

# Dominica opposition leader seeks inquiry

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ROSEAU, Dominica --

A Dominica opposition leader called Monday for Parliament to authorize an investigation into real estate owned by Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit.

Dominica Freedom Party chief Michael Astaphan said a public inquiry is needed to probe recent allegations that Skerrit paid up to five times less than the assessed value of two parcels of land in 2005.

"There is too much public debate," Astaphan said. "An inquiry will set things straight."

In his weekly radio address on Sunday, Skerrit denied the accusations and accused rivals of scheming to damage his reputation. He asked his attorneys to seek an apology from the local newspaper, The Times, which he claims published an "injurious" article about the land deals.

Skerrit's spokesman, Anthony Astaphan -- the opposition leader's cousin -- said one of the properties was "given as a gift" to the prime minister by the previous owner. He did not disclose further details.

Since becoming a government minister in 2000 and prime minister in 2004, Skerrit has purchased three parcels of land on the island -- one of the Caribbean's poorest. He recently said he was building a three-bedroom house in his hometown of Vielle Case valued at \$149,810.