

BELIZE

No. 19/1/13

SENATE

Wednesday, 24th January 2018

10:03 A.M.

Pursuant to the direction of Mr. President, in writing, dated 5th January 2018, the Senate met in the National Assembly Chamber in Belmopan on Wednesday, 24th January 2018, at 10:03 A.M.

_

Members Present:

Senator, the Honourable Lee Mark Chang – President
Senator, the Honourable Godwin Hulse – Leader of Government Business
and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment,
Sustainable Development and Immigration
Senator, the Honourable Herbert Panton – Temporary Senator
Senator, the Honourable Michael Peyrefitte – Attorney General
Senator, the Honourable Macario Coy Sr.
Senator, the Honourable Stephen Duncan
Senator, the Honourable Aldo Salazar
Senator, the Honourable Eamon Courtenay
Senator, the Honourable Valerie Woods
Senator, the Honourable Paul Thompson
Senator, the Honourable Markhelm Lizarraga
Senator, the Honourable Rev. Ashley Rocke
Senator, the Honourable Elena Smith
Senator, the Honourable Osmany Salas

Member Absent:

Senator, the Honourable Dr. Carla Barnett – Vice-President and Minister of
State in the Ministry of Finance and Natural Resources

MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*.

PRAYERS *by Senator Rev. A. Rocke*.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE OF A NEW SENATOR

MR. PRESIDENT: Mr. Clerk, please, kindly administer the Oath of Allegiance to our new Senator.

SENATOR H. PANTON: I, Herbert Panton, 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 a Senator and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. So help me, God.

MR. PRESIDENT: Congratulations, Senator Panton, and welcome to today's Sitting.

SENATOR H. PANTON: Much obliged, Mr. President

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, by letter dated 5th January 2018, Cabinet's recommendation has been signified to the General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2017.

BILL BROUGHT FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Good morning, Mr. President and colleagues. First of all, may I welcome my colleague, Senator Herbert Panton, to these Chambers. Mr. President, I rise to take charge of the General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2017.

Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order No. 49 (1), I move that the Bill be taken through all its stages forthwith.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill be taken through all its stages forthwith.

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

PAPERS

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to lay on the table Sessional Papers no. 34/1/13 - Social Security Board – Financial Statements for Years Ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, and Actuarial Review of the Social Security Scheme as at December 31, 2015; 35/1/13 - Social Security Board – Actuarial Review of the Social Security Scheme – 31 December 2016; Audited Financial Statements for Years ended December 2016 and 2015; and Reports also at www.socialsecurity.org.bz; 36/1/13 - Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended March 31, 2016; and 37/1/13 - Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2016/2017.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, those papers are ordered to lie on the table.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE SENATE

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I move that, at its rising today, the Senate adjourn to a date to be fixed by the President.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is, that at its rising today, the Senate adjourn to a date to be fixed by the President.

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

I BILL FOR SECOND READING

1. General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2017.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second 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 seventeen.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Mr. President, we are brought this morning to consider and pass one Bill for the supplementary dealing with Fiscal Year 2016/2017, and I believe we all know that we are in 2018. So it is a rather mysterious Bill, innocuous though it may look. It is accompanied, Mr. President, by a document called a Supplementary Appropriation (No.3) Schedule for Fiscal Year 2016/2017, explanatory notes dated December 8, 2017.

Before looking at the details of this Schedule, Mr. President, we are being asked to approve millions of dollars apparently spent in 2016/2017, with no explanation as to why those expenditures were not dealt with in the budget for 2017/2018. That is alarming, Mr. President. These expenditures, Mr. President, totaling nearly \$20 million could only have been lawfully expended by Special Warrants issued by the Minister of Finance under section 5 of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, an Act which I know Senator Hulse is very familiar with. What is important, Mr. President, is that any Special Warrant issued must be brought to the House for confirmation within three months, and here we are talking about approving expenditures for 2016/2017. Section 5 of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act also says at section 5(4), "Authorizations by Special Warrant which have not been confirmed by a Supplementary Appropriation Act shall not at any time exceed in the aggregate an amount equivalent to ten per centum of the amount voted for the respective head of the approved expenditure estimates for the year, or the sum of \$500,000.00 in the case of new goods or a new service." Put shortly, Mr. President, since there has been no appropriation for these expenditures, the only way it can lawfully be done is by a Special Warrant under section 5 of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. And any such Special Warrant must be confirmed within three months of its issuance, and in any event it cannot exceed 10% of the amount that has been approved under any of the heads. It is manifest, Mr. President, that what we are talking about here, when one looks at the Schedule that the amounts, one, more than three months after the Special Warrant would have been issued and significantly in excess of 10% of the amount that may have been approved.

Mr. President, again, I refer to my friend, Senator Hulse, a document he is very familiar with called the Fiscal Transparency and Responsibility Regulations

2010. That document, Mr. President, is binding on all of us, and it regulates Government's expenditure, and it seeks, because of experience, it seeks to ensure fiscal transparency and responsibility with respect to Government's expenditure. One of the important documents that is required by law to be presented to the National Assembly is the Fiscal Outlook and Mid-Year Review Report, which would provide updated information and establish fiscal targets to allow for the assessment of Government's fiscal performance against the fiscal strategy set out in its current fiscal strategy statement. In addition, it shall provide an early indication of the budget. The Fiscal Outlook and the Mid-Year Review, Mr. President, must be presented to the House by November 15 of each fiscal year. As far as I am aware, no such Mid-Year Review has been presented to the Senate for the last or for the current fiscal year. The reason I bring it up, Mr. President, is because that Fiscal Outlook and Mid-Year Review must include a budget overview, a review of Government's receipts and expenditures, assets and liabilities, and budget reconciliation. It is only when that document is presented to the Senate that we can make sense of the global sums that are set out in the Schedule. Mr. President, I don't propose to go through the details of this document, the Fiscal Transparency and Responsibility Regulations.

Nevertheless, we are entitled to an explanation of all the deviations from forecast contained in the budget and actual expenditures. We are entitled to a reconciliation of those expenditures. And, most importantly, Mr. President, it is the Financial Secretary who has a duty to ensure that the Mid-Year Review with the details are presented to us so that we can do our work.

Mr. President, I do not believe, except for those Members of the Senate who are in Cabinet and who may have additional information, certainly we on this side of the House do not know the details of any of these expenditures. What is alarming is that a significant amount of these expenditures relate to Hurricane Earl. Hurricane Earl hit landfall on the 4th August 2016. We are in January 2018, and millions upon millions of dollars have apparently been spent on Hurricane Earl, clean up and general aid. Mr. President, this Senate requires an explanation. I highlight one interesting point. When one looks at the Schedule under Capital II that is presented for 2016/217, it says under subheading 144, Emergency Management Relief Supplies and Repair Construction, 175 houses damaged by Hurricane Earl. That expenditure apparently took place sometime in April to September 2016. It is under the column April to September. It was covered by a Supplementary Act, 2016, 16 of 2016. An additional amount of \$49,000.00 was spent after in September 2016 to March 2017. But what is interesting: Repairs to Homes, \$3.5 million; and Hurricane Assistance, \$5.369 million. The table doesn't tell you when that money was spent. But what we know is that it was apparently spent sometime in 2016/2017. More money was spent on clean up than was spent on repairing homes. There are many other unique and interesting things about this Schedule, Mr. President.

Mr. President, we on this side say two things. This Senate should not approve this expenditure, unless and until we have a proper explanation as to how it is that millions upon millions of dollars apparently spent in 2016, were not dealt with in the 2017/2018 budget. Why is it that it is being brought now, at this very late stage? Why is it that it is being brought without any details as to what the expenditure was? What the money was expended on? Why is it that we do not have a Mid-Year Report that gives us the full details as required by the regulations that ensure transparency and fiscal responsibility? It is because what we are dealing with is the grossest fiscal irresponsibility by the government.

Mr. President, I propose that when this Bill goes into Committee that the

Financial Secretary be called to give us an explanation as to the details under each one of these heads. Now this money has already been spent. So there can be no excuse that it is urgent. It has already been spent. We are entitled to an explanation because we are exercising our constitutional obligation of oversight. We are discharging our duty to ensure that there is a check on government expenditure. And, when we have such wanton irresponsibility, an explanation is required. And I will call on Senators on this very important matter to ensure that before we leave here and before we approve this we can say to the people of Belize we have received an accounting for the expenditure of these millions of dollars. Mr. President, this is a serious matter. Violation of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act is a criminal offence. I say no more. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR P. THOMPSON: Mr. President, I don't know why we bother to come to this Senate to debate these Bills, or it goes to the House of Representatives. This Administration will do what it wants, whenever it wants and however it wants. Might as well they just collect the taxes, and that's it. We don't debate anything. Why do we have a budget? Why do we have a budget debate? This Administration brazenly makes the law. This is not a supplementary budget. This is a suppository budget. Mr. President, in 2016, I asked the lead Senator for Government Business to provide us with explanations for expenditures for BIL. It's been two years. We've not seen an audited report from BIL any at all. For five years now that has been in existence, and we have seen nothing. Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent on BIL, and we don't know anything. Let me give you an example. The Prime Minister says that the Civic Center costs \$34 million. The Uber architect says that it costs \$34 million. Inside sources say it costs...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: On a point of order, Mr. President, this is not relevant to the appropriation that we are doing here. Civic Center, what does that have to do with this?

SENATOR P. THOMPSON: Isn't that expenditures from BIL, Mr. President? How do we know? We don't see any audited report. How do we know?

MR. PRESIDENT: Please stick to the Appropriation Bill.

SENATOR P. THOMPSON: I am sticking to the Appropriation Bill. I am sticking to it. Mr. President, how do we know what it costs? And how can we believe what the Prime Minister says, or what Ms. Mastry says in this environment of corruption and skulduggery? How can we believe them, Mr. President? For two years now, I have sat here and listened to Senator Hulse talk about his years dealing with the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, and the countless number of hours, sleepless nights, and long days. But what good is it if we have laws and we don't abide by it? What good is it? It is just as if we have no laws, Mr. President. It's an opportunity right now for lead Senator, Mr. Hulse, to do something about this. He is no longer opposing. He sit in the seat of power. He can make a difference. He can delay this Bill, Mr. President. But it is not surprising. The Prime Minister, maximum leader of this country, he criticizes judgement from the highest court. The Foreign Minister criticizes judges from the CCJ. Ironically, he wants us to go to the ICJ to take the Guatemalan claim, to take it to international foreign judges. Mr. President, what can we expect from everybody in here? Chaos and disorder! You guys are sitting, you guys are presiding over a free show. That's all that's happening here. But the bell is tolling, Mr. President. The people of Belize have come to see what you all represent and who you really are. Thank you.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, first of all, I would like to

thank Senator Courtenay for his intervention because I agree with him wholeheartedly. It is a topic that has been near and dear to my heart as well as the Leader of Government Business. It is a topic we are well-familiar with. We've discussed time and time again in this honourable Chamber on Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. And why it is important? You see, Mr. President, we are not spending a party's money. We are not spending politicians' money. We are spending the people's money. It is a topic that the business community that I represent has long tried to champion. We began championing this subject and topic with the Honourable Godwin Hulse, and I do my best to continue.

Why is it important, Mr. President? It is because people work hard, struggle to pay taxes, suffer with the high prices, and the least we can expect, and not only expect, we were promised, is to have proper accountability and transparency with the spending of our money, our tax money. So the question has to be asked, why is it until today that we are having a special meeting just to deal with this one topic? It's costing us additional money. We have had many Sittings since the spending of this money. Now the government has to pay us all today to come to Belmopan just to deal with this one matter that was born in 2016. And we've had countless opportunities to deal with it before. So just from an efficiency standpoint one questions, why are we dealing with this only one subject today? What is the rush?

I am not going to recite all the sections that were violated under the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act of 2005 and under the S.I. 95 of 2010, because Senator Courtenay has touched on them. But we must be very clear, not only as legislators, but as citizens, that not only are we entitled to know how our government spends our money, but the law requires them to tell us and to tell us within specified guidelines. Like Senator Courtenay has said, I have never seen a Mid-Year Review since I've been in this Senate. Never! We continue to ask for breakdowns, for details, many of our colleagues. I would like to ask my colleagues if they know what these monies were spent on and where, especially the one for BIL. I mean, I spoke to the President of the Chamber on this matter asking him, how can BIL in 2016/2017, have a budget of \$500,000.00 and at the end of that period spend \$19.8 million, \$19,827,580.00. It's almost as if there is no planning. And he said to me, but all these projects are planned. We know what projects are going to be in the streamline, well in advance. Plans have to be drafted; they have to be approved; estimates have to be submitted; and they have to be approved. So BIL knows well in advance. How could they have budgeted \$500,000.00 and spent almost \$20 million? And, again, the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act tells us quite clearly that the Minister of Finance is limited. That he has rules that he needs to follow. And might I remind that he put penalties in place, the very Minister, for those that do not follow the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. And those rules limit, as you know, Leader of Government Business, limit the Minister as to how he can make these special disbursements. The rules are very, very clear. We've not debated them one time, or two times, or three times. We've debated those rules many times in this House.

And, again, I wonder what the source of these funds are because, although they are listed under Capital II, and I am asking this question for a specific reason, if these funds were spent using Petrocaribe money, in any way, then we have different requirements for reporting. How can we lose sight of that? How can we ignore laws that we passed? It is not like they are those old laws from the 1800's, or the early 1900's. They are laws that we fought to strengthen, that we championed for, since 2005. That we strengthened again in 2010, and that we addressed again big time in 2016. This debate about transparency and accountability is not a new one. How can we project, how can we ask people to have confidence in this book that's called the budget, where you budget for

\$500,000.00 for a particular area and spend \$20 million? This is called programme budgeting now. That's what we've been trying to do for a long time, where we are supposed to tell the people how we are going to spend their money, on what, and what we expect to achieve from those spending.

Mr. President, I am baffled, really and truly. And, like my colleague, Senator Courtenay, I too think it's way time that we get the Financial Secretary to come in here to at least tell us, and maybe we are interpreting the law wrongly. Maybe he knows something that we don't know. But the way we read the S.I. 95 of 2010, and the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act of 2005, there is a lot to be desired. There is a whole lot that's not being complied with. And before I hear any cheeking-tongue comments from my colleagues, I would ask them if they have read Statutory Instrument 95 of 2010, that the Honourable Prime Minister put into effect and signed into law on the 24th day of September 2010. The Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Dean Barrow, signed it into law, promising us a new way of doing business, promising us accountability and transparency that we fought for, the Unions, the NGOs, the Leader of Government Business, myself, and many others because we wanted a change in the way things were being done. We wanted a change in the way they were spending our money. And Prime Minister Barrow heard us and put this beautiful piece of legislation into place. It was one that give us hope. It was one that spoke about fiscal transparency and responsibility. It was one that spoke about the principles, Mr. President, of fiscal management, something that we have been crying for a long time, something that the Leader of Government Business has cried for many years. How do we set targets, objectives, and report? How we spend, and how we report? How we report on what it is that we are going to be achieving through this spending? How it is that the lives of Belizeans would be improved through this spending?

In addition to that, and I have spoken on this before, we came out with a strategy paper talking about growth and sustainable development, a growth and sustainable development strategy that clearly outlines that we have a commitment to transparency and accountability, that if our country is going to develop, we need to demand that persons charged with the public purse ensure that we get bank for buck and are totally transparent. We've committed to that. We've passed laws to that effect. We've spent thousands upon thousands of dollars writing these beautiful documents and penning these wonderful laws. And time and time again we ignore them. We break them. And, when we are culpable, we've seen in the past, we legislate to get ourselves out of the penalties. As the Honourable Senator Eamon Courtenay has said, there are criminal ramifications to breaking these laws, that this very government put in place.

Mr. President, I hope and pray that for this New Year 2018, that we truly begin to see the transformation that we need in this country and that we truly and earnestly make every effort, man, to begin to become a country that will give the people, not only value for money, not only transparency, not only accountability, but that peace of mind in knowing that we are here doing our jobs and ensuring that those that are charged with the responsibility of spending from the public purse that these persons do their job and that we will hold them accountable. We need to start doing our work in this Senate. We need to stop rubberstamping everything that comes here. We need to question it. We have an obligation under the law to do so. And we cannot continue to condone those charged with the spending of public monies when they are not doing so according to the law. Colleagues, I urge you, as did Senator Courtenay, for us to call on the Financial Secretary to come and give us an explanation as to why certain things that are required under the law are not being done. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR O. SALAS: I must start off by saying that I am utterly flabbergasted. And, when I consulted with members of our NGO community, they were equally flabbergasted. The first thing I did, as I was preparing some comments for today, was to request from our Ministry of Finance additional information. And I did receive additional information, essentially one or two more columns to this spreadsheet. The additional information was a column, indeed, when these different subheads were approved. And that made me even more alarmed and more concerned. And I will highlight two in particular: Subhead 1690, which is Hurricane Assistance Clean Up and General Aid, according to the information that I received, that was approved 30th August 2017, in this fiscal year; and Subhead 1681, Hurricane Assistance Clean Up Belize City, August 16, 2017, again, after the fiscal year that is being discussed here today. I thank Senator Courtenay for succinctly and accurately pointing out what the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act requires what is legally required. So I won't repeat that. But we are being asked to approve this ten months after the previous fiscal year has come to an end.

I remember clearly when we were debating the budget last March and I mentioned that I believe that we make a mockery out of the budgeting and the appropriation exercise, and this Bill fully cements my view. It further cements my view. I want to make some brief comments on what may appear very innocent, very, as I think Senator Courtenay said, innocuous, the Mother's Day Appreciation Program. When we add those two totals, it adds up to about \$200,000.00, the big scheme of things. It's not a lot of money, but it's not, you know, this is not the only time it's been done. My concern with that, and I must mention that both the ruling party Representatives and the Opposition party Representatives have accepted such monies. My concern with that is that that doesn't help to get our people out of poverty. A country poverty assessment that the CDB and our very own government did a few years ago conducted what they call a Living Standards Measurement Survey, and it essentially determined that 31% of our households are either indigent or poor, and 41% of our population are either indigent or poor. By giving checks we call it, that might give some checks for a very brief moment in time. Even by giving handouts, we are perpetuating poverty. We are perpetuating dependence.

And, if you allow me, Mr. President, I will very briefly refer to what this very same assessment said. What turns out to be the main coping strategy adopted by the nation's households to cope with financial difficulties, in other words, poverty, is to seek assistance from politicians. Thirty percent of the respondents of that survey indicated that that is their main coping strategy. So the concern with that is that that reveals that there is a high perception that politicians can resolve a household problem through these handouts, that politicians can resolve these problems, that conventional approaches through government programs or through implementing agencies are inadequate or are likely to fail, a dependency on politicians which erodes the ability to seek assistance and to provide assistance from other sources. That should be of tremendous concern to all of us. We need to be investing our meager resources. We know that we may not be able to expect government to directly create a whole lot of jobs, but they can create the enabling environment for that to happen. We need to devise strategies and programs that will create meaningful employment, that will start to get our people out of poverty. These percentages, I mentioned, should be of tremendous concern to all of us. Forty-one percent of our population are either poor or indigent.

So I will end by saying, you know, Mr. President, that I felt, I felt very slighted, very disappointed. I felt insulted when I went through the documents for today, and I realized that here we are being asked, I am being asked, to support a Bill for a fiscal year that ended ten months ago. That is absolutely wrong, Mr.

President. I will end with those comments.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Mr. President, I break the trend and not rush to praise Mr. Courtenay for his presentation. Mr. President, I am flabbergasted too, me too. Now Senator Courtenay asked, what took us so long? Senator Lizarraga asked, what's the rush? Listen, man, if you are going to come with a coordinated attack, make sure that the attack is coordinated. It's not simple. Which do you want? There is a reason, you know, Senator Salas and Senator Lizarraga, why it takes a period of time to bring this. I know the reason, but I won't tell you. Do your homework. Do your job. Listen, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result, you know, Mr. President. If you want information, you don't wait until the day of the Senate meeting to ask the Financial Secretary to come here for an hour or two. He's been available since you had notice of this meeting. You could have gone right there, you are a Member of the Upper House, and ask the Financial Secretary for a meeting, and he would have provided you with that meeting to give you all the information that you want to cover the debate. So I am flabbergasted too, that I have gotten the information, have come here today for a debate only for the debate to be that we cannot debate because some Members don't have the information. You are a Member of the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly of a sovereign country. When will you stop crying and crying, and whining and crying about everything? You want the information, go and get the information. Senator Salas just confessed that he wanted some information, and he went to Finance, and they gave him the information. And if you wanted more, Senator Salas, they would have given you more. Any information you want, it's right there. You remind me of the person who doesn't go out looking for a job and complaining about unemployment. Come on, man! The world is not going to come to you. The information is not going to come to you. You have to go to the information. It is not enough, as a Senator, for you to claim you don't have it. Do your job, and go and get it.

And, Senator Lizarraga, the people, since 2010, since the signing of that Act, have validated everything that this Government has done you know because you may not be happy, the other Members of the Opposition may not be happy, but the people are completely happy. Since 2010, this Government has been validated in election after election by the people. Another thing that I want to talk about here is that we are transparent enough to come to the National Assembly with the information. There is no secrecy here. There is no signed agreement here. You don't have to wonder about what we are doing. It's right here. See it here. And, if you want more, go to the Financial Secretary who will give you more. Don't come here and grandstand and, oh, we should summon the Financial Secretary like if he is a little boy to come and explain. You go to the man and get the information that you need. That's how you do it as a Senator.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: We are not here and entitled to do nothing. Ask your Leader.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Look...

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Ask your Leader.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Look, Senator Courtenay...

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Ask your Leader.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: I know we are students of logic, but what you do is you create a false premise argument and claim you have won. It's a false

premise. Only information that you want from the government, especially financial information, you talked about laws, let me give you another one. There is the Freedom of Information Act. I am saying the same thing over and over every Senate Meeting. It's the same thing as though you are speaking to children. It's the same thing. The information is there. Go and get it. Go and get it. Don't come here and complain about the fact that you don't have it because, indeed, you will get the information that you got, Senator Salas, unless maybe you start to see information that you don't like. Members of the Opposition received monies too for Christmas cheer. Maybe you don't like the information you see, but the information is right there. I can tell you that.

Mr. President, I was hoping to have a debate, you know, on the information that I have, but the Members of the Opposition didn't go for any information. So what can we debate? Thanks, Mr. President.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President...

MR. PRESIDENT: One second...

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I have to correct, as usual, misinterpretations by, and, I have a right.

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Peyrefitte, one second.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: I said nothing about what you said.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Your whole presentation was based on what I said, and it was false.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Okay, say it.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: My point was that we have laws in this country that we have to follow. It had nothing to do with...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Mr. President, he doesn't get to speak for another 20 minutes.

MR. PRESIDENT: Yes.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: He can only point to what did I specifically say that was...

MR. PRESIDENT: He will state his point of order, Senator Peyrefitte. Please state your point.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: No, no, no, he is trying to re-explain what the position is.

MR. PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, Senators...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: That's not what the Standing Orders say.

MR. PRESIDENT: Please tell me what is your point of order that you want to correct Senator Peyrefitte?

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, the information that I seek, and I do not have to get it under the Freedom of Information Act because the

Financial Secretary under law...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: He is debating, Mr. President.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: No, I am not debating.

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Peyrefitte.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: You have made a mistake...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Mr. President...

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Peyrefitte...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Point to what I say.

MR. PRESIDENT: Please sit down.

SENATOR E. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Sit down.

MR. PRESIDENT: Please sit down, Senator Lizarraga. He also said that, as a Senator, you can go there to get it, right? Let's stop the nitty-gritty, and let us please continue. Who is the next Senator that would like to speak? Senator Coy, please continue.

SENATOR M. COY SR.: Mr. President...

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President...

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Lizarraga, you already had your chance.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: No, no, no, Mr. President.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Coy, please continue.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I was interrupted.

MR. PRESIDENT: I already gave you the answer just now. Please continue, Senator Coy.

SENATOR M. COY SR.: Mr. President, a pleasant good morning to you and to all my colleagues in this Honourable Chamber. Mr. President, I ask for a minute to express my sincere condolences for the losses of our beloved ones in the south. I am a root of the south. Over this month, a couple days ago, we had a loss in the south, and, when you lose one in the south, it is a loss for all the families in the south and by extension for the country. Mr. President, I express sympathy to the Vernon's family in Punta Gorda Town, and, of course, to the two young Mayan girls of the Oh's family in San Antonio village.

But, Mr. President, I am here today to make a contribution to this General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation Bill. I am listening, and I am observing, and I am thinking with all my five senses. To begin with, Mr. President, when the Honourable Senator Courtenay stood up and said what we are getting out of this,

the benefits, I want to make it clear to him, and to his party, that we are not thieving millions and millions of dollars. We are doing our work and transforming this country, Mr. President. Wasn't you all, my friends, from the other side, when you were in Administration in 1998-2008, that borrowed millions upon millions of dollars and did absolutely nothing for this country? You all have been saying that, my friends. All you did, Members on the Opposition side, was to enrich yourself and your cronies. That's all you did. Now you all come here wanting to talk about transparency and accountability. Lord, my friend, give us a break. Every Belizean in their right sense can see and feel the transformation that is happening right across this country. Even the good Lord said, "Those who have understanding will understand, and those who have eyes to see let them see." My friend, it is not our Party Leader who went out in public and said, "Bring back the millions of dollars". It wasn't the leader from this side that said, "Bring back the millions", to the Belizean communities so that we can spend and see what the transformation can be when it belongs to the people of this country, my friend. And to my good friend, Senator Lizarraga, who wants to jump up, the truth is the truth. Senator, you should have stayed home if you didn't want to hear this. I know that it is already raining right now. You should have stayed home if you didn't want to come out. But when you talk about...

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Coy, just a minute. What's your point of order, Senator Lizarraga?

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Is the Honourable Senator allowed to read?

SENATOR M. COY SR.: I am not reading. All I have is a piece of paper here. I scribbled something here. I didn't write a book.

MR. PRESIDENT: You can refer to your notes.

SENATOR M. COY SR.: We did not come here to write a book and to read a book. I am putting down my points here, you see. It is only one piece of paper here. And statistics show, my friend, just to make it clear, that unemployment rate in Belize decreased to 8% in 2016. We have to do our homework before we come and jump up here and cry like a baby. We should not. And to my good friend, Senator Thompson, I thank God, my friend, that you did not write an encyclopaedia today, and you were so short and sweet and to the point. I salute you for that. And to my very good friend, Senator Salas, our NGOs, I believe, are doing many things, but much still needs to be done, my friend. As the Leader of the NGOs and the Senator of the NGOs, I believe that more could be done. More trainings and more workshops can be done. Many of our students are graduating from across the country, and we need to ensure that entrepreneurship should be part of our agenda. Thank you, Mr. President, and have a wonderful day.

MR. PRESIDENT: Thank you.

SENATOR S. DUNCAN: Thank you, Mr. President. The Bill before us, to my mind, seems to talk in terms of an emergency. It seems to be bordered or centred around a situation that hit this country in 2016, for the most part. What we seem to be dealing with is a practical situation, and, for that reason, I will stay away from the legalistic aspects of the debate and focus more on the practicality of what we are faced with. Even though we are in the legislature and we are in the Upper House where we make laws, I think we also need to be practical in how we go about our business. It is very clear to me that spending was done as part of the recovery for Hurricane Earl. And it will appear from the discussion so far that that

has been broadly accepted. However, the spending did not take place all in one month, nor did it take place all in two months, nor did it take place all in three months. It clearly took place over a period of time. And it would have been, I think, premature to bring the Bill prior to the finance people, primarily the Ministry of Finance, knowing what was the final tally. So that time had to elapse. Time had to elapse. I have a very good friend in the Ministry of Finance, none other than the Financial Secretary, who I honestly believe to be an honourable and trustworthy individual.

I also have to give due recognition to the fact that we employ public officers to carry out our work for us. I do have to give them credit that they know what they are about. It would be a little difficult, I believe, for the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to come with an Appropriation Bill that is incomplete, only to find himself having to come back to ask for more on the same topic in another fiscal period. So I can see where from a practical standpoint the Financial Secretary had delayed putting forward anything until he has a total tally and a total grasp of the situation, and it has now come. I do accept that we must abide by laws, and clearly, as a Member of the Upper House, there is no way I will try to say it is proper to not abide by laws. (Applause) But the law was made for man, not man for the law, and we must not become slavish to anything that we ourselves make and can amend.

I believe that while we must respect the law, we must be practical in how we execute our jobs. So I will not talk about the legal aspect. And, if what is said by the good lawyer, I will have to accept that. All I can say that from a practical standpoint we have to allow the work to get done. The work, the recovery work, started in 2016, after the hurricane and, because of whatever factors, could not be completed until 2017 Fiscal Year. Then that is when you have to bring the Appropriation Bill because the work relates to the 2016 period. You cannot then appropriate it in 2017. It has to go back to the 2016. So to me there seems to be a practical aspect that we should not lose sight of. And I am not here saying that we ought not to follow the law. Let me be very clear. I am not saying that, but I am suggesting that, as people carry out their functions and execute what they have to do, there is, indeed, a practical aspect to everything we do as human beings. And it is very clear to me how this can be caught up in some practical challenge for the Financial Secretary for him to have been able to get the figures to the Minister of Finance, and that is what I am watching. The Financial Secretary had to provide these figures to the Minister of Finance to enable the Minister of Finance to table a Bill. But we are dealing with emergency spending that was not appropriated, that was not budgeted for, and had to be done over a period of time. The recovery had to be done over a period of time. So we could not go for a budgeted figure not knowing what you would have to spend. Since it is a supplementary, we then need to go for the actual figures and get the actual thing.

So, as I look at this, Mr. President, I feel that after taking into consideration the quality of the people we have working in the Ministry of Finance, headed by Financial Secretary, Joseph Waight, and recognizing the recovery from a hurricane is not an overnight situation, I do feel that I can still support this Bill, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

SENATOR H. PANTON: Mr. President, I think I find myself in a unique position because I come from the outside looking in. I don't have the baggage of sitting here meeting after meeting listening to bleating after bleating. One Senator said, "Why the rush?" The next one said, "It's late". Man, if the PUP Senators want to come and challenge, the Senators ought to meet before in a caucus, before this meeting, man, so that everyone could sing from one hymn sheet. Senator Salas speaks to when he consulted with the NGO community that they were

flabbergasted. Mr. President, 99% of the NGO community has not filed their returns, according to law. So we don't know where their source of funds come from. So how can they preach to us about following the law? Follow the law in your own organization. We are talking, or they are wondering where BIL spends its money.

MR. PRESIDENT: What is your point of order, Senator Salas?

SENATOR O. SALAS: I believe when figures are thrown out like that they should be accurate figures. Ninety-nine percent is absolutely false. That is offensive.

MR. PRESIDENT: Is that your point of order? Okay. Senator Panton, please continue. Senator Salazar, go ahead.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: You laugh, right? This is a point of order, Mr. President. They laughed, but you see we would avoid a lot of problems. They say that they are here to follow, or they want to follow the law, when they themselves do not follow this. You will never read it here that to clarify or correct something that you have said is a point of order. It is not a point of order. If you get up, you must give a point of order. If you want to clarify something, the person on his feet should cede. The person on his feet should cede. I can lead a course on this book, if we need to, you know. We can have a day workshop, and we can go through this because probably they need it because when you rise on a point of order you have to be claiming that some order in this has been violated. But to clarify something that you have said is not a point of order.

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Courtenay. Everybody please have a seat. Senator Salazar, please have a seat. I recall today that whenever this side was speaking there was minimal disruption, and I hope that it continues over on this side also when we speak, right? Point taken in terms of the point of order, Senator Salazar. Please continue, Senator Panton.

SENATOR H. PANTON: Much obliged, Mr. President. We are here wondering where and how BIL spends its money. You don't have to limit yourself to the Belize City Centre you know. You can go to Dangriga and see that new stadium there. You can go to Punta Gorda and see that new stadium. You can go to San Ignacio. You can go to Santa Elena. You can go all across this country. There is no reason for you to bring pie in the sky, rhetoric and logic here. You can go all across this country and see where BIL's money has been spent. And fundamentally, Mr. President, fundamentally we are here today putting in front of the Belizean people transparently where the monies were spent for. It is being done according to law. There is a creature that is still lingering in this Chamber and lingering in this country. It is called the UHS debt, and the reason why that is still lingering, Mr. President, is because it was entered into contrary to law. What is being put before this Senate today is being put according to law, and I have no reservations in supporting this Supplementary Appropriation. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am really disappointed at the whole lot of us, all 13, because we should not have had to endure the public what you had to endure earlier today. We all are adults, and we should respect one another. Mr. President, I am surprised, and I won't use the term that's been flouted, flabbergasted, because I don't think after Supplementary, after Supplementary, after Supplementary, regardless of which government is in, I think we've passed that point now. I am also surprised that we tolerate some of the language being used or the references being used such as the inferences that

there is some coordinated move by all Senators who dare to have questions on Bills presented before the Senate or who reject the rationale that's being given for Bills being presented before the Senate. That's troubling but perhaps not surprising that we still are at that stage.

Mr. President, there are couple comments that were made that I hope was perhaps said in err, and perhaps was not intended the way it came out. So for clarity I do want, I would hope that all of us are operating on the principle that two wrongs do not make a right. I would hope for clarity that every single Senator in the Senate would not approach an Appropriation Bill citing that it is okay because ten years ago and before it was done. I would hope that every single Senator in this House, especially those appointed by the Government, a government who won, as I think Senator Peyrefitte said, multiple times, and therefore is a validation. Indeed, governments and political parties win, but just because they win it doesn't mean that the people are saying, "Do whatever you want; take whatever you want." It doesn't mean that. And, more, Senators that come to this Chamber shouldn't accept that we can respect the law, or we should respect the law, but we also need to be practical. Now we should never condone breaking the law. And I certainly can't be complicit to that.

You know, there are laws, indeed, as Senator Panton said, Mr. President, and the laws do not require, the regulations in particular, certainly does not require legal minds to understand it. It is very straightforward. And we do know why it is straightforward. It is straightforward because the previous government which was a PUP Administration did wrong by the people, and the people said no. And the people said, "We want better, and we deserve better, and we should improve our laws." Some of those who sit in the government side now, as Senators, were very much part of that reform. They were very much involved in the language in those regulations. And the law should be followed, indeed. So it is not any Senator that is to go fetching Mr. Joseph Waight. It is the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary, by law, that is to present. There is an actual day in the regulations, and it's November 15 of every fiscal year. And there is another date in that regulation. It's July 31 of every fiscal year. But I can understand the tension and the itch to grandstand. We need to stop it though. And why do we need to stop it? It is because Senator Salas revealed to all that the Financial Secretary, who I am sure has no qualms, as he has done many times before, to come in the Committee of the Whole to explain and give clarification. A man of integrity never shies away from it, and that he is. He will do it, and he will leave the chip fall where they may.

But, Mr. President, Senator Salas revealed to everybody in this Senate today the confirmation by the Financial Secretary that the monies were spent August 2017. That's a year after Hurricane Earl. So the clean up after Hurricane Earl occurred a year after Hurricane Earl? Now this is not a Bill that must be passed today, unless there is some other reason we are not aware of. And it is certainly one that could do with some clarification. Okay, it takes a while for expenditures to be completed. It takes a while for the final estimates to be in, but he said it was spent August 2017. We've had Senate Meetings since.

So another interesting thing about the financial regulations that are attached to Finance and Audit (Reform) Act is that it also calls for the Financial Secretary to explain why the delay. You see, people were so fed up, so frustrated on both sides, but none more, apparently, so frustrated than the Prime Minister himself because he then attached penalties and disciplinary measures. It's all in there, all 37 pages of it. Yet when we ask to comply with the law we are being told it is not practical; why bother the man; cite the Freedom of Information Act. I am citing the Act that's relevant and its attendant regulations.

Now what's interesting is that on August 31, not 2017, but 2016, roughly 27 days after Hurricane Earl hit the Senate met. It met because assessments were done by that time. So an Appropriation Bill was presented. It was 27 days after, which is the way it should be done, because people who had suffered from a devastating hurricane should not wait for a year, August 2017, for them to be cleaned up. So the Appropriation Bill came. The Appropriation Bill came on August 31, and this is what it said, specific to hurricane, because in this one that we are now being asked to approve for monies already spent, which we are now being told August 2017, a year after the hurricane, that amount that we are being asked to rubberstamp today is over \$9 million of the total amount that is being presented. Certainly it would be nice to clarify what it was spent on because on August 31, 2016, a year before in its correct fiscal year, we were asked to approve for clean-up, \$750,000.00. I believe the one today is \$175,000.00. So we approved \$750,000.00, 27 days after the hurricane, in this Senate. We approved it for clean-up. And you have the Financial Secretary saying one year later that this Government spent an additional \$175,000.00 for clean-up of that same hurricane. What areas did we missed? What areas were not cleaned up? That's all we want to know. The money has already been spent. Could we at least know what areas we forgot to clean up one year after the hurricane?

Then there's the emergency management, the relief supplies. You see, we came back on August 31, 2016, because it was needed for April, the Supplementary, the column that said Supplementary needed for, it says April-September 2016. So we came back, August 31, 2016, \$563,000.00. That was August 31, 2016, but this one today is citing \$3.4 million for the same period. But, again, the Financial Secretary is stating it was spent a year after. There is no need for grandstanding on this, Mr. President. It's just, can you clarify? There is no need to dodge it. It has been spent. Then, on August 31, 2016, this Senate was called again, and it was called to construct 175 houses. That's what it said. That's what we approved in August of 2016, and the amount was \$2.8 million. But today, today it is saying \$3.4 million and that they ran over by \$49,000.00. You see, I am only comparing what we approved. And, when you approve those expenditures and then come back almost 2 years later to come and say, "We spent more than what we approved, but we spent it a year ago", it's not adding up.

And then, on August 31, 2016, Mr. President, it had an additional amount because the 2016/2017 Budget had approved the restock for the warehouses because of hurricane preparedness. So we're thinking, we approved \$500,000.00, but, by August 2016, the government realized it needed \$350,000.00 more, and we approved that. Here today there is an additional \$300,000.00. It says for Belize City clean-up, which was approved though in August 2016. So there are questions to be asked and clarifications to be sought. There is no denying the monies were spent. No one is questioning that. But the people of Belize need to understand, if a hurricane occurred on August 4, 2016, why is the Financial Secretary saying that the government spent money to clean-up after that hurricane August 2017? And why are the figures being presented today so drastically different than the Supplementary, the over expenditures that we had already approved at a previous Senate?

We are operating in an environment where we just throw around the terms transparency and accountability. They no longer have value the way we treat them in this Senate. They used to have value. It used to mean something. People marched for it. But it doesn't have any more if we can't even call upon the Financial Secretary to provide clarifications. The Bill will go through because the ayes will always have it, but it does not mean that clarifications should not be sought. For many of us who work in the private sector now, or previously

understand, you submit a budget, your board approves, you have overruns, and you do a Mid-Term Review, which by the way is also captured in the regulations. You must explain why, but you also must explain how will you recover the expenditure, the over expenditure. Again, that too is provided for in the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act and the regulations. You have to commend the effort and the work that went into those regulations because it contemplated and anticipated. But, what a slap in the face it is when, it clearly is not worth the paper it's written on.

And then there's BIL. It's like déjà vu because, on August 31, 2016, there was another Appropriation Bill, Mr. President. August 31, 2016, had an Appropriation Bill for 2015/2016. We should never be happy with this trend. But at that Senate Meeting this Appropriation Bill referred to are from BIL, Belize Infrastructure Limited, who, at that time, had \$4.5 million approved, over spent by \$13.5 million and came asking for \$26 million. It got it, but, on August 31, 2016, we needed to approve an additional \$8.7 million. And now, today, Belize Infrastructure Limited is asking, having had \$500,000.00 approved, \$5 million spent, needing another \$7 million and gotten \$12.5 million, have now spent \$19 million and realized, "Oops! , we over spent even on that, an additional \$7.3 million." It is all taxpayers' money not backed up by one audit, except there is the promise it's going to come. So, yes, the Financial Secretary is required by law to explain why. Why millions, upon million, upon millions, are needed for a subhead that was already approved its millions upon millions? More there were the overruns. Why? And, since we have no Contractor General in place, is it that there was no oversight on those contracts? Why did the expenditures went so far pass the mark that was approved?

Another slap in the face is when now transparency and accountability has been whittled down to just what you can observe visually. That's what we have basically brought returns, accountability and transparency down to. Don't you see it there? Don't you see the one down south? Don't you see the one up north? I mean, if that's what accountability and transparency is, then that's the fuss, right? Why UNCAC? Why did people get so upset then? Just keep pointing it out. See it there. See it there. It's a slap in the face, Mr. President. It's insulting. It's disrespectful. They are not insulting to us. We will always be called everything and anything because that's what people who want to do petty politics do. But for the people of Belize who said, enough is enough, the people of Belize who said, they want real transparency and accountability, the people of Belize who welcomed the criminal offences attached to not complying with the law, the people of Belize who want better from this Senate, they are the ones being disrespected.

It's treated as minor, the Mother's Day cheer, but it is not so minor. Mother's Day, I believe, is May, the month of May. So if you had a Mother's Day expenditure for a singular day, it should be backed up by, I believe, a voucher system of some sort, or a Treasury receipt form of some sort, when it goes out to whoever it is given out to. Why does it take February, March, April, three months shy of a year, to approve the expenditure for one day? And we will sit here with all good conscience and accept it? We will sit here in all good conscience and accept the pathetic excuses that we are getting? We will sit here in all good conscience and try and convince ourselves that what we are doing today is above par? That we are upholding the laws of Belize, Mr. President? We are not. This is a joke.

The seriousness of it is revealed and unveiled when you compare what we did on August 31, 2016, in this Senate and what the government is asking us to do in 2018. It is a money Bill, a Bill that is asking for a formality and an approval for

millions upon millions already spent for things that the Senate already approved, which at the time it approved was already for millions upon millions that were already overspent. But, because it's something that has occurred and has already occurred and passed, this could get some clarification from the Financial Secretary. We should, as responsible and respectable people, people who hold the title of Honourable before our names now, at the very least we should ask for that. The show will continue. There will be another Senate Meeting. There will be more supplementaries. But it shouldn't be treated so willy-nilly, and the nitty-gritty details do absolutely matter. There's no way I could attach myself to supporting this, neither, Mr. President, can I understand why we would not ask the Financial Secretary for clarification. Thank you.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: Mr. President, you see we have to respond to what the Senator just before me said. You see, what I feel the Senator wants is a punching bag because she complains about grandstanding and name calling and these sorts of things, but she will hit you below the belt, and then when you respond she will say, "Accept it and behave like a gentleman." But in the last few minutes of her speech she called us petty, pathetic, below par, jokers...

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Salazar. What's your point of order, Senator Woods?

SENATOR V. WOODS: I did not call anyone petty.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: It is not a point of order, I am not ceding the floor.

SENATOR V. WOODS: What? There is a Standing Order that says I can elucidate.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Salazar, please let me hear what she has to say.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: No, I must cede in order for her to elucidate. Please call the Standing Order. I am sure maybe it says that. While she looks for that, I ...

SENATOR V. WOODS: Mr. President?

MR. PRESIDENT: Yes, what's your Standing Order?

SENATOR V. WOODS: Standing Order No.35, under Interruptions, "A Senator shall not interrupt another Senator except - to elucidate some matter raised by that Senator in the course of his speech," and he is right in saying, "provided that the Senator speaking is willing to give way and resumes his seat and that the Senator wishing to interrupt is called by the Chair."

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: Thank you for pointing that out.

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Salazar. Senator Salazar and Senator Woods, please have a seat both of you. I understand, and I have been hearing both sides, from all sides, not only both sides, but from all sides in the Senate today, and in the past, I guess two years, certain things have passed on both sides, or all sides have passed. I recall just now when you were saying certain things, some things were passed, and he is just correcting it. Sometimes when you speak and he corrects, and it doesn't only go for both of you. It goes for the entire Chamber. So let us please have a nice, constructive debate, and let us

please move on. Senator Salazar, please continue.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: My response is to the Senator and to what she has said on this matter before us, and she used the words, as I was saying, pathetic, petty, below par, jokers, showmen...

SENATOR V. WOODS: I did not say those things. Mr. President, I will not be misquoted.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: The Standing Orders are clear. She read the whole Standing Order, and we said she is not to interrupt. I am not ceding the floor.

MR. PRESIDENT: Please continue, Senator Salazar.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: Yes, those words were used in this Chamber. It's a show. It's petty, pathetic, below par and joking. But, we must take that kind of language and not respond. Is it because the debate level is not as high? But that does not detract from the type of language that is used. If you are going to use that sort of language and throw it across the floor, you will get a response.

SENATOR V. WOODS: You will too.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: You will get a response. What Senator Thompson gave was a rostrum speech. None of the issues before the Chamber was addressed in his speech. What he gave was a political speech. He said that basically we are all here, or he doesn't understand why we are here and that we shouldn't even vote. What does that have to do with what is before us? That is showmanship. That is grandstanding. But then they complain about grandstanding.

MR. PRESIDENT: One second there, Senator Salazar, one second, I have said earlier, right, we are not all perfect, and I have heard it from this side, and I have also heard it from that side. So can we please have him wrap up and finish up his points that you guys have made, or this side has made? So, please, continue and let us move on.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: I've made my point as far as that goes? The problem here is not that, and, you see, if you are going to complain that this is late or that it is out of time, that is one thing. But the problem that my colleagues are having is that you are imputing improper motives. That is different. That is what you are doing, imputing improper motives, and that is why you get this type of response because there is a perfectly good explanation. There is a perfectly good explanation as to why, or what learned Senator spoke about, Senator Duncan. It is ridiculous to believe that you can estimate the damages from a hurricane within 21 days. Hurricane Earl, the estimated damages were \$183.6 million. It affected 4,684 households, or a total of 17,000 Belizeans. Now you want to tell me that within 3 weeks we were supposed to be able to say \$12 million is going to correct this?

As I said, there is a reason for this. It takes years to recover from a hurricane, years, not 3 weeks. So this is the reason we have given. If you are here to complain about it being late, that's one thing, but it's the mouth, and it's what you are saying behind it. Vague some of it is, but not all. The three of you, so...

MR. PRESIDENT: What's your point of order, Senator Courtenay?

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: My point of order is Senator Salazar saying that I suggested improper motives to anyone. I would not, and I will not sit here and have him, and it is a point of order.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Mr. President...

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, Senator Peyrefitte. Yes, let me finish hear what he is saying.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: He is saying, and I asked him, and he said, I, all three of us over here, implied and imputed improper motives to people. I did not, and I am asking him to withdraw that statement. None of us over here, withdraw it.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Salazar, please continue with the topic. One second, Senator Courtenay and Senator Salazar, both of you please have a seat. As I have said earlier today, and on quite a number of occasions, let us not be like the other House. But it has already started, and when I see this side is defending, or at least readdressing some of the issues, I, and actually when you guys were speaking earlier none of these guys hassled you guys. Come on, man. Let us move on and stick...

SENATOR V. WOODS: Because we didn't impute improper motives.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Salazar, let us stick to the point of the debate, and let us move on, okay. Thank you.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: The one that feel is the one that squeal. I withdraw it then, if that is going to satisfy them. That is okay.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Thank you. You are an honourable man.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: It's not worth it because we know what has been said. They're quick to point at Senator Hulse. He was on this side, and those are things which, I feel, are imputing an improper motive over here. That is my view. In any event, we will move on because nobody interrupted over there, certainly not me.

As I was saying, you cannot expect to estimate within 21 days what it is going to cost to recover from a hurricane. That is impossible. Hurricane recovery takes years, as I have already pointed out, and 17,000 people were affected by Hurricane Earl. Work continues today to recover from Hurricane Earl. So, if the suggestion is, if that is going to satisfy the other side, if the suggestion is that there is some deep, dark conspiracy, the money is being funnelled somewhere, or channelled somewhere, or being used for an improper purpose, if that is the suggestion, why we must come so late? Let us disabuse some of that. This is a long process of recovery, and that is why it takes a long time to have it dealt with.

So I think, if they really want the information, they can have it. If they really want to see where the money was spent, they can have it. You see, this is why I keep making the point, nobody is trying to hide the money that was spent. Nobody is in any backroom making any deals, signing any agreement. So, if that is the concern, that can be easily alleviated as to how the figures have been spent. Thank you, Mr. President.

MR. PRESIDNET: One second, Senator Rocke. Senator Hulse, please go ahead.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 10 (8), I move that the proceedings on the order paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day's sitting at any hour though opposed.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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.

Please proceed, Senator Roche.

SENATOR REV. A. ROCKE: Mr. President, thanks for the opportunity to speak on this matter. I also want to welcome our new Senator today, Senator Panton, to our Chambers. This particular Bill that we are talking about is a money Bill. And, as far as the Standing Orders and the Constitution, Standing Orders 63 and Constitution, section 78, says that we have 30 days in which to debate this issue. It seems to me that on one side the issue of the law comes to bear, and on this side there is also a concern that maybe the issue was, to some extent, practical rather than legal, which would then leave a kind of leeway for conversation that, if this particular group felt that the Prime Minister didn't do well in giving account for the monies used, and everybody must understand that the monies used was used to fortify those people who were affected by the hurricane. But the concern is that there are some who believe that it did not, or it was not accounted for in a timely manner. Since that, we are saying that we have 30 days in which to debate this Bill and put it to rest, I was wondering that both side be satisfied and that we do have the man come in and explain, the Financial Secretary come in and explain, and, of course, understanding that we have 30 days to do this within that period.

And then we also can deal with the practicality of the experience where the people were taken care of during the hurricane season. For me, I believe in being balance about things. And I think what I have heard here today has really rocked me a little because, at the beginning of the year, we have really come off, I know people are watching us, but we've really come off in a negative way. And I don't know that that is the way we want to proceed here in constantly being negative when dealing with issues that are of importance to the general public. And so I make that submission. Whether it is accepted or not, I guess it's dependent on the crowd here today. But that is my feeling in regards to this issue.

SENATOR E. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President. I just rise to make my contributions to this Bill. Let me just say as well as I am hearing that people are flabbergasted and all of these things. I am too, Mr. President. I feel that, and I shouldn't be surprised, but, for persons who are educated, people who are educated, we ought to be behaving differently. And I can safely say, for myself on this side, that I've tried my best to respect the views of every Senator here. Even if I am not in agreement with their position, I respect their views. And so I would hope that, as Senator Roche said just a while ago, that the start of this New Year is not an indication of what it will be for the rest of the year. That we can behave as we are, educated persons.

But let me just say that, for me, I remember quite clearly in 2016, Mr. President, when we agreed to defer our salary adjustment because the government

needed to have sufficient funds to be able to assist the victims who were affected during hurricane. And so we are well aware that, in these sorts of circumstances, everything possible must be done to assist persons who are in need. And so we don't have any issue with assisting persons as it relates to them being affected by disasters.

Our concern that we have right now as it relates to this Bill before us, Mr. President, is the fact of the, in our view, the various violations of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. It makes us ask certain questions, one of which refers to the seriousness of this Government to abide by laws because we fought so hard for this Act to come into place, and we had several partners who fought along with us. And there were reasons why we did what we did because we felt that there had to be things put in place to ensure exactly what we speak about, transparency and accountability. And, if we cannot abide by the laws that we ourselves agreed to, then I don't know how we can expect others to do so. And so we are concerned...

MR. PRESIDENT: One second, what is your point of order?

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: I will do the proper thing. Standing Order 36 (5), "No Senator shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber." I don't know, Mr. President, what is more improper than trying to impute that Members in the House and in the Senate are not abiding by the laws. That is a very, very irresponsible statement to make in the Senate. And I ask the Member to withdraw that.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Smith, Senator Peyrefitte is right. And, when I start using this Standing Order 36 (5) on every one, I will start using it. Please continue, Senator Smith.

SENATOR E. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President. As I said earlier, the organization that I represent feels that that Act has been violated. So my colleague may have a different opinion. That is fine, but this is our opinion, and I am entitled to that, Mr. President.

So, for us, then we want to ensure, Mr. President, that all of these laws that we have, all of these regulations that we have, that assist us in telling us or showing us how we should operate, that these be followed, and that we abide by them. I just want us to, and while we understand that this body, when it comes to money Bills, really and truly we don't have much, except to, as was said earlier, we just would rubberstamp these things. I want us to bear in mind all our responsibilities that we have, our duties and responsibilities, as it relates to ensuring that what we do here is done properly.

And so, Mr. President, again, I just want to remind us that we should be leading by example. And so I trust that the next time we have to come here with such a Bill that proper details are given to us, as we always say, and that we keep in mind these Acts that we have to abide by when we do these things. Thank you very much.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I trust that I will not cause you any headache. I have just a few things I want to clear though. First of all, let me start with the principle, and the principal piece of legislation which is the Constitution, section 115 says that, in any year, if it is found that there are extra sums spent, or sums that were not appropriated for, then a Bill showing the Heads of Expenditure shall be laid before the House of Representatives. That's what the

principal law says. Therefrom came the Finance and Audit Act. Let me give you a little quick history. In 2005, yes, and I was principal in that, one of the reasons is, and my good colleague, Senator Courtenay will remember, we didn't get Supplementaries from 2000. So we had 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004, and we tried to shorten that time because that was ridiculous. So we put some timelines, and I will concede that the legal argument today of the timelines, having been violated, is accurate, the timelines. But the details are another matter. And those timelines have been tremendously shortened. This is ten months. It is a lot shorter than a couple years, but we should stick to the timelines as best as we can.

However, I wanted to highlight the point of the details because I think, Senator Courtenay, you erred a little bit when you said we were being asked to approve about \$20 million. Actually it's \$13.9 million. I think what happened is that you add the \$6 million plus the bottom one there. But the overall is about \$13.9 million. I think also my colleague, Senator Lizarraga, said that where BIL is concerned we moved from \$500,000.00 to \$19 million, and that is accurate. But, of course, we had approval up to \$12.5 million. So the difference is \$7 million. But I hasten to point out that where BIL is concerned BIL has a board, a board on which social partners sit, a board on which government cannot dictate anything. So the projects come, and the expenditures come, etcetera, and, when that was set up, social partners were put on it to ensure this very thing, that it will not be just under a Ministry or under a department. It's a statutory body. And, yes, projects continue and continue, and continue and continue.

But I wanted to focus a little more on the details because the heads are actually in the Act. And I recall many years ago when I added up the heads and they were wrong. I tried it in two occasions really. The heads would say: Head 18, Ministry of Finance and Natural Resources - \$185,000.00; Head 27, Ministry of Human Development, etcetera, 28, 29, and 18; and those are the heads in the Bill. But we have presented, we have provided a Schedule which shows details, man. The heads are broken into subheads. Let's run them down quickly. Subhead 18, which was the overall \$185,000.00, tells you that that is made up of subheads 1690 and 1845, Hurricane Assistance, Clean Up and General Aid, Mother's Day Appropriation Program, etcetera. When you go to Head 27, it does the same. Head 28 tells you that 175 houses were damaged by Hurricane Earl, and there was clean up, etcetera. It details it for you in that breakdown of the head. Now, if Members here want additional details, and I will say that throughout my term sitting where my colleague sits for the Chamber, we used to have the Senate meeting on Monday and House Meeting on Friday. And I will be at my risk over the weekend to try to get the additional details. It was a tremendous task. But I was provided with most of them. Now we all have ten days, ten working days between the House and now to try to get those. And, if anybody stands up and says, "We tried to get them from the Financial Secretary, or anybody, and they didn't give us", that's a different matter.

However, I want to just wind up by simply saying this, when you look at the details, and we talk about transparency and accountability, I have already accepted the failure in terms of the timeline. But transparency, man, it's presented. Accountability, it's added up. And the officer, it's not the Senate, it's not the Senate or the House that checks on the expenditure in detail of the Executive, it is the Auditor General who is an officer of the National Assembly, who then goes and audits and says, "You see that figure that you presented it was wrong." Then we have a problem. So we have to understand the roles and the responsibilities we have.

And then I will say, finally, if anybody thinks that, and BIL has stood out,

when we look at the value received, because the argument in this Chamber, Mr. President, the argument in the House, the argument in the political debate that we have always had across this nation is value received. We talked about the Faber's Road, the \$8 million. Some people say, "Oh, that's a waste of money." So we had a press conference, and we brought out some engineers who detailed the value received. That is the way it is done. It takes a long time. It could take hours to do that. But it is the value received that you are looking at. And then the argument could be, "Well, you don't need to do that. You can do other more important streets." That's a political decision, and back and forth. But the bottom line is, we have not presented any numbers here where people cannot check and go and get the details. On that note, I move the Bill.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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 seventeen, 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.

II COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE SENATE ON BILL

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, in accordance with Standing Order 68A, the Senate will now resolve itself into the Committee of the whole Senate to consider the Bill that was read a second time.

Honourable Members, I will now take the Chair as the Chairman of the Committee of the whole Senate.

(In the Committee of the whole Senate)

MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair.

1. General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2018.

The Senate agreed to have the Financial Secretary, Mr. Joseph Waight, appear before the Committee to answer to the concerns of some Senators.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the Senate without amendment.

III REPORTING AND THIRD READING OF BILL

1. **General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2017.**

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole Senate has considered the General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (2016/2017) (No.3) Bill, 2017, and passed it without amendment.

I now move that the Bill be read a third time.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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 seventeen, be read a third time.

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

Bills read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I move that the Senate do now adjourn.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Senate do now adjourn.

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

The Senate now stands adjourned.

The Senate adjourned at 1:51 P.M. to a date to be fixed by the President.

PRESIDENT
