to point out to one single village in Toledo West that has received electrification under this Government, Mr. Speaker. None! None! None! Zero under the UDP!

Contrast that, Mr. Speaker, with the work of the People's United Party from 1998 to 2008, Mr. Speaker, when we saw a massive electrification program in rural communities. In fact, the entire Southern Highway, (Applause) the southern part of this country saw massive electrification. Do you want to talk about development? Do you want to talk about being patriotic? Do you want to talk about saving this country? Then let's get the real facts, Mr. Speaker. The history is there, and it is going to judge them, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Toledo and the people of Belize want BEL to work for them, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Belize Rural Central said, “The Prime Minister by his own admission said that Government has collected \$14 million in dividends,” Mr. Speaker, \$14 million in dividends. So I want him and his Government to tell the people of Toledo West, to tell the people of Toledo, to tell the people of Belize, how this is benefitting the Belizean people, man? At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, no grandstanding, no beating of the chest, no thumping of the chest and shouting that you are patriotic is going to solve the problems and the misery that our people are living in the rural area because they lack electricity, Mr. Speaker.

You know we have hundreds of students going to these high schools, and it is a shame today that after 8 years of UDP Government these students still are studying using a lamp, having to use a flashlight and they have no access to electricity. That is the reality, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, students want to make sure that in this day and age of technology that they can have access to the internet, that they can use a computer, that they can print their work. That is what they want. So no beating of your chest that you are a patriot is going to benefit our people.

We want to see that BEL works for the people, and that is why today the people Golden Stream, the people of Medina Bank, the people of Indian Creek, San Jose, Santa Teresa, Nah Lum Cah, Mabilha, Otoxha, and I can go on, I can list the entire list of communities, they want to know when the UDP Government is going to connect them to electricity. That is what they are interested in, not this kind of talk air where beating of chest takes place. That’s not what they want. They want the direct benefits, Mr. Speaker. That is what they want. Man, we have communities that were electrified, as I said, under the PUP. We had San Antonio. We also had Aguacate, Jordan, Big Falls, San Marcos, Laguna, and San Felipe, all done under the PUP. We have not seen any expansion in these communities. The people are clamouring, they are asking, they are saying, when is it that we are going to get it? But do you know what? This is symptomatic and characteristic of how this UDP Government behaves, Mr. Speaker. They have totally abandoned and forgotten the south. But I want to tell our people that they must have hope, and I am certain that they have hope because it is evident that, as we go around and we do our consultations in our communities, the people are with us and they are waiting for a People’s United Party Government to return back to deliver the goodies to our people. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, we speak about tax exemptions, and I won’t go into all the details, Mr. Speaker. But certainly they are outlined on pages 4 and 5 of this Settlement Deed document that we have here, Mr. Speaker. And it clearly shows, Mr. Speaker, as every other speaker has said here, man, the real deal in this (Settlement) Bill, Mr. Speaker, is the giveaways that this company is getting, man, all the tax exemptions, all the duty exemptions that they are getting. Why is it that they have to be facilitated and given so many sweets, Mr. Speaker? Why is it that we couldn’t take some of those and use it to the benefit of our people in our rural communities where they really need electricity?

And I want to correct the Member from Mesopotamia, Mr. Speaker, because earlier he said that the best lawyer in this country is Sir Denys Barrow. Well, I want to correct him because the Prime Minister has gone on record to saying that the best lawyer in this country is Lois Young Barrow. That is what he

has gone on record to say. When we see, Mr. Speaker, that the Auditor General's Report 2010 points out to \$5 million in legal fees, let's talk about lawyer fees, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the budget, \$16 million is being used for legal fees, that probably answers the question where all these monies are going. So this is the real deal, Mr. Speaker. It is not about the poor people of my communities that I represent. It is not about making electricity accessible to them. It is about the millions and millions of dollars that these lawyers and these companies can get off this deal. That is the real deal, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say here, and I want to go on record, that, if the Prime Minister and this Government are serious, if they are serious about helping the poor people that I represent, then, Mr. Speaker, it is high time that they put in place electrification for all these communities that I represent, Mr. Speaker. That is what the Belizean people want. Our children in 2015 can no longer continue to suffer because we have a UDP Government that does not care about our people, Mr. Speaker. We want to see that connecting to electricity the fees are reduced. Man, everybody knows that since this Government took over it is more difficult and more expensive to connect to electricity. If you don't have \$2,000 to build a post and to get all the amenities and wires, man, the poor man can't be connected. We have several examples of communities where you have the lines passing overhead, Mr. Speaker. But yet they cannot connect to electricity because they cannot afford it. That is the real deal that the people want, Mr. Speaker, not the millions of dollars that are being given away.

So, Mr. Speaker, I go on record to say that I am calling out on this Government, I am calling out on the Prime Minister and the UDP, to deliver on the promises because if they cannot deliver then this side of the House is certainly ready and will make sure that we deliver to our people. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. A. MARTINEZ (Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation): Mr. Speaker, I have one short intervention, and I say categorically now, Mr. Speaker, as we speak, we are getting electrification in Faber's Road Community right now, as we speak. Belize Electricity Limited is out there expanding areas in Port Loyola, as we speak, Mr. Speaker. So I am very happy and sad. I am sad for the brother here who is jumping up and making a lot of noise because at the end of the day you need to do your little due diligence too, man. You cannot just be making noise. Don't worry about the noise in the market. Check your change. That is important.

And like I say BEL in the normal course of thing, and the Member for Fort George was talking about mathematics. But, when you look at it literally, \$70 million minus \$14 million is equivalent to \$56 million. So, if you had \$14 million on one side, you only need to find \$56 million. Then, when you look at what is moving forward, every 4 years, for example, let's say you have \$14 million, isn't it going to finish off? Now the PUP is talking and they were the ones who sold out the light. (Applause) They sold out the water. How did the people benefitted from it? They were the ones who sold it off because they were the ones who privatized it. They are the ones who believe in nationalization.

And so I am saying, Mr. Speaker, to hell with what is being said. They can only criticize you know but none of them are saying that they are not supporting the nationalization. They are trying to find all kinds of faults and so

on. But it would be very important for us to see, after the debate is over, to take a division to see how much of them would support the nationalization and the conclusion of this thing with BEL. This is very important to the country. It is as simple as you can see.

A Government is here to serve. They are not here to make profit. So I'm certain that Government will spend back on the people whether they return or not. A Government is here to serve. Government is not in business to make a profit. So to me most of the thing that they are saying is not making a lot of sense, Mr. Speaker. I am saying that I support it fully, and I am gathering the benefits. As we speak now, BEL is in Port Loyola taking our some lines in Faber's Road. So by the weekend we will have light. Let there be light, and there is light, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to know from the Member for Port Loyola, if he can tell us, where is the money coming from for the expansion of Faber's Road, if it is from BEL or if it is from the Government of Belize? Okay, I just want to know because I know for a fact when it comes to rural electrification BEL does not want to spend their money in rural electrification. But at the end of the day they reap the profits. They expect that Government will do the investment and they will reap all the profits. That is why now Fortis is prepared to come back into Belize because when they bought out shares, maybe 19 years or 16 years ago, it was BZ\$35 million. Now they are getting back BZ\$70 million with 33 1/3% shares, and a company sees its profits over the years. It's not overnight. So they know that 10 years from today or 20 years from today they are going to make a huge profit, and so they see the benefits and say, "I will come back and do my investment in Belize."

But I will do a dishonor to the people of my constituency of Stann Creek West because while we are fortunate that we have the assistance from the European Union, so all my villages are electrified, expansions are needed to be done. And it's a cry from the people because when the European Union makes their contribution the Government of Belize sometimes is slow in making their contribution. So the process takes some time. I have visited every single village over the last three months, and, as I stand here, Red Bank Village, there is a large area that needs to be expanded in electrification, and the light passed right over their homes, the high tension wire. But the people are so poor that they cannot afford to put in electricity in their homes. This is where the \$36 million profit should have come in and helped all these poor people in this country. I want to know how much of that \$35 million has been retained for expansion because the cry is out there.

So even the lights on the lampposts the people don't understand what the process is. So they go to BEL and say to them, "We want light on our posts because while we get electrification in our community there is no light in the village." And these villages are overgrown with bushes. So they are afraid that their children get bitten from snakes. So, when they go to BEL, BEL says to them, "It's not our responsibility to put lights on the post". I think that the Ministry of Finance should have had an arrangement with BEL that, "If your profit is X, Y, and Z, then I will want you to put electrification on the posts" because we understand that the Ministry of Finance pays for every lamppost's light.

So the only time you see expansion and lights being put up is when an election is coming around. But we in the villages want to have the same facilities as the people living in the cities and the towns. I am appealing to the Ministry of Finance and to BEL that, if it that there is these huge profits, we expect that the rural people have the same benefits like the people in the towns and the cities. And, as you go across the constituency, we have Georgetown, we have Maya Mopan, we have San Rosa, we have San Roman, we have Santa Cruz, we have Silk Grass, we have Hopkins, we have Seine Bight, we have Placencia, we have the entire Valley, and all of these villages need the electrification expansion. So this is my contribution towards this debate today, and I strongly oppose and say, man, if we are going to partner with an international company, let us reach out so that every single Belizean benefit from this agreement. Thank you very much.

HON. W. ELRINGTON (Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a brief intervention. I hope it won't be too long. Let me start off by saying though that I had the privilege really and honour of attending St. Michael's College along with the Prime Minister. As a matter of fact, we were in the same class. And I can tell you quite honestly that he was the most brilliant student in the class without reservation. (Applause) The only subject that he had difficulty with, as he candidly confessed, was mathematics. But outside of that he was brilliant. But were it not for the fact that the Right Honourable Member from Fort George said that he was the best in mathematics at St. Michael's College I don't think anybody in Belize would have known that. (Applause) This is largely because his performance has been so disastrous as leader of our country that, in fact, it is difficult to comprehend that he had any knowledge of mathematics. (Applause)

As a matter of fact, the impression I got was that the only person in the People's United Party who had some inkling of mathematics was one Ralph Fonseca. But the record now seem to be suggesting that it is either that he has no knowledge of mathematics or that, notwithstanding his knowledge of mathematics, he is so poor at managing public finances that nobody want to see him back on the political scene. (Applause) And, if you think, in fact, I am the only one who share that view, you are mistaken. Indeed, my opponent in the Pickstock Division is saying that he neither wants to see Fonseca back nor does he wants to see the Honourable Member for Fort George. I think he is going even further, he is saying he doesn't want to see anybody back in the leadership position that has the name "Fonseca" or the name "Musa". (Applause) That's a very difficult position for the party to find itself in. But he is not the only one who has expressed those reservations about the leadership. I think the esteemed, the former leader, and Member from Orange Walk Central, has expressed similar sentiments in this House. (Applause)

So, as I said, in school people can be smart in a subject but when they get into the real world they can prove to be quite catastrophic and disastrous. And I want to suggest that that is, in fact, has been the experience of the Honourable Member from Fort George. Like my opponent in Pickstock, but my friend, I too would not want to see him ever again in the leadership of this country. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, dealing directly with this Bill, it is unquestionably one of the best achievements of our Administration since we have been in office. (Applause) The transaction is completely open and transparent. There is no secret deal. The

entire details are put forward by the National Assembly for the Assembly to accept it or to reject it. It is not involving the pay out of a \$30 million in a day, as was done in the case of the DFC scandal with the Novelo Loans. Monies are paid for legal fees but monies are always paid for legal fees, and legal fees are always high because lawyers, especially the good ones, charge a lot of money. But in this case every cent that is going to be paid to the lawyer that has been paid to the lawyer will be made public because it had to be paid by the Financial Secretary. So there is no scheme and hide. The details of that will come out. And the people from the opposite side can, in fact, get that information at anytime. That is public knowledge. But lawyers, the word over, charge a lot of fees.

These transactions gave rise to legal actions largely because they were so unfair to the public of Belize. Here were companies that were having a sweetheart deal which was given to them by the Members on the other side, and then, when we got into office, in relation to this particular Electricity Bill, when we got into office, the company was saying to us, "Look, we are making all the profits but you must pay for the gas. And, if you don't pay for the gas and come up with the money, we can't guarantee that you will have electricity." What would any patriotic Belizean who has true red blood running through his veins do? You expropriate the company. You are not going to hold an entire nation hostage; you already got a sweetheart deal from the last administration. Well, here it is where it is going to end, and that is how it came about. So that, if we had not acted in the way we did in 2011, we probably would have suffered rolling blackouts. It would have caused irreparable damage to the businesses that then existed and to the economy of our country which was already in a shaky position. Do you remember when we came out of that situation in 2008? The economy was essentially in chaos. The DFC, the Social Security, the banks, everything was in a bad shape, and we could not afford to go down that road. So it was imperative that, in fact, to be acquiring the assets, and it was natural that legal action would ensue.

But note that, as soon as it was possible to effect a settlement, even before the court gave a decision, a Settlement was effected and, according to the Prime Minister, this was effected within two months. I think it was in July that negotiations started, and by the 2nd September we are in the National Assembly passing a Bill to consummate the deal. (Applause) So that was done very expeditiously, very, very professionally. And what is the effect of it? The effect of it is that we now have gotten back into our possession a national treasure, the Belize Electricity Limited. It means that every Belizean who works there now can feel assured that, in fact, their job will be guaranteed so long as they do their work. It means that the millions and millions of dollars that will be made from that company most of it is going to be left right back here because the profits now come to the Government and people of Belize, save for the profits from the 33 1/3% share which they have. So we are going to get most of the profits, and then those profits are going to create what is called the multiplier effect so that it is going to stimulate the economy and generate much more wealth for the economy and people of Belize. It is also going to reduce the drain and strain on our foreign reserves because the monies will not be sent abroad to Newfoundland but most of it is going to stay here in Belize City. What greater act of nationalism can you ask for? Contrast that situation with the position of the PUP who sold everything out almost in clandestine fashion without consultation with anybody. (Applause)

But, if anybody has any doubt as to the great benefit from this

arrangement, look at the fact that the principal of Fortis, the principal director, was happy to, in fact, participate in the arrangement, to continue to invest in Belize and to continue to show their confidence and support in the country. The fees, the costs, the charges were all fair and just. I don't think anybody can complain about it, and something has to be wrong with anybody who would suggest that, in fact, there was something wrong with this deal. To my mind it is one of the best deals that we have made. It is consistent also with the part of nationalism that we have pursued because it is not only in this that we've sort of nationalize but we start to nationalize in BEL as well and BTL as well.

And, of course, we are doing the most unprecedented infrastructural development in the history of this country. (Applause) Never before in the history of this country have there been so much infrastructural development, never before. And this is a development that has benefitted everyone because everyone is being employed from the top engineers to the poor guy who just pushes the shovels. Everybody is being patronized, all the business people, those who sell the sand, cement, steel, whatever it is. Everybody is getting a share of the pie and red, blue, pink, whatever it is, and every Belizean is full of pride at the comfort now with which we are able to move through our streets that are so beautiful. And we are full of pride at the fact that the country itself, on a whole, is so transformed. Whether you go north, south, east and west, people are saying to you that it look now like Belize is coming like the States. People are so impressed with what has been done. But it is not an isolated act. It's part of a pattern and a system and a policy of development which is geared to enhance and alleviate the Belizean people.

This also too has to be looked at in conjunction with the initiatives that are being dealt with in education, another \$35 million for education. In relation to the electricity, I heard the Member from Toledo West, and he said that when the PUPs were in every village it seems in Toledo West got electricity and different things, bridges. He can't stop boasting about, when the PUP was in, what was done in Toledo West. Well, it is not only Toledo West that we have to look forward to. The Government has to deal with other parts of the country as well. So Toledo West can't get all the time, and this is a big country, and we don't have the resources to spend. No country really has the resources to spend to develop all parts of the country at the same time. So he simply has to wait. Toledo West will get its turn. (Applause)

In terms of the Member from Stann Creek West, I must comment that, in fact, the effort of the European and the benefits that are being derived from the European Union comes from the benefit from this Government. It is us in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Development that argue for those funds that are now used to enhance the situation down south. So that the point I'm trying to make is that the Government has a holistic approach to development and this development is concentrating on education which is foundational as well as infrastructural which is also foundational, and it is unprecedented.

Light bill has been reduced and continues to be reduced. The profit that we get from BEL is for us to help to finance health, education, sports and the likes, so that there is more money that is going to be available to us. We will have, as I said, the domestication of the resources which we get because we won't have to send it off in terms of foreign exchange. And we won't have to worry

ever about rolling blackouts because, in fact, we are going to be in charge of the facility, and we will be able to provide the electricity more easily now to all areas of the country because the Government will subsidize it. The facility now belongs to the Government, and we the people will make the effort to provide the benefits for the people.

So just let me end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I'm always amazed at the Members of the People's United Party on the other side when they seek to talk about transparency, good governance, honesty, decency and the like. Those are qualities that are alien to them. (Applause) The entire Belizean population knows that, in fact, you can't trust them with the assets of the nation. (Applause) And I think it cannot be overemphasized that that was the problem that the G-7 had or the G-8 had between the period 1989 to 2008, and that seems to be the identical problem that the G-12 now has. Even though they are not yet in office, the G-12 seem to think that they are going to be so rabid in terms of the public purse that they don't want to take any chances in going to election with them. Those people can't run with us. So they have no moral authority to speak about decency and honesty. (Applause) This particular Bill is an incredibly good achievement for the Government and people of Belize, and I support it fully. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as a Belizean, I am certainly happy that the Government has found a way to find some kind of Settlement with Fortis over the issue of BEL because, as we know, whenever we have these issues confronting us it affects not only the issue between the Government and BEL but it certainly even affects the entire business community because it affects the business or the investment climate in Belize.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would just want to make a few comments and ask a few questions. Now our colleagues on the other side have been boasting that they have reduced electricity rates by 20%. But let me remind them that on January 4, 2013, electricity rates went up by 16.8%. So the actual reduction to the Belizean public is not 20% but 3.2%, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Prime Minister went to great lengths to say that mathematics is not his forte, and he is a good lawyer, and I could accept that at all times, Mr. Prime Minister. But looking at your numbers you said that Fortis, for the 70% that was acquired or nationalized from them, was claiming for \$310 million. If you were to divide that, that roughly comes out to about \$4.4 million per 1%. Now using that calculation the 33 1/3% that Fortis is now getting would be worth \$147.47 million. The Prime Minister is saying now that the 33 1/3% of the company that Fortis is getting has a book value of \$117.9 million. The company has made \$36 million in profits. That means that 1/3 of that profit is going to go to Fortis, and that is going to be over \$10 million. So that alone puts them at \$127.9 million. They are only short of \$20 million from what they were asking. I am using your numbers, Prime Minister.

Now when you add the tax exemptions that they will be getting that are being listed here, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that I could see why it is that Fortis quickly agreed to what was proposed to them by the Government.

Now the questions that I would like to ask, just a few questions that I

would like to ask to the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, are that in the Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill that he has in front of us, on page 2, they are talking about a “Deed of Assurance”, it says, “means the Deed of Confirmation and Assurance entered into between the Government, Fortis, and BECOL in the form agreed between them in accordance with the Deed of Settlement, giving Fortis and BECOL assurances in respect of the ownership of BECOL and of the rights of BECOL to carry on its business in the ordinary course.” Now no where do I see in the document the Deed of Confirmation and Assurances. And is the Prime Minister willing to make this available so that we can take a look to see what is it that they are agreeing to? And is it that they are giving an assurance to Fortis that they will not acquire BECOL?

Also, when you go, again, to page 4, where it talks about the “Extent of exemptions”, where you know, again, the Government of Belize is giving Fortis or its transferee of shares meaning that, if one year later or five years later, and correct me, if I’m wrong, Prime Minister, they sell those shares to anybody the persons that buy those shares will also be exempted from taxes on those 33 1/3%. Prime Minister, on page 5, you mentioned that there was no exemption from withholding tax. But here on page 5 it is saying that, it says, “for this provisions, to be payable to the Government (including exemption from withholding of tax as required by section 22 of the Income and Business Tax Act, as amended from time to time).” So maybe you need to clarify that. But we’ve gone through all the exemptions. So I really don’t want to go through all of that. It’s already late, and I’m hungry also, Mr. Speaker.

But I would just like to ask the Prime Minister, again, when you look at page 15, I know he made a big deal when the PUP Government had an agreement with Mr. Ashcroft and his companies, when they were saying that any arbitration that would take place would take place in London. I think he was saying that we were selling out our sovereignty. But now here in this Agreement he is agreeing with BECOL that, if there is any case for Arbitration, that it shall take place in London, England at the London Court of International Arbitration, and it goes further to say that the parties agree that Washington DC is a convenient venue for the hearing in the arbitration. So, again, I would like to ask the Prime Minister, why is it that there was a change of heart when he was against it and now under this Settlement he has this agreement?

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, as a Belizean, I am happy that we are coming to some conclusion. But, as the saying always goes, the devil is in the details, and that’s what we see here today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, let me thank Members for their contribution, and let me try to respond to those on the other side. I want to take it in the reverse order and try to answer the speakers that went last. I should make the point one time though that I can’t hope or expect to reply to each of their speakers, and so right from the start I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that what the Member for Toledo West said, what the Member for Stann Creek West said, and what the Member for Belize Rural Central said, shall not provoke a word from my lips. And, if you believe that it is because I think they said nothing that is worth responding to, I will say you are a very wise fellow, Mr. Speaker. But dealing

with the others, let me start with the Member for Cayo South. Now, Mr. Speaker, in his intervention he was rude, he was disrespectful, he was venomous, he was vulgar, (Applause) he was reptilian. And in the normal course this would elicit something in similar vein from me. But I don't know if it's because I am getting wiser, as I get older, I don't know if it's because I can't stand for as long as I used to, but the bottom line is I will not treat with the Member for Cayo South, except to say this. A long time ago, and I really ought to have employed it in the case of the Member for Cayo South before now. A long time ago I heard somebody say, "Never wrestle with a pig". (Applause) Never wrestle with a pig because you both get dirty, but the pig likes it. So you who do not like it can't win. So last words to the Member for Cayo South, Mr. Pig, I refuse to join you in the mud. (Applause)

The Member for Orange Walk Central asked some legitimate questions. I have no difficulty. It was not, the Deed of Settlement and Compromise is, as you see, a Schedule to the (Settlement) Act that we are passing, and that is why that is attached. The Deed of Assurance that you asked about has to do, not with BEL but with BECOL, and that's why it was not thought necessary, it doesn't form part of the law. But, as is always the case with this Government, there is absolutely nothing to hide, and I will be happy to make available to you a copy of that Deed of Assurance. In essence though what it does is, indeed, to make clear to Fortis that the Government has no interest in acquiring BECOL and has no difficulty with making clear that BECOL, and I said it at the press conference, will be allowed to continue its lawful business in the normal course. What I should also say to you is the position that BECOL now has that Government is agreeing to recognize fully is a position given to them by various master agreements, by various power purchase agreements, by various deeds of guarantee, all of which were given to them by the People's United Party Government. (Applause)

You will see I will ask you to pay careful attention to the language in that Deed of Assurance when I get it to you. The draft that Fortis had proposed had us reaffirming the arrangements given to them by the PUP. I refused to sign that. I instead had the language changed so that what it says is that we recognize that there are these agreements given by the other side. You might think it's a distinction without a difference but I am preserving the option of being able to say to the Belizean people that, while I accept that all that was given to BECOL by the People's United Party is enshrined in contracts that we, as a successor government, are bound to honour, I make no judgment as to whether I think all that the PUP gave was properly given. So, for me, it's a very critical point of departure, and, as I said, when I get you the document, I hope that you will bear that well in mind.

Now you asked whether the sale of the shares which are, of course, tax exempt, whether if Fortis on-sells those shares, the exemption with respect certainly to the dividends will continue to apply. And you in that same connection make the point that I said earlier, "But in any event there is no withholding tax, there is no tax due on dividends to BEL", and you point to what is said in the Act, suggesting that, "They are doing this because, indeed, the law, in fact, the Income and Business Tax Act, in fact, makes provision for a withholding." How is it then I have to address it in this law? And how is it that I can say, "But what we are putting in the law was always the case"? Well, Sir, I'm very glad you asked that question because the conundrum is easily explained though not understood. The law was never changed but your Government, Sir, perhaps illegally, certainly

outwit the law, sent to Fortis on June 8, 2000, the following letter:

“Mr. Lynn Young, Chief Executive Officer, Belize Electricity Limited,

Dear Mr. Young,” and this was written by Mrs. Davis who was the acting Financial Secretary in your Administration, 2000.

“I write to confirm that dividend payments made by Belize Electricity Limited to its shareholders are exempt from the 15% withholding tax requirement. This exemption is in compliance with the provisions of the prospectus.”

So you, the Member for Fort George, the Member for Freetown, make a big deal about the fact that we are saying now, as a matter of law, that there is to be no tax on the dividends. But we are only saying what you, in fact, prescribed, what you, in fact, implemented but without the benefit of law. I don't know, and I imagine that's why Fortis wants to see it now as part of the law. I don't know that your Government had any authority to do this. But this is what it did, and ever since in practice this has been honoured. So it is not just Fortis, it is SSB, and it is the small shareholders in BEL, their dividends from the time of this June 8, 2000, letter given by your Government, their dividends have never attracted withholding tax. (Applause) I hope that's clear so I can make copies of the letter available to all of you and in particular to the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Fort George. And I will give it to the media straight away. (Applause) Don't say that we are conferring a tax exemption which you introduced, however improperly you did so, and which has been the case, as a matter of fact, ever since June of 2000. And clearly you did it, and they are talking about compliance with the prospectus of. You did it to entice Fortis and whoever else to, in fact, purchase shares in BEL. So it is not just that we are not doing something that you did it before you did it for the very reason that you are now saying makes it a bad deal when we actually put it in the law. There is no way, Sir, that you can get around this. (Applause)

The Member for Fort George, now there's been a lot of talks about lawyers and who gets paid for what. Both the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Fort George are lawyers. I will make the point from now that in retaining the law firm of Barrow and Company, in retaining Denys Barrow, and this is what Mr. Pig utterly misquotes. (Applause) I have always insisted that he is the best lawyer in this country. The only man who could have held a candle to him was Gian Chan Gandhi. So that's the point I'm going to make to you, Mr. Member for Orange Walk Central. Not even I, in my opinion, am as good a lawyer as Denys Barrow. And so I will make no apologies for retaining him with respect to these very complex, complicated legal matters where the Government is entitled and requires the best possible legal representation because he does offer the best possible legal representation. (Applause) You know, Mr. Speaker, when the Clerk opened the door, I saw Mr. Pig going out that way. I thought he was going to come back into the House through the other door. But let me proceed. When he was, when Mr. Pig was saying all that he was saying, you never told him a word, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Well, that's the problem.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): But he is your colleague, please.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Yes, Mr. Speaker, what I was getting ready to say, Sir, is that in terms of what I have heard today from the two lawyers on your side, well, I forgot the Member for Belize Rural Central but perhaps justifiably so. When I listened to them, one thing I know, I don't care what the circumstances are, I, in government, out of government, would never, for any reason, ever dream of retaining any of those two. (Applause) In terms of what they said, if that is an indication of their understanding or lack of understanding with respect to the law, heaven help those that are their clients. (Applause)

But the Member for Fort George said, "We have no problem with nationalization but it must benefit the Belizean people". Well, you found a way, Sir, to try to lessen what in that regard is the principal weapon in our arsenal, the fact that, since July 1, electricity rates to the consumers in this country have gone down by 20%, that's some 30 odd or almost \$40 million that in effect BEL or the Government of Belize through BEL is giving back to the consumers of this country. (Applause) I don't know how then any of you on that side can suggest that the nationalization of BEL has not operated to the benefit of the people of this country. There is that huge positive result in terms of lower rates. There is also the less tangible result that comes from the psychological assurance of knowing, with respect to the consumers, with respect to the citizens of this country, that once Government is the majority owner of BEL there can never, ever again, be a situation in which anyone can threaten us with rolling blackouts. (Applause)

Then Mr. Member for Fort George said, well, we are paying a premium because the NERA valuation, which valuation was based on what NERA thought the company was worth at the time of the nationalization, is, in fact, not at a rate that is consistent with the \$2.74 per share that we are now paying. Well, that was then. This is now. If you look at this thing, in terms of our now buying 37% in BEL, then we have to pay the rate that is applicable based on the market value at the time we are purchasing. And I am saying, Sir, that that rate would mean that what we have paid \$70 million for is actually worth \$161 million. I am telling you, again. It doesn't matter how you slice it. It is a phenomenal net gain for the people and Government of this country. (Applause)

Well, apart from the question, well, focusing again on the withholding tax which, and I get confuse, was the Member for Fort George on June 8, 2000, the Minister of Finance? Or it is that Falstaffian fellow who the Attorney General says Doctor Smith insist should never again enter the portals of power in Belmopan? Which one of them was the Minister of Finance? I have a feeling it is that same Member for Fort George you know. (Applause) So he focuses on what he calls the tax giveaways, when the tax giveaways are what he himself mandated in terms of this June-8-2000 letter. But how does the Member for Fort George have the nerve to talk about tax giveaways? This is the signer of the Accommodation Agreement. This is the signer of the UHS Guarantee. This is the signer of that Belize Bank Settlement Deed. Starting with the last one first, that is what purported to give the Belize Bank freedom from paying the taxes that every other bank had to pay. That was what was struck down by the CCJ when it referred to the Member for Fort George and the Leader of the Opposition as malignant tumors, (Applause) for having attempted that sort of tax giveaway. And remember that when he did that, as when he did the UHS Guarantee, and when he did the Accommodation Agreement, he did these things in utter and complete secrecy, hidden from the Belizean people. (Applause) And he has the

nerve now to talk about tax giveaways by way of legislation that does not confer anything new but that in any case is brought before this House and the country for full open scrutiny and debate *en la plena luz del día*, in the full light of day. (Applause)

Accommodation Agreement, you know I've pulled some of what you fine fellows had to say at the time of the nationalization, and one Mr. Jules Vasquez who is consistent in being chief gadfly and *soi-disant*, it's a French term meaning self-styled, keeper of public morals, under questioning from the good News Director of Channel 7, I don't know how this came into it because he was questioning you all about the nationalization. This was posted July 6, 2011, when you had staged a walkout of the House. You boycotted that, and you had boycotted a House Meeting two weeks earlier. I think you had tried that, again, a few months ago, and the people they've warm you all so much that you all obviously have thought better of that sort of a tactic now. But anyway that's for the historical context, and he was asking you all, and you were then Leader of the Opposition, Sir. He was asking you all about the nationalization, and I don't know the old thing, is it biblical, that the guilty fled where no one pursueth. I don't know how, in talking about the nationalization, he, the Member for Fort George, came to butt in and to say to our good News Director, "Turning back, my friends, to the Accommodation Agreement, the 15% rate of return" which he guaranteed secretly in the Accommodation Agreement, he says, was at the time considered reasonable. Why? It's because of the turmoil that existed in the industry at that time. He has the face of brass to be talking about tax giveaways which are nonexistent. But even if they were extant he is in no position to open his mouth to speak ever on that sort of an issue. (Applause)

The UHS Guarantee, that was him again. Wasn't it? He was always aided and abetted by the Leader of the Opposition as Attorney General. The Settlement Deed for which they got the stick-licking from the CCJ, all these things came from the man who at the time was your Leader, the Leader of the People's United Party, and Leader of the Government. And I insist that occasions like these provide us with the opportunity to remind the Belizean people of his utter perfidy, his complete amorality, I think in psychology they have a term which says that "someone does not have any affect", which basically is a fancy jargonistic way of saying they don't have no feelings, that Member for Fort George, utterly devoid of any feelings, (Applause) and utterly devoid of any conscience. And so, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Member for Fort George, that is how I would have done with him.

The Leader of the Opposition, to wrap up with, he said that, again, he had to acknowledge one thing that the closure of this standoff brings, quits from Belize the dark cloud that was hanging over Belize's investment climate, and I heard a number of others picking up that refrain. Well, at the time of the nationalization when they were issuing their jeremiads, their sounds of lamentations, that was the line that what we were doing was completely shattering the investment climate in this country. Since that time, of course, we've had ASR, we've had Santander, we've had NCL, and we've had endless investments in agriculture, in tourism, in pretty much every sector of this country. So I don't know whether in the immediate aftermath of the nationalization because of the bad breeze they were blowing, and, again, it gives me a chance to talk about, and I

will get to this too, in terms of the Leader of the Opposition.

But, when they complain about my retaining my brother, the best lawyer in this country, they don't talk about the fact that on the other side, both with respect to Fortis and with respect to BTL, the people with whom the Government had these disputes, the companies, the personalities, with whom the Government had this dispute, were always represented by officials of the People's United Party, particularly Eamon Courtenay and Godfrey Smith. And no doubt, again, they are lawyers. They are both good lawyers. That is as it should be. But they went well above and beyond their professional obligations. They were the ones that accompanied missions that our adversaries mounted to Washington and to other places to badmouth the UDP Government. He is being paid for it, my brother, and so it's not that he was doing any favour. But, again, to borrow from Disraeli who said, in effect man is either devil or angel; he argued that he is on the side of the angels. When Denys Barrow was being paid to represent us, at least he was on the side of the angels. (Applause) He is not any *vendepatrias*.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying now when this Settlement comes about there is no injury to the investment climate that needed to be repaired. And I have given you the examples that show this to be the case. But, of course, Fortis, with its tremendous wealth of resources and experiences, is welcomed by us, Leader of the Opposition said, I am embracing Fortis, is welcomed by us now as an investment partner. They had continued with BECOL. But to the extent that the Settlement, in fact, places an exclamation point beyond this Government's philosophy that it does welcome foreign investment then that is all to the good. And to say that I am, what, eating crow by welcoming back Fortis, he is missing the fundamentals in this equation. Isn't he, the Leader of the Opposition? Fortis is roundly being welcomed back by me but on different terms, on terms that completely favour the national interest, the Government and people of our beloved Belize. (Applause)

Again, Fortis is obviously prepared to do business with us. And I repeat that there is nothing in the agreement that interferes in any way with the remit and the authority of the Public Utilities Commission. The Leader of the Opposition had the nerve to suggest that, when we had the crisis with Fortis/BEL which caused the nationalization, that was a PUC engineered crisis. This man, Mr. AG, you must continue to repeat what Francis Smith says, "Nobody named Fonseca forever should be in the corridors of power in this country again you know." He says it was a PUC engineered crisis. Let us recollect what the nature of that crisis was. Fortis was illiquid, said that it needed an increase, a whopping increase, in rates that the Belizean consumer would need to pay and that it was not prepared to go through the process set up under law and overseen by the PUC, where they would have to make their submissions, prove their case, go to the public in consultations. That was really the *casus belli*, the cause of war. "Give me an immediate huge increase, bypass the PUC, otherwise we will plunge you into rolling blackouts".

I am saying, perhaps I tried to be a gentleman, unlike Mr. Pig, at the press conference, and I refused to say anything about Stan Marshall, and I won't get into any personal or ad hominem attacks against him even now. But at that time, when Fortis was led by Stan Marshall, that was the position taken. Consistent with that was his saying in a public meeting that he does not know what Belizeans are smoking. Fortis under new leadership now, under Mr. Perry, is a different

Fortis and is prepared to do business on our terms respecting the sovereignty of the Belizean people and the legal authority and autonomy of our Public Utilities Commission. (Applause)

Then he said, Mr. Speaker, that, oh, we had first offered only the NERA valuation amount as compensation to Fortis and so now we are paying a premium. Indeed, what we are paying is higher than the NERA valuation. But in the same way, as these people were, I think, really beyond the pale in claiming \$7.00 per share, we knew that the NERA valuation was on the low side. That was the starting point. In any case, I repeat, the NERA valuation was the valuation that applied at the time we nationalized when the company was illiquid under Fortis' stewardship. In the 4 years since then the company has made these phenomenal advances recording now the greatest annual profit ever in its history. Of course, now the shares have to be more valuable than what they were worth at the time of the NERA valuation, and I've gone through the equation over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker.

A fair way of assessing the real value, the accepted way, is to look at the year end audited accounts of BEL and on that basis the shares that we are paying \$70 million for are worth \$161 million. So we get away with this huge win for the Belizean people, and nothing the Leader of the Opposition, I was going to say he can huff and puff it won't blow our house down but he doesn't huff and puff. (Applause) I have to find something else to say. He makes these, I don't know, Mr. Speaker, he is always *vaso profundo*.

And then he says, Mr. Speaker, that Government knew it would have to return some shares so why we took the whole thing. Man, how could Government? Look Fortis was prepared for us to pay them for everything you know. It was Government that said it's a far better deal to make one portion of the compensation by way of a cash-pay-out and the rest by way of giving them back some shares. That's a fair, fair deal. So I really again completely dismiss what the Leader of the Opposition says in that regard. Do you know what really is getting to them? When I looked at these interviews that were done and I see that the Member for Orange Walk Central, who has now left, was saying that, again, it was something that was deliberately caused by the Barrow-directed PUC because BEL only had a temporary cash flow problem, the Prime Minister did what he wanted to do for a long time, take complete control of BEL, when the PUP will not accept the action to take control of BEL is in the interest of the people until, we repeat, we see the rates decreased, well, you've seen the rates decreased. So do you accept now that it was in the interest of the people? Oh, and I see that he said, "It is time for Mr. Barrow and the UDP to leave. We say call the elections now." You notice they stopped with that refrain. (Applause)

But the point is, Mr. Speaker, that this Settlement has utterly and completely confounded and upended their position. Their thing was that we would have ended up having to pay hundreds of millions of dollars. I don't know how the Leader of the Opposition can say \$70 million is a premium because I will get to an interview he did with Channel 5 in which he said one of his problems was that there would be in effect hundreds of millions that we will have to pay back and we would not have the money when the time came. It could not be in a lump sum. We would have to pay it over the years. So we will be saddling the country with debt. He then always knew that the NERA valuation or he never had any faith in the NERA valuation. All of a sudden now he is quoting the NERA

valuation. But they then completely, altogether knock off their stride. This thing is such a cue that it has stunned them. It wasn't to be like this.

Everything they've said we have completely swept aside. There is no hundreds of millions of dollars to pay. If you wanted to argue that the investment climate had been damaged, well, bringing back Fortis certainly repairs it. And there is absolutely no question, Mr. Speaker, that what we are paying we have not just the cash to pay but the foreign exchange to convert into the US currency. (Applause)

But something else, he said, is what caused me to say that he and the Member for Fort George could never ever represent me as a lawyer. He said we are also not charging any tax to Fortis for the \$70 million that we are paying them. Man, even that loud-mouthed, junior-grade lawyer, you know who I'm talking about, of the distaff persuasion would know, Mr. Speaker, this is before the courts. This is by way of a settlement. This is by way of compensation. Compensation does not attract taxes, fools. (Applause) And they said, again, the transfer of the shares to Fortis, no stamp duty is being paid. Man, if you give back the people something that they had, how on earth would stamp duty arise? Even if it arose it is the Government that is transferring. Would the Government charge itself stamp duty? (Applause) It really is nonsense placed upon stilts. (You got that right, brother.)

And, again, Mr. Speaker, foreign exchange, that they don't require foreign exchange permit and we are just sending the money to their account offshore. This is a foreign company. Where else are we to send it? And, again, it is from the Government that you get foreign exchange permit. When you are a business person, once you are operating in this economy and you want to send foreign exchange abroad, this is the Government who basically through the Central Bank owns all the foreign exchange. We don't need permit to send foreign exchange by way of a payout of what is a dispute settlement. They take all these things and they try the pylon approach to attempt to pour cold water on this magnificent settlement. But every single thing they say with respect to what they described as a giveaway is no giveaway because the so-called exemption that, according to them, we are giving does not arise. A settlement doesn't attract tax. There is no need for foreign exchange permit and paying stamp duty on the permit when Government is transferring money by way of compensation to a foreign claimant. (Applause)

And, again, why I could never hire the Leader of the Opposition? He utterly misunderstands the Put Option. He is confusing the 4 years and the 2 years. What the Put Option says, if we and Fortis don't get along, after 4 years, they have to give it a chance to work, and I am sure it will work. But life being what it is, after 4 years they can say, "Man, we've had enough; buy us back out." And this is what, again, makes it such a good deal. We pay for it, of course, at the market value. Do you know what Fortis was first proposing? That if they exercise the Put Option we will buy back the shares at whichever is the higher of two values, the book value then obtaining or the book value now as it were hedging against the fact that the company that has done phenomenally well may have a reversal of fortune. I don't think so. And we said, "No, we are going to pay you, if you exercise the Put Option in 4 years time, what it is worth then. You must take the risk as we do that the company might not be as profitable in 4 years time as it is now." So, again, Mr. Speaker, we protected ourselves. (Applause)

And Fortis accepted that if they exercise the Put Option the shares immediately come back to us you know. But this is where he got confused with the 4 years. They can't do it until after 4 years, and when they do it we don't have to pay them for 2 years after we get back the shares. Mr. Speaker, really I mean, how can anyone ever have gotten a better deal than this?

And then, Mr. Speaker, and this is the last point. Oh, the one thing that I will concede we are giving back to Fortis, because they had it under the PUP when they owned the majority shareholding in BEL, is that in repatriating their dividends they don't have to get the exchange control. We know that it's a foreign company. They have various IBCs. While there is a Central Bank Regulation that says in the normal course, it does not apply to Government, you need exchange control permit to send out foreign exchange, the Minister of Finance has the authority to waive that requirements you know. And the regulation also says that when you get the permit for the little Mickey Mouse amount that you are sending off you should pay the stamp duty on the permit. Again, the Minister of Finance has the authority to waive that. But I did not say to Fortis, "No, man, when the time comes, I will waive the requirement." I put it in the law because nothing that we do must be concealed from the people of this country. (Applause) And everything that we do must and can be disclosed because we do nothing without justification, and we do nothing without considering the interest of the people of this country. (Applause)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this question of legal fees, now I want to say one thing, and I believe somebody may have obliquely referred to it. Perhaps it was the Member for Mesopotamia, the Minister of Housing. Again, it's known throughout the litigation, it has been public, so it's not any secret that Denys Barrow represented the Government throughout the court trauma, the court saga. The Leader of the Opposition says that's nepotism. Well, Sir, as I understand nepotism, it is if you give some unfair preferment to a relative of yours. There is nothing unfair about retaining the best lawyer in the country to give the Government the best service in the country. (Applause)

But notice I retained on behalf of the Government Barrow and Company, my brother's firm, in which a leading partner is, as the Minister pointed out, Andrew Marshalleck, who is Chief Counsel to the PUP, who is the one who is the instructing solicitor, if you will, with all their Petrocaribe challenges, their 13th Senator challenges, as the Minister put it, doing everything to undermine this Administration. And, not just that, the point should be made that while Barrow and Company is not on a retainer, we give them the work, it's almost as though they are. And so Mr. Marshalleck derives these tremendous benefits. It doesn't stop him, on behalf of the same Member for Cayo South, Mr. Pig, it doesn't stop Marshalleck from, at his instance, bringing suit against the Government of Belize on behalf of his constituents with respect to the Cotton Tree land. So Marshalleck is not just a PUP, Petrocaribe, the 13th Senator but you might say those are high constitutional matters. Simple thing like the Cotton Tree land Marshalleck is the lawyer for Mr. Pig against the Government of Belize. But because the firm that he is a member of, headed by my brother, gives us the best possible service, we will continue to retain that firm.

And I was saying, Mr. Speaker, so that is not any undue or, as it were, undeserved preferment such as it will constitute nepotism. What is nepotism, and I think you said it, Minister of Housing, is this. When the Government headed at

the time by the Member for Fort George was negotiating the Jeffery Prosser, the sale of BTL to Jeffery Prosser, the lawyers representing the Government in that deal were the lawyers at the law firm of Musa and Balderamos. (Applause) So he retained not his brother's law firm, or his niece's law firm, he retained his own law firm. So right away it is almost an irrebuttable presumption that that is nepotism.

But do you know what clinches the thing, what is proof positive, what drives it home? It is because he doesn't have the excuse that I have of saying, "But, boy, Musa and Balderamos is the best firm in the country at the time". (Applause) Never was, never will be! So, Mr. Speaker, that is nepotism.

I have no problem they had asked a question about the amount that Government spent, the Member for Toledo East, in terms of legal fees for 2014. We have the answer. It's just that this is a Special Meeting. So the question didn't come forth. We will provide that because, again, we have nothing to hide. (Applause) Everything we do, I repeat, is *en la plena luz del día*. (Applause) Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I should thank them you know because they have caused me to stand for far longer than is consistent with what the Member for Fort George gently described as my ailment. But it is not them. In circumstance where the defense or representation of the interest of this people demands, I will always stand literally and figuratively. (Applause) I will always stand for as long as is required to look after the interest of this Administration and the good people of Belize. 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 and the Fortis Companies arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Electricity Limited held by the Fortis Companies, 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. National Protected Areas System 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 maintenance of a coordinated management of a system of protected areas that is representative of internationally agreed categories, effectively managed, ecologically based, consistent with international law, and based on best available scientific information and the principles of sustainable development for the economic, social and environmental benefit of present and future generations of Belize; to repeal the National Parks System Act, Chapter 215 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to amend the Fisheries Act, Chapter 210 and the Forests Act, Chapter 213 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr.

Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important Bill, and certainly we are very concerned that there has been inadequate consultation on this Bill. Consultation should always take place at the front end of reviewing and revising any Bill, not at the back end as was done in this case. I am aware that from the reports that I have received that a number of individuals and organizations appeared before the Natural Resources and Environment Committee to share their views and concerns regarding this Bill. And in some cases written submissions were made to the Committee. We certainly wish to commend all those who took the time to contribute to making this Bill better. A number of their recommendations have been taken into account but many others have been ignored.

If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, to refer to some of the written submissions very briefly, which I believe very effectively reflect the very real and serious concerns of the environmental community regarding this Bill. One of the submissions states that, indeed, the management of Belize's National Protected Areas System does need to be strengthened. However, while this proposed legislation is focused on repealing the current National Parks Act by establishing a National Protected Areas System Bill, including private protected areas, biological corridors, seascapes and landscapes, it really does very little to improve the management of the system.

Furthermore, it does not speak to a system but instead is heavily focused on the terrestrial protected areas of Belize. Furthermore, there exists a National Protected Areas System plan which has been in place for some time now, Mr. Speaker, endorsed by the Government of Belize that called for the improvement of the coordination and collaboration of the management of protected areas, including terrestrial, marine, cultural and private biological corridors, seascapes and landscapes.

And the submissions made before the Committee make it very clear that this proposed Bill, Mr. Speaker, deviates from the collaborative and integrated approach envisioned and recommended in that National Protected Areas System Plan of 2005 and also with the recent edits that have been taken place over the past year or so.

So the proposed Bill, Mr. Speaker, puts, and this is one of the big concerns, puts the sole authority in the hands of the Minister. It calls for an Advisory Council but one that has no teeth and cannot effect meaningful change. So I think the main concern, Mr. Speaker, is that we don't want to be repealing an existing Act to replace it with one that is wholly inadequate and is not improving the system of protected areas. Protected areas management in Belize is critical to the country's national economic, social and cultural development, and any legislation that is proposed should be consulted on adequately and properly in the best interest of the country.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, this Bill falls way short of what is required. And even though some of the recommendations, as I've said, have been taken into account, many other important recommendations have not been taken into account. And therefore I cannot support it.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when it comes to the issue of National Protected Areas System Bill that has been proposed today, it is certainly something that is needed, and I can see

where the Ministry is trying to amalgamate and put things together. But the Leader of the Opposition has already pointed out you know that one of the most important things was the National Protected System Plan that was accepted by the NGO community and by Government in 2005, and the whole issue there was to try to have a more collaborative approach when it comes to the management of protected areas. One of the goals under the National Protected Areas System Plan, Mr. Speaker, we were putting at that time a 5-year plan or a goal for 5 years where we wanted to have, and I was the Minister at that time, where they wanted to put all the protected areas, be it terrestrial, marine and archaeological sites, under one umbrella so that you can have better synergies. The idea was that you would have put them all together where they can be using the same resources and assets that you would need for when you have to go do checkups, for instance, on land, sea or archaeological sites. And I see that is nowhere in this Bill.

Likewise, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, while there has been some consultation, I think that some of the more important recommendations that have been made to the Committee and to the Ministry have not been taken into account. I'm pointing out again that too much in this Bill is being placed in the hands of the Minister, and even the Advisory Council that they purport to have under the National Protected Areas System Bill in the future it's just an Advisory Council and it has no teeth, no real authority to really make the necessary changes in the administration and management of protected areas in our country.

Because of that and the other concerns that have been passed on by our partners in the NGO community, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recommend to the Prime Minister who has presented this Bill today that maybe they should take it back and have some more work done into it before we pass a Bill that really is not going to meet the needs of the NGO community in the management and the protection of our protected areas, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to provide for the maintenance of a coordinated management of a system of protected areas that is representative of internationally agreed categories, effectively managed, ecologically based, consistent with international law, and based on best available scientific information and the principles of sustainable development for the economic, social and environmental benefit of present and future generations of Belize; to repeal the National Parks System Act, Chapter 215 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to amend the Fisheries Act, Chapter 210 and the Forests Act, Chapter 213 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; 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.

3. Protected Areas Conservation Trust (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 Protected Areas Conservation Trust Act, Chapter 218 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000 – 2003, to provide for a new

definition of “protected area” and a new composition of the Board of Directors; to expand the functions of the Trust; to provide for the appointment of a Finance and Audit Committee and other Committees by the Board of Directors; to further strengthen the provisions of the Act in order to enhance the operations of the Trust in achieving its mission of promoting the sustainable management of Belize’s protected areas; to make better provisions relating to the exemption from payment of the conservation fee; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation which is not been treated with the importance and seriousness required. There was no proper consultation on the front end, again, Mr. Speaker, and these are very serious concerns. I think when we raise these issues we do so in absolute good faith. The Member for Orange Walk Central is absolutely very, very connected to this work. He served for many, many years as the Minister responsible for Belize’s environment. So we understand these issues, and we understand the very serious concerns of the people in the environmental community. And they bring these concerns to us. And the reality is that they do not believe that their voices are been heard, their voices are been respected.

When it comes to environmental issues, Mr. Speaker, and concerns, the best thing for the Government to do, and this applies in many other areas as well, is for us to try to get out of the way and allow the people who know best to get the job done. But in this case what we are doing, we see it with the Bill we’ve just passed, I don’t even know if they read the Bill but we are going backwards, man. We are cementing Government’s control over these important issues and entities.

I think we all can agree that PACT has been around for some time now. It’s played a very positive role, effective role, in financing conservation of important protected areas in Belize; it’s become a household name in our country. The people view it in a very positive light.

This Bill that we are passing today threatens the very foundation, man, the very foundation of what PACT is. And it effectively erodes the main trust of PACT since its establishment. Again, Mr. Speaker, we have the benefit of written submissions which I believe quite clearly expose the dangers of the Bill, and I wish to refer to some of these very briefly. One of the submissions points out that the majority of the proposed amendments in this PACT (Amendment) Bill does not enhance or improve the Trust’s ability to increase its fundraising capabilities. The bulk of these amendments deviates the role and function of the Trust from being a grant fund for NGOs for work on protected areas and erodes the funding aspect of the Trust, not only by now funding government recurrent expenses and capital projects but by making the board less autonomous and more of a full-government body which erodes its standing to access funds internationally which was always critical to its composition.

And the composition of the board again, Mr. Speaker, is a very important issue. The original PACT Act calls for eleven board members: five NGOs; four government representatives, the Financial Secretary plus three government representatives responsible for terrestrial and marine protected areas, for archaeological sites, for tourism; one private sector member with a background in finance, and the Executive Director of the Trust who has no right to vote, eleven

members. That was the original PACT. The Chair, the Vice-Chair and the private sector representative in finance were all selected by the board. This (Amendment) Bill now that we are passing today calls for eleven board members. The following is the composition: six government appointments, the C.E.O. in Economic Development, the C.E.O. in National Emergency, the C.E.O. for the Ministry responsible for protected areas, the C.E.O. in Tourism, the Financial Secretary, the President of UB; three NGOs, one from the largest tourism umbrella organization, that's how they called it, would it not be better to just say BTIA, there seems to be a reluctance to do that; two from the NGOs with one from a community based organization, no definition of a C.B.O., wouldn't it be better to name the organization, APAMO, again, there seems to be a reluctance to do these things; one individual from the private sector with a background in finance. Now this Bill is saying that that person who used to be selected by the board is to be nominated and appointed by the Minister. Why is that necessary? And finally there is the one Executive Director of the Trust.

So the amendments now that we are passing call for the Chair and the private sector representative in finance to be selected and appointed by the Minister. That is absolutely an unnecessary change. It is not necessary at all to enhance the functions and fundraising mechanism of the Trust. All it does is place more government and ministerial control over the Trust, technically making the Trust seven government representatives and three private sector representatives with voting rights where it used to be four and six, respectively. So we are going back way, Mr. Speaker. We are going back way.

It is a critically important Bill. I am disappointed that the Honourable Member for Cayo North is not here. I thought he would be a voice and a champion for the environmental community. He is not even here to participate in the debates of these Bills. That's fine.

So, Mr. Speaker, under the circumstances, man, this is something we should all be able to join hands on and celebrate. It's important for the future development of Belize. But we can't support something that's taking us back way. Why are we moving from the NGO community leading the efforts to this Government-ministerial control of PACT? It's unnecessary, and it is unproductive, and so we certainly cannot support it, Mr. Speaker.

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill. Mr. Speaker, sometimes I wonder, the Opposition wants to make a contribution, according to my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, but why when there is House Committee Meetings to discuss these important matters such as this Bill you all don't show up.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): The Honourable Oscar Requena was at every meeting, Sir. Please correct the record, man.

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): One of them does showed up, and he showed up late. But where was the other one that could have contributed? Sir, when they showed up, do you see how you made your contribution there just a while ago, they didn't made any contribution to these matters, none.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, I even see the environmental list from the great state of Florida here, and I would like to take this opportunity now, Mr. Speaker, to welcome to the National Assembly, the Honourable Jerome Conrad Coast. (Applause) And I would also like to welcome his wife who is a native daughter of the great town of Dangriga. I would like to welcome, Mrs. Marie Coast, welcome to both of you. (Applause)

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust has been an innovative financial mechanism to raise funds for the protected areas of Belize. It is important for us to understand that the funds that come to the PACT or the Protected Areas Conservation Trust don't come from the Consolidated Fund. It doesn't come from Government. They come from a fee that is collected from all non-Belizeans visiting Belize. I think it is \$7.50, when they are leaving the country. They get 20% from the cruise ship passenger head tax. They get 20% of all recreational related activities in protected areas and a few other ones. But these are the three more important ones that bring the bulk of the money to the protected areas and to the Trust, to PACT. And the PACT, since it was established in 1997, has been managed by a board. At all times the board has been controlled by a majority of non-government representatives. As the Leader of the Opposition just pointed out, you know at one time we had five members from the conservation and one that was appointed from within themselves. It was a financial person, and we even named the organizations that were going to be on the PACT, the more important organizations like the Belize Audubon Society, one of the most respected NGOs in this country.

We also named a member from the Belize National Tour Operators Association. They have a direct connection with the issues of protected areas. We also named two members from the Belize Alliance of Conservation Non-governmental Organizations, BACONGO, of which if they are not functioning anymore that we could easily use APAMO. So it was very clearly worded out or spelt out in the Act who these members were going to be. And because it was managed more by the members of the NGO community and not by Government, Mr. Speaker, the PACT, the Trust has been one that has been recognized worldwide.

In 2005, when we went to Durban at the World Congress of National Parks, that is held once every 10 years, the PACT was used as an example across this world as how countries can raise monies for their protected areas. And it was because they had that independence and not that dependence on Government. Even now in Central America and other countries they are constantly looking at the PACT as a shining example as to how they can set up a Trust Fund for them to manage their protected areas in their respected countries.

Now I'm not saying that everything in the proposed Bill is bad. I mean, for instance, this whole issue about the Audit Committee can certainly strengthen the PACT. But when we look at all the amendments that are being proposed today, Mr. Speaker, they do more harm than good. And even the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, assured the NGO community that their concerns were going to be addressed. This is what he said to his good friend, how did he referred to him, Jules Vasquez, the News Editor from Channel 7, when he said, and I quote, "I want to make clear that we had first received in Cabinet a letter sent to me by the Audubon Society and BTIA, and, again, they started out by saying that it is a

good idea and a good undertaking. But there are certain concerns they have. I had to tell them that Cabinet took on board every single one of those concerns, and the Bill was sent back to the Solicitor General to be redrafted.” He gave the assurances to the NGO Community that they took every single one of these concerns to be addressed in the Bill. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that did not happen as we have already pointed out with the composition of the board that the board now will no longer be independent, that the Government is going to have majority control of the Trust, of PACT.

Also, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, in the present Act we actually named the organizations that were going to be on that board. But now the way it is set up it is subjective as to who is going to decide who is the largest. It’s going to be the Minister who is going to make that decision. So, again, it is giving even more powers to the Minister in determining which organization is going to be representing the NGO community, therefore, giving the Minister more powers in the actual composition of the board.

Also, as we pointed out, under section 5(2) of the present Act both Chairman and Vice-Chairman were elected by the board members. Now under the proposed section 5(5) of the proposed Bill the Chairman of the board is going to be elected or selected or appointed by the Minister from among the members of the board. The board will no longer have the authority or the ability to decide who they think would be best fit to be the Chairman of the board. Of course, as a consolation prize, they are leaving the Vice-Chairman to be elected by the board.

Now there is this new section, section 18, where, again, as I said earlier, they are proposing a Finance and Audit Committee. Certainly whilst it is helpful to spell it out in the Act, this actually has already been addressed indirectly by the Advisory Committee that presently exists in the Act. The Advisory Committee does a number of things, Mr. Speaker. It advises the board on technical, administration and other matters, coordinate the preparation for the National Strategic Trust Plan, and advises the board on any other matter with a view to ensure that the board performs its functions and administers the Trust in the most efficient and effective way. So in effect we can say that the Advisory Committee that presently exists we could already address it. But it is good that it is going to be now spelt out that there is going to be a Finance and Audit Committee.

When you look at the new proposed Bill as presented today, you have section 18(a) (1), where they are presenting now what they called a Technical Committee on protected areas. Really when you look at the functions of this Technical Committee, Mr. Speaker, it does not belong in the PACT Act. Actually it belongs in the National Protected Areas System Bill that was just presented to the National Assembly. Why do I say this? I say this because, one, the PACT was designed as a financing institution for protected areas and conservation and not as an overseer of the administration of protected areas. It is the National Protected Areas System Bill that was just passed, that is the function that they will be doing. The Technical Committee, also, if we put it under the PACT, is just going to add an unnecessary bureaucracy in the worse process of NGO communities trying to access funds, and it will even cause a micromanagement of protected areas, again, totally moving away from what the PACT was envisioned.

Thirdly, it would increase the overhead expense and administrative costs of the PACT monies that can be used to give to our NGO communities in conservation. And, fourthly, this Technical Committee well, as I mentioned

earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Technical Committee actually belongs in the National Protected Areas System Bill because when you look at what they are proposing to do, Mr. Speaker, they are saying that some of the issues they want to do is the management of the National Protected Areas System and related legislations, regulations, obviously, this is in the previous Bill that was presented by the Prime Minister, and to look at emerging protecting areas system issues and other matters. So I would like the Prime Minister to consider to moving this from the PACT and putting it where it actually belongs.

When you look at section 35, Mr. Speaker, I think there was a typo where they remove the word “community” from the based organization. It is supposed to be a community-based organization, and I am sure that we can correct that in the Committee of the whole. We would like to also note there, Mr. Speaker, that when you look at section 21 they are proposing, Mr. Speaker, to reduce what PACT is charging for the cruise ship tax from 20% to 15%. That is a reduction of 25% of what they collect from the cruise ship tax. The PACT collects, depending on the amount of visitors per year, Mr. Speaker, from cruise ships between \$500,000.00 and \$700,000.00 a year. So that by giving up or by reducing it from 20% to 15% the Protected Areas Conservation Trust is giving up anywhere between \$125,000.00 to \$185,000.00, monies that are really needed for our conservation partners that are managing our protected areas plan.

Also, when you look at 33A (1), Mr. Speaker, on page 14, all of this is not necessary in the proposed Bill. Actually what we need to consider is to increase the head tax that we charge to our visitors when they come to Belize. It is since 1997, that we are charging \$7.50. It's for the past 20 years. So probably it is time to consider raising it from \$7.50 to maybe as much as \$10.00.

Sections 35A to 35D, again, Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, Mr. Speaker, all of these are not functions of the PACT where they are talking about “The Trust shall maintain a register to be known as the “Register of Protected Areas” which shall (a) contain a list of all protected areas; (b) indicate the kind of protected areas in each case; (c) contain boundaries definition; (d) be a repository of information, reports, and management plans in relation to all protected areas and protected landscapes and seascapes; (e) contain any other information determined by the Trust. You know all of these functions, again, do not belong in the PACT. They belong in the National Protected Areas System Bill that has just been introduced. So, again, I'm hoping that we can correct that during the third reading in the Committee of the whole.

Mr. Speaker, when we go to page 20 on section 36, again, as it presently stands in the Act, Mr. Speaker, section 36(1) says, “The Board may make regulations for the better carrying out of or giving effect to the provisions of this Act.” Presently now under the proposed amendment they are removing that from the board and now giving it to the Minister. Again, this is just unnecessary powers that are being given to the Minister. Why is it that the Minister needs to have that power? The board by itself, and the Minister could always advise the board, and then the board can look at the necessary changes that the board should be doing. So, again, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that we should make that change by giving that power to the Minister.

Under the Schedule, 4, on the proposed Bill here, Mr. Speaker, again, just for the semantics, on page 21, where you have (h), it says in “support for

mitigation and adaptation projects”. There is the suggestion from the NGO community that we should put “support for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects” so that we could make it clear that the mitigation that we are looking at is being as a direct effect of climate change.

Also, at the end, Mr. Speaker, at the last one, “Activities not eligible for Trust Funding”, that is on page 22. I think it is very important that we make it abundantly clear that the monies from the Trust Fund of the PACT will not and cannot be used for activities that should be paid or borne by the Government such as salaries and staff for government agencies, you know, the recurrent expenses for the Government of Belize’ agencies. I think it would be good if we can insert here a clause to make it very clear that we are making sure that the Government at no time will decide to give up some of their responsibilities and pass it on to the PACT so that they could use the Trust Fund to pay for the expenses that they should be paying.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust has been hailed as a model for protected areas financing mechanism all over the world and, as I said, at the World Parks Congress in Durban. I think that the PACT, as it presently is, is still a good example that is still being used today regionally and internationally. And, whilst there is always room for improvement, unfortunately today these amendments that are being proposed to the PACT, Mr. Speaker, are a retrograde. We are going backwards. We are not making the PACT a better organization. We are not giving it more transparency. We are not giving them more independence. We are not allowing the conservation community more ability and more responsibility in the proper management of this Trust. What we are doing is that we are taking it away from them and putting it squarely and solely in the hands of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to strongly recommend that the Prime Minister who introduced this Bill that based not, one, on his promise that he made to the conservation community, but based on some of the errors that we found here on areas that need to be corrected, I would want to recommend that this Bill be taken back, Mr. Speaker, for correction at the Ministry and with the conservation community, Mr. Speaker. This Bill, as it stands, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. W. ELRINGTON (Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a brief intervention really. I was the Chairman of the Committee that sat on the hearings of the Committee with respect to this Bill, and, perhaps most unusually, the Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting, the first hearing, so as to hear other representations made, and the decision was taken that those representations that met with consensus by all the parties would, in fact, be put forward. That was the position that the Committee took, and the Member from Toledo West was there. He agreed with everything. He seconded the proposal.

We had questions, and I think the real issue that the organizations took issue with, really the fundamental issue was that they objected to the fact that the Minister would be having a more robust role on the committee. And their argument was that, as an NGO without governmental control, they are better able to raise funds. The donors are more attractive to them to give them funds. But

nobody, not a single one of them was able to substantiate that point.

In truth and in fact, this is a Trust that has been in existence for 21 years, and for the entire 21 years the resources for the Trust has come from the government coffers, not directly but it is monies provided by Government by way of the taxation that should go into the national Consolidated Fund. If, in fact, the Government is the one that is putting in the funds, then he who plays the pipe calls the tune. That is simple. I was very patient, and I asked each one of them, what is the justification for your argument that, if it is NGO controlled, it is going to be better able at attracting funding? Do you have any data? I will give you time to go and come back. Nobody was able to do that.

In truth and in fact, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, or whatever it is, is funded through Government's initiative, government's effort, and therefore it would only seem reasonable that, in fact, since you have a responsibility for it, and since the Minister really is responsible to the people, that the Minister should have responsibility for it. Do you see how many amendments there are? It is because we were very patient. We took everybody's suggestions on board, and we decided that we'll bring it back to the House. So that is how this came about. There were, of course, divisions. Some people believed that they owned everything like some people like to think that they own everything in this country. But that is not the case. That's a misrepresentation of the fact that people have to one day come to realize you don't own it. It is for the country, and any organization that does not have the need for amendment after 21 years has to be an organization that has some fundamental problem. Those are my brief submissions, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West): Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to clarify something. Member from Pickstock, I did not agree with everything. We agree with most of it, Member, but certainly not everything. I believe that that is important that it goes on record and particularly on the issues that have been raised as it relates to the composition of the board, the powers of the Minister. Certainly I share the same view as has been presented by the other Members of this side of the House. But I must say that it was a very robust process, and, indeed, you know we had people presenting their case. So thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Protected Areas Conservation Trust Act, Chapter 218 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000 – 2003, to provide for a new definition of "protected area" and a new composition of the Board of Directors; to expand the functions of the Trust; to provide for the appointment of a Finance and Audit Committee and other Committees by the Board of Directors; to further strengthen the provisions of the Act in order to enhance the operations of the Trust in achieving its mission of promoting the sustainable management of Belize's protected areas; to make better provisions relating to the exemption from payment of the conservation fee; 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 kindly leave during this portion of the sitting.

[In the Committee]

The Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. National Protected Areas System Bill, 2015.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to with the following amendments:

Insert next after the definition of “National Protected Areas System” the following definition –

““National Protected Areas System Plan” has the meaning given in section 6.”.

Clauses 3 to 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. Renumber the section as subsection (1).
2. Delete paragraph (b) of subsection(1), as renumbered, and substitute therefor the following –

“(b) update the National Protected Areas System Plan, as needed, and in any event at intervals of no longer than five years, and present it to the Cabinet for approval.”

3. Insert next after subsection (1), as renumbered, the following as subsection (2) –

“(2) In subsection (1) “National Protected Areas System Plan” means the national plan for the development of protected areas prepared by the National Protected Areas Advisory Council”.

Clause 7 agreed to with the following amendments:

In clause 7(f) (iv), delete the words “Ramsar Convention” and substitute

therefor the words “Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat”.

Clause 8 agreed to with the following amendments:

In clause 8(2), delete the words “the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s guidelines” and substitute therefor the words “internationally accepted standards and guidelines”.

Clauses 9 and 10 agreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to with the following amendments:

In clause 11(g), delete the words “nature-base” and “culture based” and substitute therefor respectively the words “nature-based” and “culture-based”. Also, delete the comma at the end and substitute therefor a full stop.

Clause 12 agreed to with the following amendments:

In clause 12(1), delete the paragraphs (c) and (d) and substitute therefor the following –

- “(c) a representative of the largest umbrella organization for non-governmental agencies involved in protected areas management, nominated by the organization;
- (d) a representative of the largest umbrella organization representing private protected areas, nominated by the organization or in the absence of an organization functioning as such, a private protected area landowner selected by the Minister;”

Clause 13 agreed to.

Clause 14 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. In subsection (2),
 - (a) insert immediately after the word “alteration” the words “or reclassification”;
 - (b) insert immediately after the words “by the” the words “carrying out of”.
2. Insert next after subsection (2) the following as subsection (3) –

“(3) The revocation of any protected area shall be preceded by the carrying out of the requirements of paragraphs (a) and (c) of subsection (1).”

Clause 15 agreed to with the following amendments:

In Clause 15(3), delete all the words appearing after the words “shall approve”.

Clauses 16 to 18 agreed to.

Clause 19 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. Delete subsection (1) and substitute therefor the following –

“(1) Any declaration, alteration, re-classification or revocation of a declaration, of a protected area, and the preparation of a protected area management plan, shall follow –

- (a) an integrated assessment of the ecological, social and economic status of the area, potential impacts and contribution to the National Protected Areas System; and
- (b) such consultative process as may be appropriate in the circumstances, but must ensure consultation with nearby communities and affected parties of the area and follow a process of public participation in accordance with the requirements of subsection (2).”.

2. Delete from subsection (2) all the words appearing after the words “government *Gazette*” and substitute therefor the words “and also on air on two national radio stations”.

Clause 20 agreed to with the following amendments:

Insert next after subsection (3) the following as subsection (4) –

“(4) The owner or grantee of any private protected area so declared and registered shall be eligible for such taxation allowances or benefits or other fiscal incentives as may be prescribed in Regulations made under this Act.”

Clause 21 agreed to.

Clause 22 agreed to with the following amendments:

Delete the semi-colon and all the words appearing thereafter.

Clause 23 agreed to.

Clause 24 agreed to with the following amendments:

In Clause 24(d), delete the acronym “CBD” and substitute therefor the words “Convention on Biological Diversity”.

Clause 25 agreed to with the following amendments:

In Clause 25(1), delete the full stop at the end of paragraph (c) and substitute therefor a semi-colon and insert the following as paragraph (d) –

“(d) ensure the protection of riparian forests within biological corridors based on the length or size of the water bodies in the area, and for the retention of a minimum percentage of forest cover within lands located within biological corridors, exclusive of the riparian buffers.”

Clauses 26 and 27 agreed to.

Clause 28 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. Renumber the section as subsection (1), and delete form subsection (1) as re-numbered the words “...or Guidelines”.
2. Insert next after subsection (1) the following as subsections (2) and (3) –

“(2) The National Management Plan Framework shall be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, every five years.

(3) In this section the reference to the National Management Plan Framework is a reference to the standardized guidelines that serve as a tool to guide protected area managers and co-managers in the development of their management plans.”.

Clauses 29 to 39 agreed to.

Clause 40 agreed to with the following amendments:

In Clause 40(2), insert immediately after the words “or other transportation” the words “or equipment”.

Clause 41 to 53 agreed to.

Clause 54 agreed to with the following amendments:

In Clause 54(2), delete the words “Park Systems” and substitute therefor the words “Parks System”.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House with amendments.

2. Protected Areas Conservation Trust (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Long Title agreed to with the following amendments:

Insert immediately after the words “Audit Committee” the words “, Technical Committee on Protected Areas”.

Clause 1 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. Insert in the marginal note after the word “title” the words “and commencement”.
2. Renumber the section as subsection (1).
3. Insert next after subsection (1) as renumbered the following as subsection (2) –

“(2) This Act comes into force on a day to be appointed by the Minister by Order published in the *Gazette*.”

Clauses 2 to 6 agreed to.

Clause 7 agreed to with the following amendments:

In the new section 16, insert next after subsection (3) the following as subsection (4) –

“(4) In subsection (2) (i), the reference to the Trust as a national implementing entity for certain funding sources is a reference to its being duly accredited by those funding sources to receive funding to carry out projects and programmes approved by the respective funding sources.”

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to with the following amendments:

1. In paragraph (a), insert in the heading to Part IV after the words “Audit Committee” the words “, Technical Committee on Protected Areas”;
2. In paragraph (b), renumber the new section 18A as section 18B and insert the following as section 18A –

“Technical
Committee
on protected
areas.

18A. (1) There is established a Technical Committee on Protected Areas (hereinafter called the “Technical Committee”, which the Board shall appoint, whose functions shall be to advise the Board on-

- (a) the management of the National Protected Areas System and related legislation and regulation;
- (b) the five year strategic plan for the National Protected Areas System;
- (c) emerging protected areas system issues; and,
- (d) the implementation of the National Protected Areas Policy and Plan and the ongoing management of the National Protected Areas System.

(2) The Technical Committee shall comprise a minimum of three persons and a maximum of five persons who each have at least ten years of experience in protected areas management and have a minimum of a Master's degree in Natural Resource Management, Sustainable Development, Environmental Management, Marine Biology or Ecology or other related areas.

(3) The Board shall appoint one member of the Technical Committee to be Chairman of the Committee.

(4) No member of the Board shall be eligible for appointment to the Technical Committee.

(5) The members of the Technical Committee shall hold office for a period not exceeding three years and shall be eligible for reappointment.

(6) Where for any reason, the Chairman is unable to preside at any meeting of the Technical Committee; the members present shall elect one of their number to preside at that meeting.

(7) A *pro tem* Chairman elected under subsection (6) shall have all the powers of the Chairman at that meeting, including the power of exercising a casting vote in addition to his original vote.

(8) The quorum for any meeting of the Technical Committee shall be two thirds of the appointed members, and the decision of the majority present at any meeting shall be the decision of the Committee.

(9) The Technical Committee shall maintain proper records of its proceedings.

(10) The Executive Director or his representative shall be secretary to the Technical Committee.

(11) A member of the Technical Committee who has a direct interest in any matter submitted for evaluation by the Committee shall not vote on that matter and shall not be present when the Technical Committee votes on the matter.”

Clause 10 agreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to with the following amendments:

Insert next after paragraph (b) the following as paragraph (c) –

“(c) by deleting subsections (4) and (5).”.

Clauses 12 to 17 agreed to.

Clause 18 agreed to with the following amendments:

Delete and substitute therefor the following –

“Amendment of
section 35.

18. Section 35 of the principal Act is amended in subsection (2) by deleting the word, “Council” and substituting the words, “after consultation with the Technical Committee on Protected Areas.”.

Clauses 19 to 22 agreed to.

Clause 23 agreed to with the amendments:

Insert next after clause 22 the following as new clause 23 –

“Amendment of
Environmental
Protection Act.

23. The Environmental Protection Act is amended in section 68 by deleting paragraph (g).”.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House with amendments.

3. Electricity Acquisition (Settlement) Bill, 2015.

Clauses 1 to 7 agreed to.

First and Second Schedules agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

HOUSE RESUMED

V BILLS FOR THIRD READING

1. General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2015/2016) (No.2) 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. Electricity 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 considered the Electricity 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 and the Fortis Companies arising from the acquisition by the Government, in the public interest, of shares in Belize Electricity Limited held by the Fortis Companies, 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. National Protected Areas System 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 considered the National Protected Areas System Bill, 2015, and passed it with amendments.

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 maintenance of a coordinated management of a system of protected areas that is representative of internationally agreed categories, effectively managed, ecologically based, consistent with international law, and based on best available scientific information and the principles of sustainable development for the economic, social and environmental benefit of present and future generations of Belize; to repeal the National Parks System Act, Chapter 215 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to amend the Fisheries Act, Chapter 210 and the Forests Act, Chapter 213 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; 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.

4. Protected Areas Conservation Trust (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 considered the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (Amendment) Bill, 2015, and passed it with amendments.

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 Protected Areas Conservation Trust Act, Chapter 218 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000 – 2003, to provide for a new definition of “protected area” and a new composition of the Board of Directors; to expand the functions of the Trust; to provide for the appointment of a Finance and Audit Committee, Technical Committee on Protected Areas and other Committees by the Board of Directors; to further strengthen the provisions of the Act in order to enhance the operations of the Trust in achieving its mission of promoting the sustainable management of Belize’s protected areas; to make better provisions relating to the exemption from payment of the conservation fee; 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. F. FOSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been a long day and I will be very brief. But I certainly want to say a few words about the current status of the Sarstoon Island, particularly, Mr. Speaker, allow me to place on record in this Honourable House our complete solidarity with and pride in those 200 or so Belizeans who traveled on August 16, 2015, to Barranco and then from there to the southernmost boundary of Belize. They demonstrated in a very clear and unambiguous manner that we, as Belizeans, have every right to travel to any part of Belizean sovereign territory and that the independent spirit of Belizeans is alive and assertively proud even in the face of aggression. Those Belizeans, Mr. Speaker, who traveled to the Sarstoon on that day, demonstrated by their peaceful presence the ineffectiveness of this UDP Administration in asserting our national rights and upholding our sovereign dignity. The trip was a powerful statement, Mr. Speaker, and I think Belizeans across the country have recognized that this trip was a peaceful, powerful statement that Belize, all of Belize, from the Rio Hondo to the Sarstoon, from our cayes and atolls, to our western border, is ours to protect and defend. And this is not, Mr. Speaker, a task solely for our military and for our diplomats. So all Belizeans have an important duty and obligation in defending and protecting our land. (Applause)

A few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was early August or so, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister was invited to Belize by the Foreign Minister and was allowed to misspeak without correction by the Minister. It took a joint statement by his five former predecessors, one of whom was the Member for Fort George, all PUP Foreign Ministers, to correct Foreign Minister Morales on his military-based assertions. I still have not heard the Foreign Minister correct the record on this very important matter. As you know, with that trip on August 16, everybody came out. The ruling UDP Administration through their Ministers, through the BDF, through the National Security Council, they tried to scold, they tried to shame, they tried to intimidate, they tried to frighten and prevent Belizeans from making the trip to no avail. They tried to stop both captains from taking their vessels and threatened not to renew licenses. They spoke out against the presence of women, children, and the territorial volunteers and everyone else in attendance, before eventually just abandoning them to their fate.

And then after the people went and came back they had the face of brass to issue a self-serving press release to cover this naked and cynical act of abandonment, Mr. Speaker. So shame on them, Mr. Speaker, shame on this UDP Government! Shame on the Prime Minister! Shame on the Foreign Minister! Shame on the Minister of National Security, (Applause) who is, I believe, in Canada! He is flying to Canada today to watch football. Shame on him with crime out of control in the country! They jumped on every trip they could jump on. Shame on this Government!

Mr. Speaker, if this UDP Government can't protect its own citizens, can't

have the decency to say, “You are going down there we are going to make sure that you are safe and secure”, and nobody wants to provoke any incident with Guatemala. No! Absolutely nobody wants to do that, no right-thinking Belizean at all, and the territorial volunteers are some of the most right-thinking Belizeans amongst us. None of them want to provoke any incident with Guatemala. If the Government can’t stand up with them, can’t stand in solidarity with them, and be there for the very purpose of ensuring that they are safe and secure and ensuring, out of an abundance of caution, that, in fact, no such incident is provoked, that is the very reason the Government should have stood with them and provided some security to them. (Applause) Man, if the Government can’t do that, Mr. Speaker, if they refused to protect our territory, then they are useless, man, useless, and they must go. That is the first duty and obligation of any sovereign government, the protection of the nation state, (Applause) defending your territory.

Mr. Speaker, we absolutely want peace with Guatemala. Guatemala is our neighbor. They are good people. We have lived with them. We will always live side by side with them. Guatemala is not going anywhere. Belize is not going anywhere. So we must work together to achieve that peace that we have long been seeking. But it must be based on respect, man, not fear and intimidation and appeasement. It has to be based on respect, absolutely. And we could go into great detail about what is happening in the Chiquibul and other parts of our country, in the Sarstoon, fishing in our waters. There are so many things, Mr. Speaker, that demonstrate an absolute lack of respect, and there seems to be no response from our Government, no response at all.

So, Mr. Speaker, the incidents that have taken place over the past few weeks, the incident that took place on August 16, I think, shocked a lot of Belizeans. They have heard these territorial volunteers talked about their experiences in that area of the country. But I think for the first time many Belizeans had an opportunity to see it firsthand the type of aggression that that was taking place. To date we have not heard anything from Guatemala.

Our Government, we understand, has sent a protest note. I am yet to see the protest note. My representative on the Bipartisan Commission is yet to see this protest note. Man, we need to stand up for our people. We said it very clearly several weeks ago. We need to demand a full and unequivocal apology from the Guatemalan Government, (Applause) for their military actions on that day, August 16, a full explanation of why they acted in the manner in which they acted, a formal commitment from them that this will not continue to happen. Every time our people go there they have to check in as if they are checking in with the Guatemalans. Even when they are in Belizean territory, man, the Guatemalans are coming over and accosting them and asking questions. That can’t be the way in which we are seeking a peaceful resolution of this matter. So that practice of the Guatemalans, stopping, questioning our people, questioning Belizean vessels in Belizean territorial waters, has to stop, man. It has stop.

As so many people have said, when is it that we lose control of, and we are talking about our portion of the Sarstoon River, when is it that we seem to stop reasserting our control of that river? The Forward Operating Base we hear, talk about that now. It’s not clear what the position of the Government is. Will we or will we not build the base at Sarstoon Island? I think it’s clear to all Belizeans that we need to build that base right away. We need to get that Forward Operating Base operational right away. (Applause) We also recommended, and I repeat it

here today for the record, Mr. Speaker, we need to do something in Barranco. This is a matter the Honourable Member for Toledo East and the Honourable Member for Toledo West repeatedly raise with me. But in Barranco we need a more formal presence of the Government in Barranco not just one police officer. Is the police officer still there? We need Customs, we need Immigration, and we need a more formal presence of the Government. This is Belizean territory, (Applause) a more formal presence of the Government.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know there are many, many other points that can be made. But I certainly wanted today, it would have been remiss of me not to place on the record of this Honourable House our absolute support for and solidarity with those brave Belizeans who are so proud of their country, who believe in this country and want to do everything possible to support and stand up for the national sovereignty of this country. And among those people, Mr. Speaker, there are every political stripes, UDPs, PUPs, PNPs, whatever the other parties are, VIPs, every stripes.

So this is not a political issue. But it is an issue around which we, as Belizeans, can unite if the Government is showing us the way, if the Government is leading the way. And today in Belize the Government is not leading the way on this issue. They seem to be missing in action, and that is of absolute concern to us and to the Belizean people. We must always, always make it absolutely clear to everybody on every part of this world that this is Belize, this is our home, this is our land, and we will protect it to the very end, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Sarstoon incident, I made a statement, on behalf of the Government at the press conference on the Wednesday following, that what I said then was, is, and remains our position. We will continue via the men and women of the Belize Defence Force and the Belize Coast Guard to assert and to protect our sovereignty everywhere in this country, including, and perhaps in particular, the Sarstoon. I pointed out that the only way to get to Cadenas where we have a military outpost is via the Sarstoon River and that every Tuesday, or certainly every other week, the changing of the guard takes place on the part of the BDF by way of the transport of the replacement troops up to Sarstoon on our side of the midpoint, and those that are being rotated out from Cadenas are brought back in the same way.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not going to go over the reasons why the Government thought it impolitic for the territorial volunteers to take women and children insert them into an extremely, volatile, explosive situation. But while that was in our view very wrong I say, again, as I said then, the sentiment that motivated the leadership of the territorial volunteers is applauded by all of us. What really is upsetting to me, the Leader of the Opposition talks about shame on the UDP, shame on this Administration, the shame really is all his, Mr. Speaker. This is a desperate individual and utter and complete failure as Leader of the Opposition, somebody who is in charge of a party now that is in tatters, somebody who has lost every election that he's contested as Leader of the Opposition, somebody, Mr. Speaker, who I will wager, and I will give you any odds you care to request, will suffer a devastating defeat not just countrywide in the constituency of Freetown he is going to lose and he is going to lose badly. (Applause) His utter incompetence and ineptitude as Leader of the Opposition, and Leader of the PUP, is on display for the entire country to see. And all of us

watch and are amuse, some of us don't find it funny, as he becomes ever more desperate. The more pressure is exerted upon him in consequence of his repeated failures the more desperate he becomes.

What do they say? *Hog whe gwine da slaughter house crop anywhere.* He resorts to any and every stratagem no matter how nakedly, opportunistic, no matter how anti-Belizean, it is to try to recover these disastrously, failing, flagging political fortunes of his. He talked about transparency and Public Accounts Committee. He talked about Petrocaribe, and I see they have given up completely on that now. He talked about the 13th Senator. He talks, Mr. Speaker, he tries to manufacture, (Shut up, and let me finish! Shut up, you empty vessel!) (Applause) I didn't say a word when he was talking, Mr. Speaker. He has employed every conceivable stratagem to prop up his absolutely disastrous political fortunes, which are in a state of such disrepair because of his absolute incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

The latest in this string of desperate measures is to seek now to exploit the Guatemalans issue. They will lose with that too. But how low can you go? He is talking about what he didn't get or what his representative didn't get as a member of the Bipartisan Committee. As far as I can see, he has effectively put at an end any notion of bipartisanship. And he has done so, as I said, Mr. Speaker, in the most shamelessly, opportunistic fashion without any regard for principle, for appearances. He's been aided in that regard by the Member for Fort George, who set in place the special agreement, who persuaded Belizeans or attempted to persuade Belizeans that the way to solve the problem with Guatemala was to go to the ICJ, who is now completely done an about-turn because they figure that doing that about-face is a way to try to recover some kind of political legitimacy. (Man, don't talk any foolishness.) With absolutely not the slightest pang of conscience, without any qualms at all, they've done this complete volte-face.

Mr. Speaker, I am here to tell them that it won't work. It will not work! The Belizean people are well aware of the fact that they have now resorted to attempting to play politics with Guatemala. There may be one or two people that they will take in you know, Mr. Speaker. But by and large, the majority, the right-thinking people in this country see through what it is they are doing, putting the whole notion of national unity, the whole question of bipartisanship at risk, in fact, doing away with it, to try to serve narrow political ends. And the real tragedy is that they do this irreparable damage to the national position, and it is all for naught because they are going to lose. (Applause)

When you want to talk, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, about impotence, you talk about the impotence that is represented by your leadership of the People's United Party, talk about the eleven people who say they want nothing to do with you, who are insisting on a contested convention so that they can run you out of that. (Applause) Talk about the fact that you can't control Francis Smith, or Dan Silva, or Cordel Hyde. I don't know because the Member for Orange Walk Central is a cagy fellow. But that is what you must talk about. Whenever you want to call any scrutiny to the question of impotence, what was it he said? Don't watch me, watch yourself!

So, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down by repeating that this Government will continue to be responsible with respect to the Guatemalan issue. We will, as we have been doing, be very clear in our commitment to maintaining national

sovereignty and territorial integrity with respect to all of Belize, as I said, including the Sarstoon. But we will not be drawn into a false position. We will not allow them to suck us into this trap which, as I said, they are setting in the hope of trying to recover the political fortunes that they have so disastrously lost. (Applause) Nobody at home or abroad gives them a chance of winning the next general elections. (Applause) And while that is due to a number of reasons, do you want me to call it now? How many times you all said it before? The last three times you've said it, and you all lose every one, and every time you all lose worse than the last time. (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that while they will lose for any number of reasons, reason number one is, I repeat, the disastrously, incompetent leadership of the gentleman who sits opposite me. Do you all want to try and create scandal out of something as fundamental to our national integrity as Guatemala? Is it scandal you all want to do? Talk about the fact that under your watch two Members resigned not just from your party from the House causing you to lose the by-elections. Talk about the fact that that seat, Melvin was not a Member of the House, that seat that is staring that is almost gaping at us in terms of the emptiness was filled by a Member of your party who just this week had charges of carnal knowledge brought against him. (Applause) That is what you are to talk about. That is what the People's United Party has come to.

And I close, Mr. Speaker, by saying, again, we know what we are about, we will continue in that manner, and the vote of confidence that we get on the occasion of every single election that has been held this year will be replicated and magnified as soon as the general election comes maybe next year, maybe not, who knows. (Applause)

HON. D. B. GARCIA (Belize Rural Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to be brief. Mr. Speaker, I rise not to make any personal attack against anybody. I am not going to make any personal attack against anybody. But I am going to raise a matter, Mr. Speaker, that I considered to be of great importance, if you allow me. Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand here a letter dated April 9, 2015, written to an individual of Lords Bank, Belize District.

“Re: Lot No. 392 situated Lords Bank Village Area, Belize District.

I am to inform you that, in order to continue the processing of your lease application for Lot 392 situated at Lords Bank, Belize District, you are invited to come into the Belize City Lands Office and bring in a recommendation letter from the caretaker of the area for cancellation from James Henry.

For further information, kindly contact the Lands and Survey Department in Belize City and ask for the inspector in charge of the area.

Sincerely,

(ANNIE MARTINEZ)
Inspector.”

Mr. Speaker, it's right here in black and white, the naked and blatant shameless politicizing of all governance processes in this country, complete partisan politicizing, running roughshod over the Village Council Act which I

spoke about on one accession previously, which gives the Village Councils and the Lots Committees the purview and the authority to recommend lots in various areas.

Mr. Speaker, they don't even hide it anymore. It's not even subtle anymore. They are putting it in black and white. "You must get a letter of recommendation from the caretaker." We know what is caretaker, Mr. Speaker. Caretaker is the political officer, the political candidate. Now I don't believe that I have to recommend anybody. It should be Lots Committees, and it should be Village Councils, Mr. Speaker.

The partisan political control of the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker, I am putting it on record and I am calling for it to stop. This nasty partisan political tentacle into every process in our nation has to stop. It is bad governance. It is poor governance. It is an attack, a naked and blatant attack, on our democracy, Mr. Speaker. And I will speak out against it and place on the record this letter which I have changed the lot number and the name of the person involved because there is no right for any name to be called here. But I am bringing it to the attention of this Honourable House in order that I have read it into the records. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. F. MARIN JR (Corozal South East): Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. Again, I will be brief. It's an issue concerning Corozal South East, and I just have the names here that I need to read out for you, please. Part of my area in the Sarteneja Village there are a lot of fishermen like in other villages. But of late they have been complaining about the security on the seas. And they are talking about one of the areas where they normally go between Dangriga and Manatee. They called out names like Sand Fly Caye, Long Caye, Castle Range, and Bluefield Range. They are talking that when they are going out there to do their normal fishing as always there are people who are of irrefutable character who are coming in and forcing them out of the area with high-powered weapons, with machine guns, all sorts of thing, interfering with their lobster traps and all that stuff. I have asked them, I said, "Are you sure this is not the authorities, the Coast Guard or the Forestry?" They said, "No". It is just people in plain clothes who are coming in and threatening them in certain cases stealing their stock from them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to appeal to this Government to please look into this matter. They said that they have attempted to go to the Coast Guard and the Fisheries authorities but up to now they are not getting any results from these people, and I would like to see something be done so that these Belizean fishermen can go about their work peacefully. Thank you.

HON. M. ESPAT (Toledo East): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of this Honourable House a problem that we are faced with in education, and I'm sorry that the Minister is not here, after passing this Motion for another \$35 million for the upgrading of schools, and I did not hear anything about St. Peter Claver Primary School in Punta Gorda that is still using some old buildings that were moved from Dangriga, where they were building the school. In Dangriga, they had temporary structures. Those were moved from there to Punta Gorda. Those schools need to be fixed. We are faced, Mr. Speaker, with a problem, as the learned lady behind me just said a while ago, this political interference in every single thing we do.

On Monday when school reopened in Bella Vista Village, for example, that is another area that needs attention. The kids are in some Mennonite buildings still after eight years. There is no proper structure there. The bathrooms are falling to pieces. They even had one of the temporary rooms without a wall. The children used to call that room the air-conditioned classroom because it had no wall. Yet the Minister said, "Oh, we did a scientific study to find out where the need was existing". And these are areas that they have totally abandoned. For what reason, I don't know.

But to add to that on Monday 40 kids went to school in Bella Vista, and they were sent home because they could not pay the fees that that school was asking for. I got in touch with the Education Officer in Dangriga, and I hope that they will follow up on this situation. Mr. Speaker, the fees in that primary school is \$85.00 per child. Now we did not only go to the Head of the Catholic Mission Schools but we went to the priest, and it seems to me that, and you know I was sort of insulted when the priest told me, "Man, if my parents were not taking care of me, I would not have survived in Belize for 13 years. And they must stop making children."

Now you know that is really going to the extreme when somebody will tell you that these people should not be allowed to have more kids. They even went, as far in one of the Parents/Teachers Meeting, to tell them to buy condoms so that they stop making children.

I mean this is total nonsense; \$85.00 maybe don't sound too high for you people here; I think Belmopan is \$35.00; and yet you go into the rural areas where people make, why don't you listen and learn? Listen and learn! Mr. Speaker, they make \$18.00 per day. They can only work in the banana industry three days. That is what they earn, and yet the schools are expecting them to come up with \$85.00. They even went as far, Mr. Speaker, to ask the principal of that school, who is a UDP, and that is why she is getting away with what she is doing, if they can pay by installments. No, you can't pay by installment. You need to pay now. Otherwise you go home. Where are the laws that protect our children? Are the laws now below the political appointees? It seems to me that that is the trend in this country. Because you are a political appointee, you can do what you like.

Mr. Speaker, ten of those parents had three kids. Fifteen of those parents had six kids. Five of them had one and ten had two.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, I have to ask of you, you started out talking about the physical condition of the schools.

HON. M. ESAPT (Toledo East): But this is education I am talking about. Everybody else had a free reign to talk about whatever they want.

MR. SPEAKER: No, the Members before you talked about one issue.

HON. M. ESAPT (Toledo East): I'm sticking to education.

MR. SPEAKER: But then it is so wide. You have to pick one urgent issue.

HON. M. ESAPT (Toledo East): That's why I am speaking here about

issues that are affecting our kids in the Toledo District. The free textbook program, Mr. Speaker, is being sold for \$50.00 each. This is the free textbook program in an area that is poverty-stricken, and this needs to stop, man. This has to stop. It's no use we talk here about millions and millions. That do not relate to those people there, it absolutely not. You could save \$40 million on electricity because you drop the price. That does not mean anything to the person there that is not even connected to the grid. It means nothing to them, and that is what I want to bring to the attention of this Government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): Mr. Speaker, the Member just said, and let me start over, Sir. He spoke about this primary school in the Toledo District, and the Member just said that this school was opened last week. That's what he said, and that these children were turned away from school because of an \$85.00 fee that they couldn't pay. That's what he said just now. Am I correct, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Proceed, Member.

HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development): That's what he said, and I repeat to you. I asked you over and over if you know what you are saying. You said the school opened last week. Well, Mr. Member from Toledo East, primary schools just opened Tuesday of this week. (Applause) Primary schools opened yesterday. So you are telling an untruth. In other words, Creole would say that you are lying. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Stann Creek West Member, you had caught my eyes first, proceed.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, most of us that represent rural communities have rudimentary water systems that are being installed by the Government of Belize. And over the last year every day we listen to the radio we hear that the water board or the money has gone missing. The Minister responsible for Rural Development is not here today but I want somebody to convey the message to him that we need to do some amendment to the law to make sure that this discontinues because what happens is that it affects the community. Just last night in the news they were talking about, I don't know what village the lady came from, some Ms. Swift, about the system in her village. And I have a village in particular in the Stann Creek District in Maya Centre where they actually misplaced some \$13,000 and the Chairman of the board was made to sign some agreement that he is going to repay it. But this has to discontinue. So I'm hoping that the message can get to the Minister responsible to make some amendments that there be more accountability and responsibility and transparency. Thank you very much.

HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of public importance. Mr. Speaker, it is a matter that I have brought here on several occasions, particularly during the budget debate process. But I find it very important to raise this matter once more, Mr. Speaker, because it is obvious that it has fallen on deaf ears on the side of the Government who have the resources and are mandated to do what needs to be done. And this is in relation to the abandonment and neglect of the Santa Cruz/San Jose bypass in the Toledo District, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for historical context, this road was constructed during the PUP Administration 1989 to 1993. And it was done so that the journey could be cut. Instead of having to travel ten miles from the Crique Jute junction to San Jose, you would simply have to travel 2½ miles from Santa Cruz to San Jose. Mr. Speaker, the road was opened, as I said, was walked and everything. Culverts were fitted but, of course, over the years it has been abandoned. The leaders of San Jose, particularly the leaders of San Jose and also from Santa Cruz, have written countless letters to the Ministry of Works, to the person in charge of the Ministry of Works. And they wrote letters in 2011. In fact, they started in 2009, 2010, and 2011. We have all those copies of the letters. I got elected, Mr. Speaker, in 2012. Mr. Speaker, upon being elected, I took up that matter. I personally spoke to the Minister responsible for Works. I wrote him a letter in 2013, requesting that that road be addressed, that it be fixed, Mr. Speaker, to no avail. No one is listening.

In march of this year we had the leaders of San Jose, I had the Chairman of the community, I had the Alcalde of the community, and another leader, we were on national radio and television, bringing out the issues and pleading to the Minister of Works and to the Prime Minister, to the Government, to please ensure that this road be fixed, man, This is important. You have right now, during the rainy season when it floods there is a creek there by the name of Black Creek once that is flood the students cannot come out to school. If that road is fixed, that's an alternative route. But, apart from serving the students, farmers work in that area. There are farmers from Santa Cruz and San Jose, and I notice that when I called on the Prime Minister he signaled me that seemingly he's not interested. He is not interested in that road. That is what he is signaling to me. (Applause)

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear that the Government has a mandate, has a responsibility, man. It's not a favour we are asking. They have a responsibility to fix that road for the people. In fact, I went a step further; I sent an email to the Office of the Prime Minister; and I know they will probably tell me that they never received it. I never got any response. The point I am making here, Mr. Speaker, is that, please, man, this Government keeps saying that they have all the resources. The Prime Minister boasted in Cayo North East that he is awash in millions of dollars. But he can fix one simple 2.5 miles of road in San Jose/Santa Cruz bypass.

This is a shame and a disgrace, and I'm calling out on the Member from Queen's Square, the Prime Minister, to please address this. Mr. Prime Minister, you are not spiting me, Mr. Prime Minister. You are not only spiting the PUPs. You are spiting everybody, man. You are spiting your own people who used that road, Mr. Prime Minister. Please, man, please, get off that high horse and listen to the people. Listen to the people. This is all I'm asking. I have a duty and an obligation to represent the needs and the concerns of my people, Mr. Speaker, and I am once again going on record to ask the Prime Minister to please allocate the resources and ensure that this bypass is fixed immediately.

On a closing note, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask your permission to quickly say that we all recognize, Mr. Speaker, that our sister nation in the Caribbean, Dominica, has been severely affected by a storm. I know they are going through some difficult times, and I want to say that we recognize the difficulties and the challenges, and I believe that, as a country, we should do something to show our solidarity with our sister nation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Mr. Speaker, I will speak briefly on the declining state of the Belizean economy. I know we have a budget presentation coming up next March or whenever. But it is a matter of grave concern, Mr. Speaker, that for the first seven months of this year, according to the Government's Statistical Institute of Belize, January to July 2015, the country imported over \$1.2 billion worth of goods, while we were only able to export \$367 million worth of goods. That's a trade deficit that is heading for a \$1-billion deficit. In fact, I would want to surmise that Belize now has one of the highest trade deficits ever in its history. According to the SIB, agriculture primary is down almost 10%, 9.4%, the secondary sector down 10.8%. We all know the story of citrus. Although I see the Chairman of the citrus board is trying to say that the SIB was wrong in their estimates, etcetera, but everybody knows that citrus is down by millions. And, of course, the local oil production is dwindling to almost dry-well status now. So clearly with fisheries and manufacturing down, agriculture down, it's only tourism now that seems to be holding up, and even that has suffered a decline in this last quarter.

When you compare that, Mr. Speaker, with the fact that just today in this Honourable House the House has approved loans to this Government of \$70 million from the Caribbean Development Bank for education, \$54 million for the George Price Western Highway, and earlier in March you will recall that this House approved \$60 million for the police stations across this country, National Security. That is a total of \$210 million in that short space of time that we have borrowed again. When you add to that the millions that we owe now under the Petrocaribe Agreement as well as the fact that we came out of a budget in 2014 with a fiscal deficit of \$140 million, it clearly shows that we are heading for doom and gloom in this economy of Belize.

You know, yes, the UDP Government has a lot to or they are boasting about a lot for all the streets that they have paved, very high profile things, the BTL Park. You know talking about that BTL Park, Mr. Speaker, they promised to give us a beach. Do you remember it? Yes. Oh, it will come. Well, all we ended up with was a liquor bar instead of a beach. And look what they've done to Memorial Park which is in the Fort George Constituency. I can speak about it with anger because they have taken a Memorial Park dedicated to the war-dead and destroyed it by building a lot of little shacks, so-called commercial zone for tourist, with little wooden shacks, for which there are no tourists going there anyway. It's a shame and disgrace, Mr. Speaker. That is how we are wasting money in this country. Again, you look at the newspapers every week.

MR. SPEAKER: Narrow it down, Member. Please, I'm begging you.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): No, I'm talking about the economy. The economy is crumbling, Mr. Speaker, and we have a right to alert the people about it. (Applause) Look at how many pages, 15 pages I read in the last issue of foreclosures.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, this is the adjournment, one issue of urgent public importance.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): It is one issue. One issue I'm talking about, the declining state of the Belizean economy.

MR. SPEAKER: No, man, this is not the budget debate. You have to pick an issue. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): You see you don't want to allow me, Mr. Speaker. But you allowed them to talk anything that they want.

MR. SPEAKER: I would allow you to do one issue. It's not me. It's the Standing Orders.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): It's you. It is you, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry but it is you. I am talking about the state of the economy, man. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: But, Member, if you continue, I will have to ask you to stop. If you don't narrow it, I will have to ask you to stop.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Well, Mr. Speaker, I am going to narrow it down now. I am going to narrow it down now, Mr. Speaker, just for you. A former UDP Minister has been very scorching in his indictment of this Government. He said, "This economy has been run into shambles. We live because Venezuela gives us handouts every month. That's how we survive. Where is the talent?" He asked. "Where is the ability? Where are the goods we should be producing?" He asked. "We can't run the country with idiots in the Cabinet." Who said that, Mr. Speaker? You know the Member for Pickstock today in the House quoted what his opponent said about me. So I believe I have a right to point out, Member for Pickstock, what your brother is calling you, an idiot. (Applause) You are one of the idiots in the Cabinet. (Applause) That's what your own brother is saying.

So, Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the UDP the results are there for all to see. Soaring debt, you know they used to talk about Super Bond. Tell us about how much the debt is now. Skyrocketing cost of living, struggling workforce, you know the SIB, Mr. Speaker, talked about the unemployment going down from 1% to 10%. Well, we know that is hogwash, total hogwash. Well, we have to go by our street's smarts as well, Prime Minister, and you go out there in the streets right now, if you ever do these days because it looks like Sister B has to take care of the constituency now. Alright, that's good. But the point is that the SIB also pointed out that over 12% is underemployed, 16,000 people, I think, they said. When you add that 12% to the 10% unemployment, you get 22% of unemployed and underemployed. That is more an accurate figure of the state of people who can't get work in Belize today, 22%.

So, Mr. Speaker, high crime, unemployment, growing poverty, and an economy in decline is a sorry state of affairs. And really the Prime Minister asked us earlier today, I think, he asked the Member for Corozal South East if you really want an election. "Do you want me called the election?" he said. Well, I'm saying to the Prime Minister at the state that we are going with the economy right now you better call the elections soon you know because things are going to collapse very soon, (Applause) for the entire UDP Government. Call the elections, man, if you think you are bad! Call it! (Applause)

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 adjourn.

The House adjourned at 4:34 P.M. to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

SPEAKER.

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