

No. 1

TUESDAY

First Session

17th April, 2001

Seventh Parliament

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

ADVANCE COPY

OFFICIAL REPORT

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THE

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST MEETING, FIRST SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES CONSTITUTED AS SET OUT IN SCHEDULE 2 TO THE SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES ORDER, 1979.

FIRST SITTING

17TH April, 2001

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

The Honourable House of Assembly met at 4.00 p.m. in the Assembly Chamber, Court House, Kingstown.

PRAYERS

MR. SPEAKER IN THE CHAIR

Honourable Hendrick Alexander

Present

MEMBERS OF CABINET

Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning,
Economic Development, Labour, Information,
Grenadines and Legal Affairs.

Dr. The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves

Member for North Central Windward

Attorney General

Honourable Judith Jones-Morgan

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign
Affairs, Commerce and Trade.

Honourable Louis Straker

Member for Central Leeward

Minister of National Security, the Public Service
and Airport Development
Honourable Vincent Beache

Member for South Windward

Minister of Education, Youth and Sports
Honourable Michael Browne

Member for West St. George

Minister of Social Development, Co-operatives,
The Family, Gender and Ecclesiastical Affairs
Honourable Girlyn Miguel

Member for Marriaqua

Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries
Honourable Selmon Walters

Member for South Central
Windward

Minister of Health and the Environment
Honourable Dr. Douglas Slater

Member for South Leeward

Minister of Telecommunications, Science
Technology and Industry
Honourable Dr. Jerrol Thompson

Member for North Leeward

Minister of Tourism and Culture
Honourable Rene Baptist

Member for West Kingstown

Minister of State in the Ministry
of Education, Youth and Sports
Honourable Clayton Burgin

Member for East St. George

Minister of State in the Ministry
of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries
Honourable Montgomery Daniel

Member for North Windward

Minister of State in the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade
Honourable Conrad Sayers

Member for Central Kingstown

Minister of Transport, Works and Housing
Honourable Julian Francis

Government Senator

Honourable Edwin Snagg

Government Senator, Parliamentary
Prime Minister's Office, Special
Responsibility for Labour and
Grenadines Affairs

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE

Honourable Arnhim Eustace

Member for East Kingstown/
Leader of the Opposition

Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday

Member for Northern Grenadines

Honourable Terrance Ollivierre

Member for Southern Grenadines

Honourable Juliet George

Government Senator

Honourable Andrea Young

Government Senator/Deputy Speaker

Honourable Joseph Burns Bonadie

Opposition Senator

Honourable Gerard Shallow

Opposition Senator

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 17TH APRIL, 2001

CEREMONIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT HELD ON

PRAYERS

The Clerk of the House and Members of Parliament read the Prayers of the House.

PROCLAMATION

The Clerk of the House read the Proclamation summoning the House to the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Section 30 of the Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I beg to nominate Mr. Hendrick Alexander, to the Office of Speaker of the House of Assembly of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Mr. Hendrick Alexander was elected Speaker of the House.

OATH

The Oath of Allegiance and the Oath of Office were administered to the Honourable Speaker.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, there would be of course, later on the Order Paper, an opportunity for congratulations.

I would like to move under Standing Order 12 (5) of the Standing Orders of the House of Assembly that the proceedings be exempted at this day's sitting from the provisions of the Standing Orders, "Hours of Sitting".

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, pursuant to Section 31 of the Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I beg to move that Senator Andrea Young be elected to the Office of Deputy Speaker.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

OATH

The Oath of Allegiance and Oath of Office were administered to the Deputy Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Are there any other nominations?

There are none.

OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE

The Oaths of Allegiance and Affirmations were administered to Members accordingly.

Suspension of Sitting: 4:38 p.m.

Resumption of Sitting: 4:50 p.m.

Entry of the Governor-General and party

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it gives me great pleasure to address this Honourable House on the occasion of the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.

I wish, Mr. Speaker, to extend warmest congratulations to you on your election to the Office of Speaker of the House of Assembly. I am confident that you will perform your duties with the integrity, dignity and impartiality which are central to the proper function of this high Office.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all those members who were elected on March 28, 2001, to serve for a five-year term. Congratulations are also in order for the Deputy Speaker and the new Senators.

Mr. Speaker, I heartily extend congratulations to Dr. The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves on his elevation to the esteemed noble office of Prime Minister.

I am sure Mr. Speaker that Dr. Gonsalves' fine qualities, his profound grasp of the human condition in our Caribbean civilization and his deep commitment to the people of this country will serve well in the performance of his duties.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate too, the Honourable Arnhim Eustace on being re-elected and on his appoint to the Officer of Leader of the Opposition. The House will no doubt benefit from his knowledge and experience.

Most of all, Mr. Speaker, I praise the people of our beloved country for their fulsome embrace of competitive democracy in the recent general elections. These elections, it must be pointed out, have been adjudged to be free and fair by all observers locally, regionally and internationally. Our parliamentary democracy is alive and strong, and the transfer of political authority has been smooth and dignified. All this is a wonderful tribute to our Caribbean civilization.

The Prime Minister's passionate call Mr. Speaker, for the healing of the nation after his party's overwhelming victory at the polls has been well received, at home and abroad. In this regard, the apt slogan "Together Now" resonates with the politics of inclusion. My government will ensure in practical ways that no one will be left behind because of his or her political affiliation.

Mr. Speaker, my government recognises that this new century has dawned with unsolved problems of the 20th Century and brand new challenges and opportunities arising from the process of globalisation. Fresh approaches are thus required on all fronts. These demand an admixture of prudence and enterprise; dazzling creativity and solid experience; boldness and caution; science and the spirit of free people; intellectual thought and the folk wisdom of our people; and a genuine affirmation that this nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man. In pursuing fresh approaches to governance, my government will

fully involve all our people. My government welcomes our people's optimism and hopefulness; it eschews defeatism and cynicism. And so, we shall overcome.

Mr. Speaker, in charting a new and better way for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, my Government will practice good governance. It will build a modern,

democratic, productive, just and caring society to be enjoyed by all regardless of political affiliation.

Mr. Speaker, it is within that philosophy, framework and vision that my government will focus on the following top ten (10) policies.

- (1) Making job creation, especially quality jobs and sustainable economic development our main priorities;
- (2) Being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime;
- (3) Moving resolutely against corruption in government;
- (4) Building a top-class quality educational system for living and production in the new century;
- (5) Deepening political democracy, strengthening individual rights and freedom and upholding the law and the Constitution;
- (6) Modernising and reforming government to better and more effectively deliver all the services provided by the government.
- (7) Launching a war on poverty, illiteracy, inadequate housing, disease, poor health, and an unhealthy environment.
- (8) Developing as never before in our country, sports, Culture and the arts;
- (9) Strengthening and deepening the process of Caribbean integration, regionally and in the diaspora, in the quest of the further ennoblement and advancement of our Caribbean civilization; and
- (10) Providing honest, committed, creative, responsive and responsible leadership.

Mr. Speaker, the legislative and practical programmes of my government will center on these top ten (10) policies. Lodged within these priorities is the implementation of “The First One Hundred Days Programme” of my government, upon which work has already commenced.

Mr. Speaker, my government is deeply committed to constitutional reform and will shortly be initiating action in this regard.

Prompt steps, too, will be taken Mr. Speaker, to begin a process, which will pave the way for the introduction of genuine, democratic and effective local government.

At the same time, a raft of measures will be adopted to combat official corruption and to provide open, honest government.

My government has pledged Mr. Speaker, that its number one job will be creation of quality jobs for the people of this country. There are immediate and more medium-term proposals which will be implemented to create jobs through the Youth Empowerment Service, the information technology, offshore financial services, tourism, fishing, a reformed agriculture sector, both banana and non-banana, private construction and the Public sector Investment Programme.

Mr. Speaker, in the pursuit of its programmes of job creation and sustainable development, my government will do all that is within its power to establish the type of investment climate which will attract the necessary capital resources from both local and external sources consistent with our national interest.

My government will embark upon education reform so as to build a top-class quality education system for living and production in this new century.

Mr. Speaker, the health of our people and a clean environment are policy concerns, which are propelling my government into concrete action. In this regard, the improved operation of the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the care of the aged and children, and the collection and disposal of solid waste will be among my government's central focuses.

Our nation's social infrastructure is in dire need of overhaul, Mr. Speaker. My government plans to shift the policy emphasis from traditional social welfarism to one of social development. The empowerment of the family through self-sustaining measures as distinct from temporary handouts is at the core of my government's approach to the alleviation of poverty. This matter is not only one of social upliftment; it connects, too, as a national security issue of the first order.

My government pledges, Mr. Speaker, to put programmes in place to advance the cause of sports, culture and the arts and to ensure that sports persons and cultural workers are fully appreciated in practical terms.

The physical infrastructure of our country, Mr. Speaker, especially the road network, has been allowed to deteriorate markedly. Accordingly, my government

will act swiftly to improve the situation in this regard, so too, will it act on the matter of Airport Development.

My government makes it absolutely clear Mr. Speaker that its primary obligation is to ensure that national security and law and order are maintained and promoted. Thus drug traffickers and assorted criminal offenders will receive no respite from my government. My government, I repeat, will be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

My government gives the assurance Mr. Speaker that it will continue to build relations with all peace-loving, law-abiding nations internationally including all those states with which our country currently has diplomatic relations. St. Vincent and the Grenadines will shoulder its international obligations to the best of its ability. And my government in its foreign policy will always promote the interest of our people, at home and abroad.

The commitment of my government Mr. Speaker, to the deepening of the process of regional integration is already well known. A central element of my government's overall vision is the further ennoblement and advancement of our Caribbean civilization in all its dimensions. On this matter, my government is unwavering.

My government fully recognises Mr. Speaker, that expectations are very high in our country. This inevitably happens whenever there is a change of government, particularly one, which has been ushered in with such an overwhelming majority. However, the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines are politically sophisticated and wise. They know that "Rome was not built in a day". Still, my government will be moving swiftly, as indeed it already has been, to address adequately the concerns of the people in communion with them.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that this Parliament, composed as it is with such an array of talents and experience, will certainly rise to the challenge which lies before us for the successful development of our beloved nation state.

Mr. Speaker, I pray God's guidance on all future deliberations of this Honourable House and take great pleasure in declaring open this the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.

***SUSPENSION OF SITTING
RESUMPTION OF SITTING***

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, by agreement with the Leader of the Opposition Mr. Speaker, and I believe with the concurrence of all Honourable Members, in the interest of time, the congratulatory remarks will be restricted to three persons; the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Senior Statesman of the House, the Honourable Minister of National Security.

I want Mr. Speaker, first of all to congratulate you on your elevation to this very high Office. I think that persons who are familiar with your wisdom, your judgment, your eloquence, your own experience in the Jaycees Movement and your former stint as a Senator in this august body, that all of these combined will no doubt make for a very successful tenure of Office. And I can assure you that on this side of the House we will co-operate fully with your rulings even though on occasions you may feel somewhat peeved because I know that there is a tendency for Honourable Speakers to be a little more deferential to the Opposition, particularly when its numbers are not as large as perhaps they would like those numbers to be.

I want to offer my sincerest congratulations to the Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Senator, Andrea Young. She is perhaps the youngest Deputy Speaker in the Commonwealth, and it is testimony to our Government's intention to promote young people where they are very deserving; and she is a very deserving young person. She is a Barrister-at-Law who has had, I think perhaps three or four years experience already at the Bar, and she has distinguished herself among her peers as a leader to watch for the future.

I want to offer my honest and sincerest congratulations to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his occupation of the office of the Leader of the Opposition. I rather have him there than here. And I am quite sure Mr. Speaker, that he shares my sentiments.

I want to congratulate all the Honourable Members who have been elected or re-elected, and in particular, I would like to welcome the new comers, the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines. It is our custom in the Caribbean to say congratulations to our neighbours before we say to those within our own House. It is only manners. That is what we have been taught. And I also would like to congratulate the Honourable Member for the Southern Grenadines. And I do congratulate them for their election and for the five-year term. I don't know whether I will congratulate them beyond that period. But we welcome them.

I would also like to welcome particularly the new comers, those who have been elected for the first time on this side of the House; the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Minister of Telecommunications, Science, Technology and Industry, the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture, the Honourable Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, the numbers are going on so much that I am getting a little... but I understand, the people have spoken. The Honourable Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security and of course, I would like very much to welcome and congratulate the Honourable Attorney General, Mrs. Judith Jones-Morgan who by general acclamation has been a very fantastic appointment and we are very pleased about it throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Caribbean. We are happy to have you.

The other Members who have been elected, and who have been returned, the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Minister of National Security, the Honourable Minister of Education, the Honourable Minister of Social Development. And I must apologise for the Honourable Minister of Health who has been here for some time as a Senator, that I almost forgot this is his first time as an elected Member, and perhaps it is fitting that I leave him for last since he had triumphed over the “Iron Man” in South Leeward.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the Opposition Senators and congratulate them; the new comer, the Honourable Senator Shallow, and of course the Honourable Joseph Burns Bonadie who is a veteran and who has been a Senator in this House on the Opposition and then on the Government side, and then on the Opposition side.

I want to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the new Senators, four of them; Senator Edwin Snagg, as he likes to say from the marginalized community of the Southern Grenadines. And the Southern Grenadines now has two representatives in the House Senator Julian Francis, Minister of Transport, Works and Housing. He is a tireless worker. The Honourable Juliet George, and of course, I congratulated before Senator Andrea Young.

Mr. Speaker, you would notice on this side of the House that there are five women. I was hoping that perhaps there would have been an extra woman, but unfortunately, the circumstances has not so conspired it from the Opposition. But I believe that we have a higher proportion of women on the Government side than in any Parliament in the English Speaking Caribbean. Indeed, there will be very few Parliaments who can boast five women on one side out of seventeen Members of Parliament. And I think we are doing pretty well, and we should try and improve upon it as we move into this 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, I would like very much to congratulate a number of persons who have been able to put this House of Assembly together in its state today. You notice we are looking much better today. Frankly for a very long time we have been looking like a dump. The clock actually works now. We have a new clock. We have, as you see, brand new curtains and don't blame Honourable Members on this side for the slight red in the curtains. We had nothing to do with the choice of the colour. We have new red carpet. The colour has always been red. As you notice, outside the building has been spruced up. We did not have enough time to actually do the painting inside, but we scrubbed the walls and sanded the floors, and we have tried to provide, courtesy of the Methodist Church, better chairs than we normally have, and I want to thank the Methodist Church very much and congratulate them. And you would notice that hanging on the rails outside we have a lot of flowers outside, and you would notice that inside too we have flowers as we fix the status of our Caribbean people. We are a lively and uplifting people, and I don't see why we should look down and dull. Let us have our Parliament with some joy and some life and do the business very seriously.

The Ministry of Works must be congratulated, and the workers for working way in the night to have all this work done, including the surface in the yard re-asphalted. And we have done all that in just about seven days. I want really in relation to the flowers, I want to thank very much. Miss Denise Punnett who has donated these flowers free of charge and set about doing them herself. And I think the generosity of public-spirited citizens must be acknowledged in this Honourable House. I do not have the names of all the persons who have donated paints, but I have been informed that some six thousand dollars worth of paints have been donated by citizens to do this job. And we still I believe have some paints in reserve to do additional work, and I want to thank all of them, and I am hopeful that the Clerk and other persons would convey to those individuals our thanks.

And then you will notice on the walls there are beautiful portraits; first, Sir Rupert John, our first native Governor and then our four Heads of State since Independence, and we honour them because Parliament consist not just of the elected Members, but the elected Members and Her Majesty, and the Governors General represent Her Majesty and they do form part of our Government, and we have Sir Sydney Gun-Monro, Sir Lambert Eustace, Sir David Jack, and of course our incumbent Governor-General, very revered, His Excellency Sir Charles Antrobus. And the person who has been responsible for these excellent paintings has been the former Speaker, and extremely talented man, Nolwyn McDowall. I want to say this, that these paintings we have purchased on credit. Of course, Mr. McDowall perhaps has very little alternative since the market for Governors' General of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is very limited, but we assure him that he will get full payment and I am hoping that in due course, if per chance a special warrant comes to the House, it

would receive the support from the Opposition so that Mr. Mc Dowall can get some monies.

I want to thank very much and congratulate the Police, who have been excellent throughout the transition, and they are an extremely professional Force, and we are very proud of them and we think the citizens are very proud of them for the protection they have been offering us, and those of us who believe in order and discipline.

I want to thank and congratulate very much the members of the House of Assembly staff, the hardworking Clerk of the House, Mrs. Theresa Adams who has frankly been doing an excellent job and really I must acknowledge that on the floor of the House.

The members of the Press are here and we thank them very much and congratulate them.

I want to announce that every single sitting of the House of Assembly would be broadcast live. We are living in an age of information, and it is simply archaic to seek to lock out the Press from the peoples' business. They represent the people in a fundamental way, and we want them to know that we value them in this House and we see them as partners in development and for the furtherance of democracy.

I want to thank and congratulate all those members who have come here from overseas and particularly the members of the Diplomatic Corps who are here and they would see how we conduct our business; with dignity and with grace. The ceremony, which we have witnessed today after the culmination of a very hotly, contested election demonstrates that we are truly a mature, sophisticated and civilized people, deserving of all assistance and help from those with whom we stretch our hands of friendship. The name of the game internationally is good governance, and I think you would be able to report back to your respective capitals that good governance has gotten off to a magnificent start in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I want to thank all the citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and congratulate you for being part of this marvelous exercise. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I am obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Just before I take the Leader of the Opposition, I think it is necessary to appeal to the Gallery; I wouldn't call you "Strangers" I call you members of the Gallery. I understand your enthusiasm; yes you can applaud but save the comments please. Thank you very much.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise Mr. Speaker, to join the Prime Minister in offering congratulations to you on your election as Speaker of this House of Assembly. I also wish at the same time to congratulate Senator Young on her appointment as Deputy Speaker. Your job Mr. Speaker is sometimes a thankless one, but a very important one indeed, being as you are now, at the pinnacle of this Parliament. It is to you that we look for guidance as we deliberate on matters of State, and I believe that you will bring to the Office the impartiality that is required for the conduct of the business of the House of Assembly. I know that you have already been a Member of this Parliament, and therefore you are familiar with a lot of the rules, regulations and procedures of this House. And therefore I do not believe that you will have a very difficult time in that regard.

You will find Mr. Speaker, and also the Deputy Speaker, when she is in charge of the House, she will find that we on this side of the House will operate in a manner, which befits the dignity of this House. It is important that we do so, because we now reside in a world in which everyone, inside and outside of this country knows what is happening everywhere. And it really is very important that this Parliament be seen to be a model Parliament. In that context therefore Mr. Speaker, your role is indeed very, very important.

I look forward Mr. Speaker to working with you as we conduct the business of the State.

If I can now turn to the Honourable Prime Minister, to offer my congratulations to him and to the members of his team. We have just come out of a hard fought General Election and as I indicated on the night of the Elections when I spoke with the Honourable Prime Minister, I most heartily congratulate him on his success.

I noticed however, since the elections that I have not had a change, only in status, but I noted from the comments of the Honourable Prime Minister, that somehow I have become a member of the New Caribbean Civilization, as if I was not a member all along. But, let me put it this way. I understand these things. All of us in this House Mr. Speaker, are interested in some form of Caribbean Civilization. And all of us Mr. Speaker, will like to be ennobled in terms of that new civilization, but I regret that I was not considered that way in the previous new dispensation. But maybe I understand that too, Mr. Speaker. But seriously Mr. Speaker, we have the task at hand. I think the stability of our country has been tarnished over the last few years and we need in this Parliament to make sure that we operate in a manner, which does not bestow the perception of lack of stability. I am very serious about that Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister in his remarks alluded to the presence of the International Community here as represented by Members of the Diplomatic Corps. And I agree with what he said. I think it is vitally important that all of us send this signal to the international community.

I also want Mr. Speaker, to congratulate all the Members of this House particularly those who have been elected for the first time. There are a number on both sides of the House, and I really sincerely want to wish them congratulations. You have come into a Chamber, the law making body of this land; and I believe they are all conscious of the importance and significance of their election to this high Office. Let us hope Mr. Speaker, as we go forward, that this Parliament continues to improve.

In the last Parliament Mr. Speaker, we had a situation in which there was no participation by the then Opposition on Select Committees of this House. I want to say Mr. Speaker that this Opposition will participate in the Select Committees and other Committees of this House of Assembly. I believe Mr. Speaker that this is part of the signal that we have to send. However, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the Honourable Prime Minister that this will be a vigorous Opposition. I want to assure him of that. Never mind the size, we are talking here talking about content. And Mr. Speaker, our job on this side of the House is to keep the Government on its toes. That is what we are elected to do. In addition to that Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Honourable Prime Minister of his statements when he was Leader of the Opposition “that you are over there to govern and govern you must.” We are here to make sure you stay on your toes. And that is exactly what we will do Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to offer sincere congratulations to the staff of the House of Assembly. They have a difficult job at the best of times, but they have learned to manage it, and I look forward Mr. Speaker, to their continued co-operation with all the Members of this Honourable House. At the end of the process Mr. Speaker, we are speaking about the development of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are talking about development in all its aspects. And I just want to reiterate Mr. Speaker, that as we do our business in this House that we be guided, not only by Almighty God, but by the general concern which I believe we all have for the development of this country of ours. So congratulations to all Mr. Speaker. I am much obliged.

HONOURABLE VINCENT BEACHE: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I don't think that much has been left for me to say.

I would like to offer congratulations as well to the Members on both sides of this House. I would also like to welcome the wife of the first Prime Minister of St.

Vincent and the Grenadines; that she can be here to celebrate this day with us. I know she is a very pleasant, charming, young lady and has done quite a lot over the years to help in the development of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the NMCM, and by extension the Christian Council for I am quite sure they being the Bodies that monitored these last elections, had quite a lot to do with the way the elections were conducted, that there has not been one major incident during the elections when there were crowds of over forty thousand people assembled in one place. And I think we have to thank them very much and thank the people of this country for their forbearance, wisdom and knowledge, and the way they conducted themselves during these elections.

I have been in this Parliament now for thirty years. “The Old man and the Sea,” I think. And I have been in Opposition; I have been in Government. I would do whatever I can, to give whatever experience I have gathered or gained to the new Members of Parliament, either on the Opposition or on the Government side. This institution is a university. You will not learn everything in one day or one year. I am still learning. I think that Members who are prepared to learn to the benefits of themselves and also to the benefit of the country as a whole. I congratulate especially, the Leader of the Opposition. It is a vast change from “Prime Ministership” to “Oppositionship”. And these are my words. And you see the measure of a man when he can assimilate from one very top position, and as somebody said, the position that is even greater than the President of the United States, “power” that resides in the hands of the Prime Minister. I think that the ODD should continue, and I hope it would continue. I think there is someone that said, “Evil can only flourish when good men do nothing”. And if we in the Government, we err at certain times, I would like to know that we have an ODD there to correct us, to bring us back on the straight and narrow way.

I don't like to be repetitive nor do I believe in “tautology”. And so all I would say Mr. Speaker, to welcome you to the Chair. I know you are going to bring impartiality to it, and I know that even though at times, if we feel you are not impartial, it would not be something that is contrived because we believe in whatever ruling that, we are given.

I have been given the onerous portfolio of the Public Service. My concerns about Parliament are well known. It has gone back for the last maybe, ten/fifteen years. As the highest institution in the land, I think that we need to do something that the people who work in Parliament, hardworking, very dedicated, that they need to be recognised. And I think that now I have the opportunity, I give them the pledge that I am going to ensure, within the constraints of finance, that they will take their rightful place within the civil service hierarchy of this Government and this country.

And so Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Prime Minister stole my line about the 22 percent women we have in Parliament, but the gender issue has been one that has been in the forefront for a long time. We intend to try to correct this. I know that we have some beautiful, talented, spirited and tender ladies in Parliament. I don't think we should be fooled that they would continue to be soft, because being tender does not mean being soft. And I know that they will do whatever they have to do without fear or favour. I look forward to working with them all in close harmony. I know that sometimes when we may have heated arguments or debates, and you can always find the comforting voice of some of those who will quiet us down, and say, let us forget it and move on.

And so Mr. Speaker, I thank you. I thank the visiting members who are here, and all those who have sent us well wishes, and that the work has just started, and that we intend to go on with it.

I thank the Leader and the Members of the Opposition once more. Thank you very much.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, maybe I can offer explanation to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition as to perhaps why he might not have been considered part of the Caribbean Civilisation. You know, politics is like cricket; the one that is in fights very hard to remain in, and the one who is out, struggles very hard to get in. So I suppose you have to use maybe various methods and means, different balls, and sometimes trying to get out you have to perhaps block at the wicket so that you remain.

Honourable Members, I would like to thank you sincerely for the confidence that you have expressed in me by electing me as Speaker of this Honourable House and particularly, to the Honourable Prime Minister; a position which I accept with humility. I am aware that this is a dignified position, which carries with it a tremendous responsibility, and great expectation, which I intend to shoulder manfully.

I wish to thank His Excellency, the Governor-General and Mrs. Antrobus for gracing us with their presence here this evening. We wish them well in their various endeavours. I would also like to thank you for your kind expression of goodwill towards me. This goodwill has not only resounded from this Honourable House, but elsewhere.

I wish also to congratulate all of you who are sitting here as Members of this House and particularly those of you who have been successful at the polls. You have been entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the future direction of St. Vincent and

the Grenadines. I pray that as we strive to uphold the dignity of this Honourable House that we do so with respect and admiration for each other. We need to remember that promotion comes not from West or from the East nor from the North, nor from the South, but from God who is judge, and that he puts down one and sets up another. I trust that we will be mindful of this, and whatever we do in here we would seek to glorify God.

I greatly applaud the decision to make live, through broadcasting, the proceedings of this Honourable House. This I hope will make us conscious of the fact that we are being judged by a wider and greater audience; something which will help us to lift and maintain the standard of our debate, and that we will conduct ourselves in such a manner that would make our nation proud. Every meeting of this House should be an opportunity for learning. Our actions, conduct, and general behaviour should be exemplary, that those who watch and listen to us would want to emulate us. I hope for full co-operation from each of us and trust that at the end of it all that we would be satisfied that we would have helped to build a better St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I look forward to good working relation with the Clerk and the rest of the staff of the House of Assembly. May God richly bless us all. Thank you.

APPOINTMENT OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, pursuant to Section 76 of the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines we are now faced with the job of appointing the Public Accounts Committee. For the knowledge, information of those who are new, and perhaps for those who have not read the appropriate section in the Constitution:

“The House shall, at the commencement of each session, appoint a Public Accounts Committee from among its members, whose duties shall be to consider the public accounts of this country in conjunction with the Report of the Director of Audit, and in particular to report to the House-

(a) in the case of an excess or unauthorized expenditure of public funds, the reasons for such expenditure;

and

- (b) any measures it considers necessary in order to ensure that public funds are properly spent, and such other duties relating to public accounts as the House may from time to time direct. “

The Chairman of this Body, Mr. Speaker, by tradition, from the Mother of Parliaments in Westminster is the Leader of the Opposition. And in the Standing Orders, particularly Standing Orders 68 (1) enjoins us that this Body as a Select Committee:

“..... shall be constituted so as to ensure so far as is possible that the balances of the Parties in the House is reflected in the Committee.”

And prior to this meeting, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and I came to the agreement that the Public Accounts Committee should consist of seven Members; five from the Government side and two from the Opposition side. In accordance with that agreement Mr. Speaker, I nominate the five following persons: The Honourable Vincent Beache, the Honourable Dr. Jerrol Thompson, the Honourable Rene Baptiste, the Honourable Clayton Burgin and the Honourable Julian Francis. Those are the five nominations on this side Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines Dr. Godwin Friday and myself as Leader of the Opposition.

ADJOURNMENT

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Honourable House do adjourn until Thursday May 3rd for the next Sitting.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.
House adjourned at 6:00 p.m. until May 3, 2001*