

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT**

*IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON DECEMBER 17, 2007*

SESSION 2010

VOLUME 14

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

10.00 A.M.

The House of Representatives having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the Third Session of the Ninth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the House read the following Proclamation:

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 2 of 2010.

[L.S.]

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ George M. Richards
President.

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the Third Session of the Ninth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday the 13th day of January, 2010, as the time at which the said session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the
Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 7th day
of January, 2010.

Prayers

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PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. This sitting is now suspended.

10.04 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.06 a.m.: *Members of the Senate arrived and took their places in the Chamber.*

10.23 a.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, arrived in the Chamber.*

[INVOCATIONS]

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. George Maxwell Richards, addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:

President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Members of Parliament:

At the outset, permit me to wish you all, Members of Parliament and your loved ones and the rest of the national community, a good and fruitful journey, in the year 2010.

As we begin this new year, I have asked myself: "How are we doing in Trinidad and Tobago at the start of the second decade of the 21st Century?"

In my view, one of the most critical matters facing the country is the need to increase its level of productivity. Globalization and liberalization are realities of the socio-economic landscape worldwide, and our society must secure the competitive edge which will enable it, not only to sustain, but also to increase its level of income and enhance the economy's growth potential.

The World Economic Forum (WEF), an independent, international organization, recognized in the global business community for its technical analysis of international economic issues, has recently released its latest annual Global Competitiveness Index or GCI Report. The WEF defines competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity in the country. The GCI is composed of a weighted average of several different components which are grouped into 12 pillars of competitiveness with 110 sub-

indices. These include public institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, higher education and training, labour market efficiency, financial market sophistication, technological readiness and innovation. These pillars fall within the direct sphere of influence of the public, private and labour sectors.

Trinidad and Tobago falls into Stage 3, the highest level of economic development—innovation driven—with a ranking of 86th out of 133 countries globally. While this represents an improvement from its 92nd rank in the 2008/2009 GCI, our position has deteriorated steadily since 2002/2003, when it was 42nd worldwide.

The GCI Report shows that Trinidad and Tobago possesses a competitive advantage in 28 sub-indices including, for example, national savings rate, quality of the education system, taxation and rigidity of employment and a competitive disadvantage in 81 sub-indices. These latter include pay and productivity, business costs of crime and violence, organized crime and capacity for innovation. Other problematic factors include poor work ethic in the labour force, inefficient bureaucracy, inflation and inadequate supply of infrastructure.

It should be noted that the GCI draws its information from both international hard data sources and from perception-based indicators which are likely to be extremely subjective. Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear that one of our major objectives must be a significant improvement in the competitiveness of the country and the public, private and labour sectors must all be deeply involved in this exercise.

Adequate infrastructure is a necessary, if not sufficient, requirement in the development of a country's economy. Top priority must be given to improving infrastructural services such as transportation, water supply, roads, telecommunications, waste disposal, irrigation systems and environmental protection. In all of these fields, the technology is already well developed and in its most appropriate form—which may not necessarily be the latest—and could be used without much research and development. While we are not altogether where we used to be, we are not where we ought to be in the above-mentioned areas and there is no gainsaying that they still require considerable attention in order to satisfy the needs of the population at large. These are basic needs without which we cannot expect to achieve the level of development that would move us into developed country status, which is our goal.

In this regard, no one can question the fact that the most important asset available to countries such as ours is their pool of highly trained men and women—for it is their understanding and work that ultimately drive effective action in national development. The foundation of social and economic development

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and growth is an educated population and in today's technologically-driven world, an essential element of this is tertiary level education and training in science, engineering, technology, innovation, management and entrepreneurship.

It is a truism that in successful countries, the scientific, engineering and technological community has been the most critical resource for economic transformation and today we are seeing the world being increasingly made up of societies in which economic value is derived from knowledge, especially scientific and technical knowledge.

10.50 a.m.

It is now abundantly clear that knowledge has become the critical factor in shaping economic life, as well as social and cultural values. Our universities: the University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the University of the Southern Caribbean, therefore have a most important role to play, since they are the main sources and channels of such knowledge. These universities must provide the intellectual and creative energy that is required to enhance the country's economic performance. Critically also, the universities must connect with the communities or face the real possibility of being irrelevant to their development.

Although student numbers have been growing rapidly in the last five years or so, I estimate that much less than 10 per cent of our working age population has achieved tertiary education. This compares with 38 per cent in the United States, 36 per cent in Japan and 26 per cent in South Korea.

As a country, we invest approximately 1 per cent of our GDP in higher education, and while this represents a substantial increase within recent years, it is behind the performance of countries such as Australia, 1.5 per cent; Canada, 2.3 per cent and the US, 2.6 per cent. Moreover, in Trinidad and Tobago, private finance still plays an extremely modest role in university funding. Private finance in the US amounts to 1.4 per cent of GDP and 2.4 per cent in South Korea, compared with less than .1 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago. We need to develop a culture of private philanthropy. We need also to foster the tradition of raising money from alumni.

The European Commission has suggested that in a modernized university system, a total investment of some 2 per cent of GDP is the minimum required for knowledge-intensive economies. For example, the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland and Sweden, are already leaders in public investment in higher education, and approach these levels. The view is that if less or close to 2 per cent

of GDP in higher education cannot be invested, we cannot claim to be building a knowledge-based economy. All this having been said, it is crucial to note that there is a need for our universities to play their traditional role in ensuring that not every social value is measured in terms of technological achievement and the relative place of the nation on a notional ladder of competitiveness.

The traditional role of universities in examining philosophical and ethical questions in critical analysis of the social order and in fostering artistic expression, must be re-endorsed as they take on enhanced roles in orienting and training students for knowledge-based economic development. Some philosophic questions cannot be handled within the scientific tradition, and require examination of ethical and normative issues. Critical analyses of the social order must not only be retained but strengthened, especially in an atmosphere in which these achievements could easily be devalued.

But thirst for education, at whatever level, does not usually come suddenly; it has to be nurtured from the home and in school. Where are we failing in this regard? The failure is in the home, as well as in the school; but the major breakdown is in the home. Many of our family support systems of old are no more. Family life and the importance of community have been seriously eroded, and many of our current ills have their genesis in this breakdown; but merely bemoaning the fact is a luxury that we cannot afford.

Family life ought to be taught in teacher training colleges, so that partly through the school system we may seek to repair the damage that has been done. Non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, formal and non-formal, can also help. It is a long haul and there are no quick fixes.

While progress is being made in the education system, to cite but one example, pre-school education, such progress is being hampered by the fact that proper values are not being inculcated in the home. If the value of education is not emphasized there, our children will ask: What is the point? Also, if some teachers, and I repeat, some, are merely doing a job and, having no vocation, do not perform as teachers should, but instead treat the school as a place where they sign in and sign out, again, the children will ask: What is the point?

That is why, in spite of the several and various programmes that exist for skilled training, so many of our young people remain outside the loop and seem to have no interest whatever in leading productive lives.

In spite of the availability of free tuition at tertiary level education, why are the numbers at university as low as they are? It has to do with the value that is

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placed on life and on education in particular. But what are the sanctions for negligence and, if there are, against whom and how are they put into effect? I ask you to ponder that.

Turning to the other end of the age spectrum, I believe that the time has arrived when urgent consideration should be given to reviewing the pension arrangements for public servants. It is no exaggeration to state that many retired public servants live in penury. Under the present arrangements, these pension provisions remain fixed and unaltered for the duration of the retirees' lives. It should be easy to understand that with the passage of time, the rapid increases in the price of shelter, food and other commodities, the cost of living, on the whole, has eroded and will continue to erode the capability of such pensions to sustain the retired public servant and his or her dependants, if any, at any reasonable standard of living. This applies as much to former ambassadors and high commissioners, as well as senior public servants, including permanent secretaries and heads of departments, as it does to lower level personnel. Retirees from the judicial service face similar problems; moreover, ill health often compounds the situation.

Let us not delude ourselves, pensioners and other persons on fixed incomes are fully exposed to price inflation, even as many of them continue to service mortgages on their homes, some of which may have been used as collateral to finance their children's education. Unless pensions are adjusted, there will continue to be an automatic fall in the standard of living as prices increase. I dare say, the answer hardly lies in doing away with permanent pensionable posts, however attractive or expedient that may seem and for whatever reason.

Continuing in this vein, it is important that we be mindful of the realities of the daily grind that so many face, even in the midst of what one might describe as relative abundance. Within recent times, there has been clear evidence of the distress that can be caused when misunderstandings arise within the country, especially in the matter of governance. It became increasingly evident that serious gaps exist between good intention and the management and communication of such intention. In the final analysis, perception always remains important in relations among human beings, and we have a duty to be mindful of this fact.

Dialogue that sincerely permits another point of view and patience, are necessary ingredients for successful encounters where views diverge. The views, as well as the capabilities of ordinary people, should never be discounted. We need to listen to one another, as we build the country together, inside and outside of Parliament, seeking always to achieve balance in our relations.

11.05 a.m.

This leads me to raise, as I have done in the past, the matter of the role of Parliament. What is it for? It has been said of the British Parliament of the 15th Century that it was "essentially an instrument of the Monarch's will". In our space, although we have borrowed the parliamentary system from our erstwhile colonial masters, there can hardly be any semblance of such an idea. This august place is where it is expected that the business of the people, including the least among us, will be conducted.

It must never be forgotten that such action as takes place in the House and in the Senate is intended to represent the interest of the people; all of us. It is clear, from the debate at the close of the last session of Parliament and from discussions among the people, that there remain serious gaps in the understanding of precisely what impact the new land tax legislation will have. For many individuals, this gap engenders the fear that the new legislation will be the source of undue hardship and that is why I look forward to having placed before me, as promised in the winding up of the debate in the Senate on December 30, 2009, such amendment or amendments as may prove necessary in the implementing of this new legislation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in closing I ask the question: How are we measuring our progress in this year 2010? I am not only addressing those who are in this Chamber, but every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, at whatever level. We have read of international indices; we have noted the perceptions of others. How do we rate ourselves—not just leaders, but all of us? If progress is to be measured by the improved quality of life of every citizen, which it should be, then we all have a part to play. Leadership is critical, particularly in this decision-making body in whose House we have gathered today. But that is not all. Leaders in business, labour and every other institution are crucial to the task. However, in a democracy, responsibility for progress does not lie solely with the leadership. Every citizen has choices to make and must be trained to do so.

However, in making progress, let us be mindful to preserve those things that have served us well. In addition, those elements of our history, visual and otherwise, which distinguish us from others, must be preserved. We have a duty to those who went before us and on whose shoulders we stand.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the courtesy of your attention.

11.10 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

11.10 a.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, left the Chamber.*

Paper Laid

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11.20 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the Third Session of the Ninth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

To be printed as a House Paper.

CIVIL AVIATION (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Civil Aviation Act, Chap. 49:03 [*The Minister of Works and Transport*]; read the first time.

CHILDREN BILL

Bill relating to the protection of children and for matters related thereto [*The Minister of Social Development*]; read the first time.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY) (VALIDATION OF THE NINTH REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION) BILL

Bill to validate the Ninth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the boundaries of the electoral districts in the electoral area for Tobago under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly Act), Chap. 25:50 [*The Minister of Local Government*]; read the first time.

SECURITIES BILL

Bill to provide protection to investors from unfair, improper or fraudulent practices; foster fair and efficient capital markets and confidence in the capital markets in Trinidad and Tobago; reduce systemic risk; to co-operate with other jurisdictions in the development of fair and efficient capital markets, and for other related matters [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Criminal Procedure Act, Chap. 12:02 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS BILL

Bill to give effect to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

Prisons (Amdt.) Bill

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PRISONS (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Prisons Act, Chap. 13:01 [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, there being no other business, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Wednesday, January 20, 2010 at 1.30 p.m., on which day we will do the Anti-Terrorism (Amdt.) Bill, which will come from the Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.24 a.m.