The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]

PAPER LAID

The Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) (Amendment to Schedule 6) Order, 2019. [The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)]

SHIPPING BILL, 2019

Bill to repeal and replace the Shipping Act, Chap. 50:10, the Harbours Act, Chap. 50:06, the Droghers Act, Chap. 50:07, the Motor Launches Act, Chap. 50:08, to amend the Port Authority Act, Chap. 51:01 and the Coroners Act, Chap. 6:04 to provide for the certification and registration of seafarers and the certification and registration of vessels and offshore installations, matters relating to crew safety and security of life at sea and matters incidental thereto [The Minister of Works and Transport]; read the first time.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2020) BILL, 2019

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the swansong of the Rowley regime on the eve of elections here in Budget 2020. I think that this budget is a condescending insult to the poor, an insult to the marginalized, an insult to the working classes and an insult to the struggling mothers and fathers who, despite difficult circumstances, go out every day with dignity to earn an honest dollar. Remember it is said:
“Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause and plunder the soul of those who plunder them.”

The contempt which this Government has for the poor was on full display on Monday when the Minister came to this House and threw out crumbs to the most vulnerable persons in our country. That contempt was compounded yesterday by none other than the hon. Prime Minister, with his sob story at the spotlight to make excuses for his Government’s failure to manage the economy since they entered office. Since he cannot do the job, I say do not make excuses, call the elections now. [Desk thumping]

I want to tell you no matter how poor people are, they have self-worth, they have pride, and if you on that side think that you can fool them with your outdated schemes and insulting offerings, you have to think again. [Desk thumping] Imagine, just imagine, $2.50 and “ah five-dollar” light bulb; those are the crumbs. Two dollars and fifty cents and “ah five dollar” light bulb; this is what they think the most vulnerable need. One hundred million for rentals but $2.50 and “ah five-dollar” bulb for the poor. Millions for wives of Ministers but $2.50 and “ah five-dollar” bulb for the poor. Twenty million for the Tobago mansion for the Prime Minister, in these very budget documents, but $2.50 for the poor. Two hundred and fifty-five million-dollar bailout for one company and $300 million gift to another company. But what? Two dollars and fifty cents and “ah five-dollar” light bulb to the poor. And both those companies, by the way, Madam Speaker, are affiliated with a high official of the PNM, a father of a high official of this Government.

The fact is that some in this country may cheer these crumbs despite the evidence that CEPEP got $21.2 million decreased allocation this year. That is the
lowest allocation to the CEPEP since 2012. So they have been decreasing CEPEP allocations every year. And what does it mean? It means that less people are working because they had never increased their wages. So, how will the wage increases be funded if the allocation has been decreased? You gave an increase, allocation decreased. Will workers have to be fired then in order to meet their needs for the wages? What is even more interesting is that CEPEP and URP workers will earn less than the new minimum wage. They got a 15 per cent increase while the minimum wage increased by how much? 16.7 per cent. So what the Minister threw out as crumbs, what he is doing, the Finance Minister—you see that pittance “cyah even buy ah KFC box, ah box ah KFC”, that increase. But you know what—[ Interruption] Please can we not have—Madam Speaker, the Member will have his turn.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I will just remind all Members of Standing Order 53 and ask Members to compose themselves. Speaking is not really allowed but if one has to speak, please remember, very hushed tones, no long conservations. Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much. I am saying that pittance cannot even buy a box of KFC and I was saying the Minister was practising spin. He was practising to spin better than Sunil Narine. [Desk thumping] So CEPEP workers will get less than the minimum wage.

I tell you and I warn you, we will take you to court for discriminating against the CEPEP workers and URP workers [Desk thumping] because you have now consigned them to getting less than the minimum wage. How can you do that? Are you for real? Have you read your own provisions and your plans? The Government’s version of financial equality is to make everyone poorer, except who? Friends, family, financiers and et cetera. [Desk thumping] This has been
the case especially in the constituencies that they have controlled for over 60 years where we find the highest crime rates, the highest unemployment, the highest gang and murder rates, the worst infrastructure, the worst services, the lowest wages and property values, financial inequality and social inequality.

You know, Madam Speaker, I know that there will always be voters who will believe that the five-dollar bulb is more valuable to them than a new laptop for a child’s education. There will always be voters who think that the $2.50 raise is more valuable than a free tertiary education. It is what it is. There will always be people who will vote against the improvement in their own lives. Guess why? Because of illogical fears of the other side. It is what it is. No one could change them. Fortunately, Madam Speaker, with each passing year, because of higher education rates, greater access to information, an increased mixed population, the younger generations are breaking free of the patterns of tribal voting. [Desk thumping] So do not think that handouts and mamaguy would get you more votes. Times have changed. Times have definitely changed.

We ensured, Madam Speaker, for that greater access to education, we opened the gate wide. My Government invested heavily in education for young people and those people will not be fooled, the young ones. They know better, they know they deserve better, they know that they deserve more. You may have been able to con the parents and grandparents before, but in today’s world you will not succeed with the children and they will open their elders’ eyes to the disrespect, your disrespect. Your Government replaced laptops in tertiary education for all. With what? Light bulbs and bread crumbs. The days of Hansel and Gretel politics are over where you drop crumbs and smile and grin but “yuh eating thousand-dollar cake”. [Desk thumping]

I know, Madam Speaker, in today’s world, no one wishes to see their
children make careers working for the minimum wage. I know that. Indeed, our CEPEP and URP and minimum wage earners, what do they do every day? They fight the battle every day. You know why? To educate their children so their children can get a better life, every parent. They do not want the same life, they try to lift up their children to live a better life. No one wants to see their children go through the same troubles that they had and they are having and that is why I say that the young ones will break out of the pattern and give you a great surprise.

Madam Speaker, as Prime Minister, together with my team, we spent our time bringing relief to citizens who were reeling from destructive effects of the policies of the former PNM Government and it is noteworthy, the current Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister were prominent members of that regime in 2009. [Desk thumping] Today, the Rowley regime has returned to the draconian policies of that former regime to brutalize middle- and low-income earners.

When we came into office in 2010 and in recognition with the widespread poverty as a result of the former administration’s mismanagement, my Government initiated a series of actions designed to increase the purchasing power of families and thereby to help them with the cost of living. So what did we do? We set an agenda. We removed VAT from over 7,000 basic items. [Desk thumping] That was a part of a wider national development strategy to improve their standard of living of people in this country. By September 2015, we had settled over 133 wage negotiations. [Desk thumping] We increased the minimum wage twice. We increased the minimum twice. [Desk thumping] We increased pensions. You know if you had done that, you would not have given a 17 point something minimum wage, you would have been able to give a $20 minimum wage. [Desk thumping] That is what it should have been.

We also targeted various components of household expenditure and that is

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what helped to guide my Government’s policies in creating the social safety net. For example, by increasing the number of children who were able to get school meals, we were able to help to bring down the cost of living. Further, by providing them with books and laptops and so on, decreased the cost of education. As I said, we widened the gate, provided about 95,000 laptops and thousands of books to the school children. [Desk thumping] We built, yes, 106 schools [Desk thumping] and should you get vex, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, MP Gopeesingh will read out the list of every single one and we will provide you with the photographs of 106 schools, some of which you have left abandoned. Abandoned, bush growing all over. As they say, caraili vine growing all over them, abandoned. We built those schools. We built a south campus of the University of the West Indies [Desk thumping] to increase access to education. What have you done? You have left it there, again, for bush to overgrow it. That was another way to decrease the cost of education to people.

We improved health care by the construction of additional hospitals, including the Carenage health facility in Diego Martin West. [Desk thumping] The Couva children’s hospital, [Desk thumping] never mind you have now named it whatever and converted a brand new state-of-the-art into what? “Ah drugstore. Ah drugstore, imagine that.” No shame. No shame whatsoever. We completed the long languishing Scarborough Hospital. [Desk thumping] Scarborough, Scarborough. We started Arima and Point Fortin hospitals. All of this was to decrease the cost of health care and make health care, good health care more accessible. Look, remember you know, when you stand on that side and you talk about Arima and Point Fortin, I want you to remember that those are UNC projects. [Desk thumping]

We provided food cards. Minister came here to boast about how many food
cards they had cut out and cut down, 18,000. Again, causing more hardship for people.

10.15 a.m.

So, we provided cards; we provided grants for single mothers, children with special needs, disability grants. These were all designed to increase purchasing power of the average family to improve the standard of living of our citizens. And now, they want to come, they have dismantled this system, depriving families of critical support and they want to come to mamaguy the most vulnerable in our country with the promise of, guess what, day care; day care. I know the value of day care, Madam, but there are so many preschools they have left abandoned, not opened, [Desk thumping] and on top of that, that, in my respectful view, is hypocrisy to come here to promise day care centres, day care schools, [Desk thumping] when you have abandoned so many schools you have refused to complete and early childhood included in that. So you are not serious, you are not serious. That is mamaguy, that is what that is, mamaguy. [Desk thumping]

We created over 55,000 new jobs and we did that without raising a single tax, [Desk thumping] no tax. People want jobs. They do not want bulbs, they want jobs. Compare that plan, or those ideas—initiatives that we had, to those on the other the side. When they came in here in the first two years, “they rush” to introduce VAT on basic foods: Crix, Milo, tea bags, cornflakes, condensed milk, salt, ketchup; all those 7,000 items with the exception of just a few. What did they do? They put a 12.5 per cent VAT on it, mamaguying again to say “Listen we decreasing VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5;” when in effect “you putting it” across the board. [Desk thumping]

The result of that initiative and others by them have caused food prices to increase from September 2015 by about 14 per cent in Trinidad, and it is even
higher in Tobago. Those stats come out of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Consumer Affairs Division. You know what? Like everything else they tried to hide, they have removed all data prior to 2016 so anything from 2015 off the website, gone, gone. [Interruption] In Tobago, I said it is higher.

So what I have done for my presentation, I have taken the data which I had when I did my presentation when the 2015 data was there, compared it to the 2019 September, and put it in an appendix so you could see every food item and every price; appendix I. And that is why I say that this budget is the bread that the devil knead. They also increased fuel prices three times, and the Minister “boldfacedly” laughing and giggling and saying, “They ent riot yet”. The riot is coming for political change, not physical, the riot will be at the polls when you call that election. That riot will come politically at the polls.

And, they have increased three times fuel prices, increased NIS contributions from 12 to 13.2 per cent, again deceasing your disposable income, making it harder to have a good living. And the question is this: Is anyone better off today except friends, family, and financiers? The Government introduced a 7 per cent tax on online purchases. A tyre tax; a transition to a tiered GATE system so less people could afford now to get GATE. They removed regular fuel at the nation’s pump which was the fuel used by the fishermen. All of this has further increased the cost of living. Is anyone better off today apart from the friends, families and financiers?

**Hon. Member:** Faris.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** In short, where we decreased the cost of living, this Government has done everything in their power to increase the cost of living. [Desk thumping] But you know there is only so much abuse, disrespect, and oppression people can tolerate. The line between restraint and chaos is growing

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thinner by the day. I put this Government on notice that a reckoning is coming and it is coming soon. [Desk thumping] Those of you who live so lavishly and leave so little for the rest will pay a heavy political price. [Desk thumping] You will pay for the lives and livelihoods you have destroyed over the last four years.

The Rowley regime has displayed a cold hearted attitude to tens of thousands of workers whom they caused to be fired, lose their homes, and broke their families. The shutdown of Petrotrin is the biggest economic blunder in our nation’s history. You laugh and you thump your desks in this House while you play games with the former Petrotrin workers without even considering that some of them committed suicide, others are now dead, could not afford the health care that they were getting before. You demonized them to the point where they could not get jobs after you fired them. Now you want to say you are going to give them the refinery to run. Now the question is this then: Why? Why? Why? Why did you fire them in the first place? [Desk thumping] Why? Why? Why did you torment and suffer these workers? Why did you destroy their lives in the first place? Yet, this is of no concern to Members opposite because, guess what, “they busy” eating cake. And soon the time for celebrating, I tell you, is coming to an end. A new UNC government will work with stakeholders to swiftly resolve all outstanding issues regarding former Petrotrin workers. [Desk thumping] We will uplift the children of the same poor and marginalized that you treat with such scorn and contempt, who through the sacrifices of their parents, have educated themselves and elevated themselves that they will soon be coming to sit in the very seats that you occupy because of their increased education. Mark my words, they will remember what misery the 23 of you have inflicted on them [Desk thumping] in the past years.

Today, Madam, I dedicate my presentation to the men and women who have
lost their jobs and their lives over the last four years. I dedicate it to the poor and vulnerable. I dedicate it to the next generation of leaders that we will soon bring forward. [Desk thumping] I ask them all to keep the faith and know that I love you all, keep the faith. [Desk thumping] And so I say I intend to present today again, I will spend my time on presenting the UNC’s national economic transformation plan, Madam Speaker. And they never had a plan, you know, never had a plan, laughing when Rodney said they never had a plan. We will present today the UNC’s national economic transformation plan [Desk thumping] to resurrect a dead economy. Be assured that what I do not put into my presentation that team UNC possesses many formidable batsmen and women capable of leading this all against the weak spinners of this Government, and my colleagues [Desk thumping] will deal with detailed sectoral performance and plans which I may not have the time to address.

However, Madam, you know we have to know what is wrong before we can find a way to solve the problem. So before I present that plan, let us face the reality and ignore their fantasies. It is a fact that every area of national life has worsened in the last four years. They have been trying to convince citizens that their harsh realities of pain and suffering are unreal. In other words they are not spotlighting people, they are gaslighting people. [Desk thumping] While this incompetent Government boasts of a turnaround, you know what is happening?—hundreds of thousands are suffering from lack of water. [Desk thumping]. Over 22 per cent of our population, is about 299,000 people are living below the poverty line, [Desk thumping] unsure where their next meal is coming from. People are dying from inadequate access to health care. People are being robbed or murdered by criminals. Thousands more are the new working poor and over 63,000 persons at least have lost jobs under their care. Business confidence is at an all-time low.

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Madam Speaker, all these statistics that I am giving I have the footnoted reference so this is not make-up. Every single—“footnoted” yes, references, Minister. [Laughter] Thousands more I say, [Interruption] business confidence—it is footnoted in the speech.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But how “yuh could” footnote in a speech?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes Madam, in the document, in the document. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, please contain— Hon. Members.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Wow, as if that is important.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Here we are, thousands more are reeling from floods, and you know what?—the Minister well knows it, he was marooned in the flood yesterday. [Desk thumping and laughter] You see it on the front page of the newspaper. Madam, Madam, through you. Through you, Madam Speaker, through you, Madam Speaker, I will come in my yellow canoe to rescue you [Desk thumping and crosstalk] just as we shall come to rescue the nation. That is the reality. But the Minister descended in— [Laughter and crosstalk] Madam, please. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, all right, all right. Members, and I am on my legs, Minister of Finance. Okay, so that—we understand the banter but please let us comply with the Standing Orders. Leader of the Opposition, please proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. You do not have to laugh at my jokes. Footnote that, you do not have to laugh. Madam Speaker, that is the reality.

But the Minister descended into the same fantasy island as was described by his boss at the United Nations, same fantasy island. This really is a virtual tale of
two countries, their country and the real country. *[Desk thumping]* Let me give you an example. Let me give you an example. In Moruga, the HDC broke its promise to persons to whom HDC houses were allocated. The HDC unilaterally inflated the prices of those houses. From $330,000 they went up to $450,000 for two-bedroom houses. And from $420,000 to $625,000 for three-bedroom units. We commissioned an independent valuation and those reports revealed—exposed that these houses are significantly overpriced. These overly expensive houses are also defective with cracks, unsuitable sewer facilities, no back steps in the event of a fire or no second exit, and those houses have no land and building approvals. They broke the law building those houses. Today—yesterday, Madam, a team of lawyers which I lead has sent a pre-action protocol letter to the HDC demanding that the prices of the houses be reduced to the original and that the necessary remedial work be undertaken or they will face the Supreme Court. *[Desk thumping]* We will fight the HDC on behalf of these people of Gomez Trace in Moruga and we will do so as well for other people in similar positions. I have said it is a tale of two countries and now I am saying it is also a tale of two Governments. So let us look at it.

When we left office in 2015, we left as follows, and again I have the references for all of these, we left the highest foreign reserves in our history. *[Desk thumping]* We left significant savings in the HSF. We left new initiatives in the energy sector which led to the increased gross production which they are celebrating now. Madam Speaker, we left billions in revenues to be collected from various entities. So when they say there was no money left, that is not true. Billions in revenues to be collected from various entities including $3.8 billion capita repayment from the TGU, $1.5 billion from the Phoenix Park IPO, $500 million dividend from NGC. *[Desk thumping]*

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Madam Speaker, as I said, we had the highest number of persons with jobs. We created 55,000 new jobs and they contributed to the tax base. We engaged with working with hospitals. We left several hospitals in various stages of completion as I said—mentioned them before: Couva children, Arima, Point Fortin, and of course that Tobago hospital. A series of infrastructural projects including stadia, state-of-the-art aquatic and cycling centres designed—and we did those to be part of what? A thrust in sport to, [Desk thumping] again to earn revenue to create jobs. Significant investment in infrastructure, in highways and drainage, opening up large segments of the country to economic development. Remember they used to call us the “box drain government”? Under their watch “they stop” all drain, rain, grain, anything, so once it rains—

**Hon. Member:** Flood.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** You know once it rains under this Government you will take a bath in your car or you could take a bath downtown Port of Spain on the street. Floods everywhere.

**10.30 a.m.**

Lower levels of crime; when we came in we left lower levels than when we came in. In our country's history, we recorded the highest ever FDI, [Desk thumping] the highest ever GDP at $176.1 billion. We recorded also the highest total number of persons with jobs; the highest foreign reserves, $11.5 billion, which they have now brought down. [Desk thumping] They have brought it down. We left schools, houses, community centres, police stations, all in various stages of completion. I can go on and on with these, Madam, as to what we did, what we left.

Trinidad and Tobago was definitely on a growth path as evidenced by the positive growth of the economy by 1.8 per cent in 2015. [Desk thumping] So
today, where has this Government taken us after four years? Let us look at the indicators. Let us do a quick review of the economy under this Government. The economy is dead. [Desk thumping] On Monday, the Minister presided over the final rites and buried it. [Desk thumping] Let us look at the indicators. They have raided more than US $4.2 billion from the HSF to finance their irresponsible spending. [ Interruption] Four, four, US, of course. They have reduced FDI to negative. [Laughter and crosstalk] They have—Madam.

Madam Speaker: Everybody will get an opportunity to speak. Okay. I am quite sorry to remind you all that this is not a laughing Chamber. So everybody will get their opportunity to make their contribution.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you for your protection, Madam. Let me repeat that—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, just a point of clarification. Could the hon. Member give the source of the data, that US $4.2 billion was taken out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: So, Member for St. Joseph, I think I have said repeatedly, except for Hansard, there is no requirement for the Member to give the source.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Speaker, if the Minister so wants, I will give them. I will provide him with a copy of the document with all the footnotes of the documents. [Desk thumping]

So here we are, here we are. They presided over the dismissal of more than 63,000 workers; [Desk thumping] increased the cost of fuel, as I said before, three times. They introduced the VAT, 12.5 on thousands of consumer items. We have been downgraded twice by credit rating agencies to just above junk status.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask: What has happened with the IMF Article IV Consultation? They have to be invited by the Government. This is the first thing
in my memory that they have not come. Why is it that the Government did not invite the IMF? [Crosstalk] Madam Speaker, can they stop it please? They will have a turn. They will have 45 minutes to laugh or to cry.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so I really want to caution both sides. I want to caution both sides, with respect to observing the Standing Orders. All right? So let us set the proper tone for this very important debate. All the mocking must cease. All the crosstalk must cease. I say that laughter is prohibited in this Chamber. Leader of the Opposition.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. They have killed the economy with three consecutive years of negative growth; three consecutive years of negative growth. In other words, you have contracted/declined the economy. So to come and talk about growth; you put that on your document, growth. Which growth? The only growth is in somebody's pockets, not in the economy. [Desk thumping]

You have drastically increased our debt to about $102 billion at the end of 2018. It is more now at the end of fiscal 2019, whilst at the same time, of course spending, public debt spiked, Madam. Listen to this. Public debt spiked from 81 per cent of total revenue when we were there in 2015. It has increased to a whopping 137 per cent at the end of fiscal 2018, or fiscal ’19, which is where we are now—we do not have that data, it is going to be even more, 137 per cent public debt to total revenue, living far beyond our means.

They have borrowed, Madam, over $58.1 billion. I have got this data from the Central Bank data centre, a cumulative listing, which gives the historical data. This $58.1 billion is comprised of central government borrowing to the tune of $36.5 billion by central government borrowed. But then they do this off book thing. So when you look at these books you do not really see it. You have to go
up on the Central Bank and work like a long time to pull it down. Off book, they are doing a lot of off book budgeting/borrowing. Again, I have compiled a list if anyone wishes to see it, 21.5 billion to what is called contingent liability. That is the state enterprise sector, statutory authorities, and so on, a total of $58.1 billion borrowed.

They have increased the overdraft ceiling to borrow more. They came here with law. They scraped out 7.6 billion in NGC dividends when they said, listen, we killed NGC. We—what? Burnt out NGC. We were running on fumes. Who is running on fumes now? [Desk thumping] Who is running on fumes? So, they have depleted our savings of foreign exchange reserves by US $3.4 billion, which is $23.8 billion. So, in addition that $58 billion borrowing, they have to add this $23.8 billion that they raided from the HSF.

They contracted the tax revenue base; imagine your tax revenue base. You know why? Because they are always making wrong projections. You contracted tax, meaning the amount of revenue we get from taxes, that was decreased, in spite of all these numerous taxes you have put on people. You are suffering the people, putting tax on them and then what happens? The tax collection is less. You know why? Projections always. The Minister is always projecting. For the online tax, he projected about 70 billion to come when the reality came in. For the new VAT “he say he was gettin”—you guys remember that? With the new VAT he was going to get 12 billion. Reality is, what, five, or six or seven for the max. But you are putting all these taxes, which is taking disposable income out of poor people's pockets, and yet the tax revenue, what you are collecting, is less. Why is it?

And so you have cut expenditure on the social safety net. You have cut expenditure on infrastructure we spoke about, with severe flooding. You have presided over a growing crime rate. You have consistently failed to achieve your
fiscal projections, running consecutive fiscal deficit over the last four years. Your fiscal deficits have been on an average 5 per cent of GDP. In each of your years of Government you have always run fiscal deficits, and then you want to talk about growth, want to talk about stability, turnaround and growth.

Madam, you collapsed GDP at market prices by $17.6 billion, from 2014 to the end of fiscal 2018, still do not have ’19. It will be even more. You engaged, in all of that, in a barrage of misinformation, misdirection, mismanagement. [Desk thumping]

Look, let us just forget all the old talk about stability, turnaround, strength and growth. That was the theme on the Minister's budget documents: Stability | Strength | Growth. The Minister has been wrong in every growth projection that he has made. [Desk thumping] The truth is that the economy went from growth in fiscal 2015 and has gone to a consistent contraction of minus 0.3 in 2016, minus 2.3 in 2017. And last year, when the Minister came here, “I can see clearly”, he is seeing sunny skies, and so on. He predicted a 1.9 per cent growth. We now have proof that the economy contracted by minus. It declined. It declined. That was no growth, minus 1.9 per cent. That was for last year. This year, the economy contracted by minus 0.2 per cent, fiscal 2018. We will see for 2019 what the projections are.

This Government has comprehensively failed to steer the economy through the mess they created. You thump your desk and speak of stabilization. That is a myth. You speak of turnaround. It is nothing but a runaround that you gave us. You talk about growth, growth, when we are in regression/recession. The economy, the reality is that it is dead. So I say that your reality is a different reality from the reality of the people and of the data itself. You have had no stabilization, that what you have had is regression. You have not had a turnaround,

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as I said runaround. And all of that is not performance. That is incompetence. [Desk thumping]

One of the most frightening economic indicators is tax to do with jobs. There was a terrifying loss of jobs under them. We were able to—as I said 55,000 jobs we did, new jobs, eh, without raising taxes. We had the largest number of persons with jobs in our history. It is no secret, massive job loss here, Madam. And as I said before, mismanagement, the incompetence. They have caused over 63,000, at least 63,000 persons to be fired. Let me present that evidence because the Government has been busy hiding data. They have given the country no employment statistics for two years, an unprecedented two years. Why? They are hiding it. They can run but they cannot hide and I have spoken— [Desk thumping]

Yes, Madam, let me present the evidence to support my contention to at least 63,000 jobs. So what do you do? From the Review of the Economy you would see, and at September 2015, the number of persons with jobs. Then you go and you look each year, that number has been decreasing. So, within their first two years, from the Review of the Economy, over 31,000 jobs were lost by mid-2017. But you have to add to that now a further 26,800 persons who lost their jobs, as revealed by whom? Not by the Government, although you would say it is the Government. They have not put it in their Review of the Economy for two years. The NIB tells us that their data shows that by mid-2017/mid-2018 a further 26,802. So you have to add that. So we have now reached 57,802 persons. And we have to add to that now, because this data only takes us to the middle of 2018. We have a whole year; whether it be hiding data. But through newspaper reports we have discovered since then, we have to add to that persons who lost jobs post mid-’18, 5,000 Petrotrin employees, 631 TSTT employees, 200 UTT workers and many
more from mid-2018, to where we are now in September 2019. We add just these. That is where we get the number 63,633 people have lost their jobs under this incompetent Government. So I tell you facts are stubborn things. They are very hard to go away. So hide all the data you want, the people of this country know. They know, they know. [Desk thumping]

They do not need statistics from you to know how devastating unemployment is in our communities. The fact you chose to hide these for two years or that taxpayers are paying Ministers who presided over this mass retrenchment serves only to highlight the contempt of the Rowley Government for the ordinary workers and citizens. [Desk thumping]

Madam, I was looking at the economic indicators. I turn now to the drop in global ranking. The ease of doing business ranking declined drastically from 2014. We were at rank 66, Madam, 6-6, not 6-6-6, 6-6. Today we might well be at 6-6-6, because we have dropped to 105th place; 105th. How did that happen? Jamaica is at 75, St. Lucia is at 93. We are at 105.

In terms of economic freedom index, T&T rankings have also dropped drastically, 67 in 2014/15. Here we are, Madam, from 67 in 2014/15, to 112 in 2018. Barbados is at 67; Jamaica, 39; St. Lucia, 38. The Minister erroneously told this House on Monday, “in fact corruption is no longer a feature of public transactions as it was prior to when they came into office”. Yet the truth is, when we looked at the Corruption Perceptions Index, our ranking went from 72 in 2015 to 78th place. So we have fallen on the Corruption Perceptions Index. [Desk thumping]

10.45 a.m.

And now the Prime Minister tells this Parliament, tells people, you know, I do not knowingly associate with crooks except in Parliament. But he probably
knows what he is talking about or who he is talking about. I think he was referring to some of his own, given that the perception of corruption index has worsened under his leadership. Barbados on that index is at 25; Jamaica, 70; Bahamas, 29; St. Vincent, 41; Dominica, 45; Suriname, 73. Why is it then that these other Caricom countries are doing so much better than us in these rankings? Why these global rankings? They have no oil, they have no gas, they have no methanol, they have no urea, they have no Pitch Lake, they have no world scale carnival, they have no large industrial estates. Madam, so why? It is because they have no PNM. [Desk thumping] I can give you some examples of false news that the Minister said in his Budget Statement, but I will leave it for my colleagues in the interest of saving time.

So, Madam Speaker, let us turn now to some issues dealing with procurement, because that is a serious matter. This Government from the time they came into office, we will proclaim procurement, we will bring the regulations, four years have gone, nothing has happened—nothing. The Minister has told us last time he would bring it by March, well I do not even know which March now. March has come and gone, never happened. Procurement legislation, they refuse to proclaim it. They refuse to implement the law, corruption continues to rear its ugly head. And in spite of that, Madam, they enter into so many murky deals including the purchase of ferries, Austal ships, Sandals scandal, buying airplanes, a Chinese housing contract too, then had to pull back, 43 million and 100 million in rental contracts, tax breaks on multi-family units, fake oil at Petrotrin, the list continues, Madam, the list continues. And so, today I want to add two more, I want to add the Clico/BAT sell-out, and I want to add the Petrotrin debacle. [Desk thumping] All of these would have been protected by the procurement law, the process would have been protected by that law because it included the disposal of public property.
And so the Clico/BAT sell-out and the sale of Petrotrin fall in the category of disposal of public property, but they did not want to implement the law.

Let us talk about the Clico/BAT sell-out. The deep involvement of the PNM in the demise of Clico is public knowledge. Today they beat their chests as though they are saviours of this once giant conglomerate, when their own high ranking officials orchestrated its demise. [Desk thumping] Ten years later, they have now decided to resolve the sale of the traditional portfolios of Clico and BAT.

However, like everything else the Rowley regime does, it is full of questions and secrecy about the process instead of there being transparency. It is a sad day when civic minded citizens are being intimidated by their employers over whether they exposed wrongdoing by government officials. Here we are, as Clico and BAT employees are being dragged into their offices of their supervisors to be interrogated about whether they exposed what the Government proposes to overspend, or to lose in the Clico/BAT sell-out. Many questions come up about this sale, Madam.

In March 2019, the Minister of Finance announced he was in the process of reviewing the recommendations of Central Bank for the sale of the portfolios. He announced that there were four companies, but eventually went down to two, Sagicor the preferred bidder, and Maritime. The Minister said he was no rubber stamp; that means he was being careful in considering the portfolios and the bid proposals, and what he was going to do about them.

As such, Madam, I call on the Minister to reveal the extent of his involvement and the directions he gave for the sale of the portfolios. [Desk thumping] Given that the Minister told there was a glitch about a 300 million—you all remember that? A glitch of someone’s bid that was higher by 300 million, and he dubbed it a glitch, Madam. But today I will tell you I have been informed,
and it is alleged it is far more than 300 million. We will come to that. I call on the Minister to publicly answer what matters he considered before he approved the sale of these billion-dollar portfolios, as well as the factors he took into account when he said he protected the public interest.

The Central Bank confidentially boasted that the sale was subjected to a transparent, competitive and rigorous bidding process. Ironically, they, Madam—it was so transparent and whatever, one of the bidders has threatened to take the Central Bank to court, accusing the bank of acting irrationally, unfairly and unconstitutionally. [*Desk thumping*] I am certain if the sale is so transparent and rigorous and so on as they self-proclaim, then there should be no issue with making the information public to withstand scrutiny.

Meanwhile, this Government’s only action on the issue is to try to ferret out and punish employees who were loyal enough to this country to come up and speak out about what was taking place. [*Desk thumping*] I call on the Government to protect the whistleblowers under the law rather than victimizing them. All this old talk about whistleblower legislation, while they are the biggest threat to the whistleblowers. [*Desk thumping*] In the interest of transparency and the protection of the taxpayers, I call on the bank and the Minister to fully disclose all documents relating to this transaction, so the public can form their own view about what happened.

The Minister and the Regulator should explain to this nation why they accepted an alleged quarter billion dollars, $470 million less for the portfolios. Why did you accept an alleged bid that was a quarter billion dollars less, man? That is when I talk about so much for the rich and the crumbs for the poor. The $2.50 and the what—the lightbulb. Half a billion dollars more, they could have accepted it and they refused it. Refusing that quarter billion dollars, taxing billions
from the country, throwing crumbs, Madam. Is that reasonable? Is that what a competent government would do, Madam Speaker? This lack of transparency is unfair to the two bidders, Sagicor and Maritime, as well as the population and the country as a whole. And it brings both companies and the Regulator and the Minister as I said, and the country into questions, into disrepute. I demand a transparent account of what occurred, and today I call on all authorities including the Integrity Commission to launch an investigation into this murky deal. [Desk thumping]

I do so, Madam, because we on this side have a duty pursuant to our oath to raise matters regardless of how the chips may fall. We do our duty without fear or favour. We make no conclusions today except to raise key questions and therefore, I say, we cast no aspersion on the integrity of the preferred bidder or of any other bidders, Madam Speaker.

Let us turn to another murky deal that went down without the procurement legislation, the Petrotrin debt. You know, Madam Speaker, if the Minister wants to call me stupid, I would call him stupid too, you know. [ Interruption]

Madam Speaker: All right. So, I think we are into our Fifth Session, people know what is allowed here. Unparliamentary behaviour is not allowed, insults are not allowed. There is a big gap between banter and insults. Okay? So I will ask Members to desist, and anybody who called one stupid and another, I will ask you to apologize. The other thing I want Members to remember, this is a Chamber for debate. Every Member will be allowed an opportunity to stand and make their contribution, following the proper procedure. So that there is very little need for jeering and cheering. So, I will just ask the Member who called the Leader of the Opposition stupid, to just stand up and withdraw it. [ Crosstalk]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Proceed to add on injury time?
Madam Speaker: All right, no injury time so please proceed, you raised the issue. Let us proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. It hurting them you know, the truth hurts. That is what is happening on that side, [Desk thumping] they do not want to hear the truth.

So, Madam Speaker, I turn as I said, to the Petrotrin debt. Again in this thing, the demise of Petrotrin, the company, the PNM, we all have public knowledge that there was deep involvement by the PNM. Today, again, boasting as though they are saviours of our national patrimony and legacy, they were blaming the workers and others when it was their own high ranking officials in the persons of Malcom Jones [Desk thumping] and Ken Julien. They orchestrated the demise of Petrotrin. “Doh” come and blame the workers. [Desk thumping] Do not blame the workers, it will not work. The court matters that we filed to try to recover lost monies, this unscrupulous Government came and discontinued the cases. [Desk thumping] The recent decision by the board of e Teck to withdraw a $35 million claim against the Ken Julien Board, that claim we filed by my Government. Listen to this Madam, we won it at the High Court, the country won it at the High Court when we were there; won it at the Court of appeal; won it at the Privy Council; costs were ordered from all the three quotes, Madam. Why did you discontinue it? [Desk thumping]. Tell the country. Why did you do it?

And I will tell you this, the Member for Port of Spain North\St. Ann’s West footnote this too, put it in your footnotes. The Member for Port of Spain North\St. Ann’s West knows about all this. Why? He was an attorney on record, he was an attorney or record in the case. [Desk thumping] You were an attorney on record in the case. Why did you discontinue it?

Mr. Charles: Conflict of interest.

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Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We won the limitation point on all three quotes, Madam. The record is there; these are public documents. Let us carry on why, why? And is it then therefore, is it then now, Madam, the PNM came after all the successes in the court to withdraw the claims. Were they trying to protect their friends and their families, and their financiers, Madam? [Desk thumping] That is the question we must answer in this country. [Desk thumping] Why? Billions of dollars that they caused this company Petrotrin to shut down. When we try to get it back “she take down de case.” Billions spent by the e Teck board, pull out the case against Ken Julien. “Look people not stupid in this country, yuh know. People does see all yuh shenanigans.” You know what is happening. [Desk thumping]

On Monday, Madam, Minister spoke, he came here, and let me make it clear, we welcome the decision to sell the refinery to Patriotic Technologies. [Desk thumping] Whilst we welcome that, Madam, for it to be sold, I already raised the question “Why yuh didn’t just do dat instead of firing all de five thousand people?” from the beginning for a whole year and really bankrupting this country for a whole year.

So, Madam, whilst we welcome that decision, we do not trust this Government, we feel that they may in fact be setting up the workers in the company. [Desk thumping] And I will share with you why. One point only because others will come forward. On Monday, the Minister came here repeated, repeated, ad nauseam, the same announcements he had made about the whole thing happening up to the decision to sell the refinery. Okay, remember he came here on Monday, Madam, and he said it was going to be sold “debt-free”. Debt-free, is that really true?

Madam Speaker, fortunately, we live in the digital age in some cases. In some instances here, and anyone who wants to see can go up on the website of the
Companies Registry and they will find this: They will find a Deed of Debenture, dated 28 June, 2019, made with First Caribbean International Bank as agent for the Bank of New York. And the other party on that day are all three companies which replaced Petrotrin. Deed of Debenture, all three companies that replaced Petrotrin. These companies together, they took mortgages to secure the sum of approximately TT $8 billion. These companies together took mortgages to secure, as I said that $8 billion.

When the Government took the decision to close down Petrotrin, to chop up the assets into these separate companies, they did not tell the country that they were going to mortgage away the assets of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The people’s assets held by these companies include the refinery, the tanks, the ports, the pipes, lands. These are all pledged as security for this loan. That is what the Deed of Debenture is telling us. They pledged away our national heritage and patrimony. Unpatriotic action of a government against its people. The Minister should answer, how is the refinery going forward debt-free [Desk thumping] in the face of the debenture? Who will be the new guarantor of the loan? Is the taxpayer going to repay this $8 billion loan created by their friends Malcom Jones and Ken Julien, when the refinery is sold? Is the union going to pay this loan? And did you inform them of this charge against the assets?

Are you setting up the union for failure? We need answers in this matter. Madam, if this loan is not paid, you know what will happen? The creditor, they will take possession of these assets of the former Petrotrin. This Government spent over $3 billion of taxpayers’ money in severance to close down Petrotrin, to close it down. They further saddled the taxpayer with the debt to pay. They now want to sell the refinery for $4.5 billion or US $700 million.

11.00 a.m.
So the insanity is that the taxpayer has already paid $6.5 billion to close down Petrotrin and that does not include the interest cost. It has cost this country a tremendous amount to shut down Petrotrin in actual money and, of course, in suffering in the livelihoods of people. And at the end of the day we can only say this Government had no plan, they have no idea of what they were going to do. [Desk thumping]

First “yuh” say some going, then you say all, all going. Then further—then “yuh come and yuh say”, “Listen every man, woman and child in this country, the Government is not going to close down Petrotrin”; the words of the Prime Minister recorded. He said that, “In case you were opening your fridge and you did not hear me, every man, woman and child”. They are telling you the Government is not going to shut down Petrotrin. That is why I say you cannot believe a word this Government tells us. [Desk thumping] Not a word, not a word.

So, Madam, having reviewed the situation, it is clear that we now face the most severe challenges since we attained independence. There is urgent and desperate need for economic transformation, social regeneration and administrative modernization if we are to achieve prosperity and a better quality of life for our citizens. We have taken our role—as the country’s Opposition for the last five years we have taken that very seriously. We think that should be a major responsibility of any party in Opposition as you prepare for taking back government. I see this as a sacred task. It cannot be that you must wait as they have done. You get into government, then you fish around, fumbling, to see what you could do, and cannot do, and should not do. We have seen the results of not having a plan of that approach. I want to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, with or without an LED light bulb. [Desk thumping] There is light.
So this is our task, getting T&T working again. Here is our plan for the way forward. Today I will share with you some of our comprehensive plans for the transformation of our nation. We will get the job done because the PNM talks, and the UNC works. [Desk thumping] We have the vision to transform our country so each citizen can enjoy a better quality of life by getting sustainable jobs, greater safety, improved access to quality health care, affordable housing, and of course, equal opportunities for all. We will govern, Madam. We will have this plan so that we could govern seven generations ahead. The UNC is light years ahead of the PNM; they have bulbs, we have plans. [Desk thumping] They have talk, we have action. [Desk thumping] So here it is we developed a national economic transformation master plan to rescue our nation, to resurrect our nation.

The new UNC master plan lays out a comprehensive suite of policy initiatives and programmes to resurrect the economy. Planned at the top of our list of priority, we create 50,000 new jobs. We did it in our last term, we have a track record, it means we can do it again. [Desk thumping] Madam, this plan was formulated from insightful views and consultations with key stakeholders and experts, and we have it also aligned to the UN STGs, the sustainable goals, in which the international committee endorses the policy framework for a world free of poverty. In other words, we have aligned our plans with those development goals from the UN.

For far too long our country’s economic fortunes have been too dependent on the energy sector and there has been nothing in the Minister’s various budgets and the Government’s plans, or no plans, for breaking this dependency. Transformation and new business development are at the heart of our plan. While we continue to hold strongly that the energy sector will still help development, we do believe that we must go and grasp projects in the non-energy sector. Our plan
embodies a business unusual spirit. The private sector in our plan is being called forth to take the lead in strategic projects while the new UNC government will play a facilitative role. Let me repeat, a new UNC government will play a role in facilitation. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, we have built our plan on five interconnected guiding principles. Principle one: People-centred development, getting people back to work. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I will give the main headings for the principles on which we base our plan and my colleagues will develop those for me. We continue to be guided by the principle that the highest mission of any society is the development of its people. That is our core philosophy of the UNC and so I say, people-centred development principle.

Second, principle two: Pro-business. Allow the private sector to drive growth and development. We will follow a pro-business strategy which allows the private sector to be the main driver of economic growth, transformation and sustainable development. A new UNC government will focus on improving the ease of doing business, tackling crime, removing obstacles to business growth and expansion. And attracting local and foreign investments by providing an enabling environment and the incentives.

Madam Speaker, principle three: Resilience, deeper economic reforms but with a human face. [Desk thumping] That is a powerful source for sustainable development and so we, a new UNC government, will focus on improving our economy’s resilience to future shocks, bringing the budget into balance, stabilizing high public debt, protecting our external position and safeguarding financial stability. Reducing poverty—these are the things we look at for the human face—closing income inequality, providing a proper safety net for the poor. All these will form an important part of our plan. Madam, it is well understood that one
hand does not clap, and therefore, we must collaborate to get it done because people issues need to be balanced with policy and direction. It is not just a numbers game.

Principle four: Local content. Give people a sense of ownership and independence is very important. [Desk thumping] Local content has the potential to stimulate broad-based development. You will give people a sense of ownership, of buy-in, an independence to all in our society. So, therefore, all projects will include opportunities to maximize local content and local value added, through jobs, skills training, procurement, goods, services, technology transfer.

Principle five: Sustainability, promoting environmental stewardship. And so we are blessed with abundant natural resources, Madam. Forests, wildlife, rivers, wetlands, coastal marine eco-systems, of course the beautiful Caribbean, blue Caribbean Sea. We are blessed with tremendous natural resources. But the natural environment, being the foundation of our well-being, is being seriously eroded. And so we must deal with environmental issues and I will give some details in terms of the environmental plans.

So, those are the five principles which underpin. They form the foundation blocks of the plans that we will put out.

I turn now to the actual master plan. National Security: I have put this first, Madam Speaker, because it is always said, “if you dead, you cannot enjoy any of the other great things in your country”. This Rowley regime has been a total failure when it comes to the protection of our citizens. [Desk thumping] Although the Minister said they spent $6 billion annually on national security, in spite of that, Madam, since they came into office 2,023 persons have been murdered, 2,023, 2,023 persons, Madam, murdered and the crime continues. I do not lay any blame at the feet of the TTPS or the Commissioner. In fact, I want to commend
the Commissioner and the TTPS for that horrendous discovery of persons in cages and so on. Let us give them thanks, TTPS and the Commissioner of Police. *[Desk thumping]* And so I do not put that, what is happening in crime, at their feet.

You see, they have mismanaged the affairs of national security, so much so that the Commissioner of Police constantly complains about funding as he is unable to maintain vehicles, police stations. I am told you “cyah” even get food to feed the police dogs, “doh” have money. Maybe if the Minister of National Security was not so busy trying to steal the Commissioner’s thunder— [*Laughter*] He seems to want to match him each time, whether it is a black shirt, or whether it is a camouflage long-sleeve something. [*Interruption*] Minister is something resembling police. If he stop doing that and, you know, put his mind to try to come up with the policy things we will be better off.

I am saying they have mismanaged, they are complaining constantly about funding. Madam, maybe if he was not so busy trying, as I said, TTPS would have the resources they need. The air guard is unable to go in the air, the coast guard is unable to guard the coast. There is no money to pay for fuel and staff and the staff for the existing fleet of vessels, no money to pay them. But “they gone down” Australia, gone Down Under, to do what? Buy two more boats.

**Mr. Charles:** No sense.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Now they come with some promises to steal—they come with more promises in an attempt to hoodwink the population. Well, let us see the facts, okay. The Minister in this budget statement told this country, “Hey, we going to help these policemen, you know. We have to give them something”. Two hundred tablets for police vehicles. You know what that means, Madam Speaker?

**Hon. Member:** That is not to eat you know.
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know what that means, Madam Speaker? The Minister of National Security, I know this is hurting you because you are totally incompetent.

Mr. Charles: Totally incompetent.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Totally. [Desk thumping] Two hundred tablets for police vehicles. That means that the 723 vehicles will be out of tablets. They have 923, 723 “no tablet”. Fifty dashboard cameras. What this means?—873 vehicles will be without dashboard camera, 873. Sometimes, you know, even when you get around with these things, by the time it leaves wherever the warehouse is, you would have none to distribute to the seven divisions of the police and the various units of the police. Three hundred body cameras. There are about 6,768 officers. When you give these 300 there will remain 6,468 officers without. So this promise that you are making, it is a start, but you have been talking about these body cameras for how long now? How long? Four years, man. Four years.

You know, I am told that things are so bad. I am told that they gave them 180—prison officers—180—what you call them? Stab proof vests.

Hon. Member: Two hundred and fifty.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Two hundred and fifty. You promised them 180. I am—it is alleged that you gave them only 180 out of the 250. I am told that of the 3,000 prison officers, you gave them 250 firearms, leaving 2,750 officers without. I am informed that the prison vehicles are in such a state of disrepair, the prisoners had to help to push a prison vehicle where it shut down on the Priority Bus Route, man. Are you for real? Are you for real? And you come here crying crocodile tears. We had brought serious crimes down, let me remind you, to the lowest in 32 years. [Desk thumping]

We intend to do that again and bring it down furthermore with our plan. So
what are some of those plans? What are they? One, while they speak of a very small drop in the ocean, we intend to introduce the technology in all police vehicles and the body cameras on all police officers within that five-year term. You all had your five-year term—four, you are now going to start. So you could never get to give all. We will do it because we will be there for five years. \[Desk thumping\] We will fill the vacancies at the Office of the DPP. \[Desk thumping\] We will resource the Witness Protection Programme and modernize the Justice Protection Act.

We will build judicial complexes for court matters to be completed quickly. And you tell us when we leave this building you are going to outfit this building for courts. It will be a UNC government who will do that. \[Desk thumping\] Because you know why? Four years you have done nothing with respect to court structures and therefore, in the short time you have left, you know how “you always promising” and the promises never materialize.

11.15 a.m.

Further, we will implement the electronic monitoring bracelets. Now, when we left, we had passed the law since then in our time. We had put certain things into train, I think MP for St. Augustine would tell you more about what he had done with these bracelets. You know, five years later—four years later, what has happened with these bracelets? What has happened? We will implement that programme. \[Desk thumping\]

We will repeal and replace the now outdated Domestic Violence Act [Desk thumping] to protect our families. We will establish a proper National Operations Centre, as it was originally designed, instead of some watered-down version like you pick them up and put them under SSA, is it? Under the SSA. We need a standalone National Operations Centre, man. [Desk thumping] This is First World

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where that centre will have it minute by minute, will know everything happening in the grid in the country and therefore be able to instantly respond. Yes, to respond. We will take an urgent review of the commission of inquiry on the attempted coup, to look at the recommendations for implementation. We had started it and this has not been continued. We will reestablish the Ministry of Justice. [Desk thumping] We will make quarterly allocations—releases to the TTPS and they do not have to go every Monday morning and knocking on door and begging. Quarterly releases, so they can plan by the quarter. When it is that you allocate “X” and you give them—you minus from that “X” and every Monday they have to beg to get money to buy dog food. Is this Trinidad and Tobago at this time, in this world, in 2019?

We will have rehabilitation—for rehabilitation, the establishment of a criminal review commission that would be vested with the power to review the record of criminal offenders. We will suggest a later retirement for members of the defence force and we will do that in conjunction with the defence force. [Desk thumping] Because right now they retire at the age 45, 47 years I believe, and to do that after so much training, when they will have great training and they will have great institutional memory, they have to leave. So we will review that age, so that we can benefit from their institutional knowledge and their training.

We will utilize part of the UWI Debe Campus for training our protective services. [Desk thumping] At this campus law enforcement officers will be able to pursue a diploma or undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and in addition for that kind of training, we will put a forensic science centre at that campus. So we will have the officers training for degrees in forensic, forensic science and we will also put a centre there, because the centre we have just cannot cope with what we have to do.

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This will be a training facility in evidence processing similar to a dated teaching hospital model. These programmes will allow our servicemen and women to build sustainable and fulfilling careers, while they perform a duty to our nation. All members of the protective services should at least have some minimum level qualification at this time and in this age of our country. And it does not mean that those who are there [*Desk thumping*] that you will have to fire them; what it means is that you can give them in-service training; whilst they are still gainfully employed, we can upgrade the officers, Madam. We need that, this is 2019. Soon all members of the force will be sent to this facility, to obtain a minimum diploma before taking up active service. [*Desk thumping*] So in other words, training is very important. That was national security.

Madam, I turn now to public finances and what I have termed “restoring fiscal sanity” because what has been happening, the fiscal policies have been totally insane. A new UNC government is committed to restoring fiscal sanity through robust tax reform, divestment of non-strategic state enterprises, containing the cost of government operations and strengthening economic growth. [*Desk thumping*] We are confident that these efforts will ensure a more stable macro-environment, a sustainable debt trajectory and an improved business climate to attract new investments to create sustainable jobs, reduce poverty and increase prosperity for all.

Madam, I will deal first with what I have termed “fiscal poverty”. We will proclaim and implement in full the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act. We will ensure that each Ministry has a unit and these units are properly resourced. For four years, as I said, they have paid lip service, still cannot get it and I suspect we will never get it proclaimed until the day before general
election. So that they continue to do murky deals, yes, without the legislation.

Second heading, Madam, second area we would look at is “fiscal responsibility”. A new UNC government will commit to the foreign fiscal responsibility initiatives and we will do so firstly through debt consolidation and we will craft a management strategy. A UNC government will honour the debt to local contractors \([Desk thumping]\) of goods and services that they provide to Government and we will also deal with the issue of VAT refunds within a realistic time frame by presenting the debt management plan. So let us hear what we do.

First of all, a new UNC government will commit that interest payments from the HSF for two years, in the first instance, we will commit that to the debt repayment, whilst the economy gets time to grow. \([Desk thumping]\) We will address the issue of consolidating indebtedness into longer term debts, determine how it will be publicly presented to reflect the true debt position—I talked to you just earlier about off book and on book, therefore you never know what is the true picture. So that we can publicly present the true debt position, whilst at the same time consider the extent this will affect international credit ratings.

The challenge will be effectively managing the balance between transparency to citizens, but also with the risk of downgrade. That is the balance we will have to meet in this debt consolidation strategy. The UNC will engage the credit and multilateral agency about the debt management plan. The new UNC government will establish a formal fiscal debt target and communicate these to the market and the general public. We intend to run a balanced budget position over 2020 to 2025 \([Desk thumping]\) and to stabilize public debt at about 60 per cent of GDP by 2025. We will fully integrate the HSF into the fiscal framework. The legislation governing the HSF will be amended—they promised it, promised it, promised it; four years have come and gone, nothing happening.
The legislation governing the HSF will be amended to de-link the current integrated stabilization and heritage aspects of the fund, to separate them. The stabilization mandate, the HSF, will be explicitly linked to support the budget, while the heritage mandate will be aligned to supporting national development for future generations. [Desk thumping] We will establish an investment policy for all funds held by the Government and that investment policy will ensure that these various funds obtain reasonable returns within certain agreed parameters. The funds will be managed by a specially established unit within the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance will be required to report to Parliament on the performance of these funds on a periodic basis. [Desk thumping] Too much Government by secrecy, too much Government by secrecy. We are committed to transparency and accountability to the public. That is a totally opposite to those on the other side. [Desk thumping]

Restructuring state enterprise is another area in which we can restore fiscal sanity. There are about 100 state agencies and statutory authorities and their subsidiaries operating across the economy on behalf of the Government as owner or part owner. This is massive state involvement. The State enterprise sector is supposed to contribute to the economy through foreign exchange earnings, employment dividends, payments and taxes, but that is not happening. Many of the state enterprises have significant losses, imposing a substantial fiscal drain on the Treasury and a drain on the taxpayer. We have seen where state agencies have been mismanaged, aided and abetted by Government. Where multi-billion dollar claims—please, Madam. Madam, I need your help.

**Madam Speaker:** Again, I just want to remind members that the Chamber ceiling is low so we have to speak in hushed tones, no long commentaries. Please continue, Member for Siparia.

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Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam. I am saying the State agencies have been mismanaged, aided and abetted by Government where multi-billion dollar claims have been withdrawn, as I shared with you before with the e Teck board and the Petrotrin board and so on.

Our approach, Madam, with respect to the state enterprises is this. Following consultations, a new UNC government will review, assess and make determinations about the following: which enterprises that we may wish to continue to hold on behalf of the people, which enterprises will better serve the country if they were out of government hands, which ones would do better as public private partnerships, which ones will assist with research and policy direction for government, in terms of climate change, poverty reduction, transformation heritage cultural preservation and awareness.

And so, Madam, after that assessment, we will do—we will put in place an employee share ownership plan for as many state enterprises as possible. [Desk thumping] Let there be buy-in, let there be ownership; you are part of your country; you own part of it. That is what we will do. Further, we will gradually divest selected and non-strategic state enterprises, thereby reducing the level of state ownership or removing government from several enterprises which have no strategic national importance or are financially a drain and they have no prospect of viability. These functions could be better carried out by private sector.

Further, we will transform the remaining state enterprises, to publicly owned companies. [Desk thumping] And so we can recapitalize these enterprises if necessary, placing up to 49 per cent of their shareholding on the local stock market. This will give citizens an opportunity to have a stake in their state enterprises. It will dramatically I think, Madam, with due respect, it will dramatically—can I please have—
Madam Speaker: Again I think, you know, Members have to be cognizant that this is long. We are accustomed to this, that we have long sittings and therefore to make it tolerable, we all have to try to control ourselves and our conversations, okay. Leader of the Opposition, please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I just said one of the things we will do is to place about 49 per cent of Government’s shareholdings on the local stock market so to give citizens an opportunity to be part-owners. They will have a stake in our state enterprises and I will say it, that this is where I got to, Madam, this will dramatically reshape the notion of economic participation and wealth creation. [Desk thumping]

We will ensure that publicly owned state enterprises are run efficiently by private sector firms. We will tender the management of these companies to private companies in an open tender under the proper procurement law that would be in place [Desk thumping] and we will have clear pre-qual and evaluation criteria. We will step away from Government interference in these enterprises and negotiate performance contracts with successful private companies to ensure that these entities are run efficiently while Government receives payments through taxes and dividends from the profits that are generated, in that way earning more revenue. That is how we can do it.

11.30 a.m.

We must engender a business development approach with strategic financial objectives and failure to meet those objectives must have review and repercussions. Decision makers must be held accountable for their actions or inactions, and the bottom line is that these companies must be profitable. The old days are gone. [Desk thumping]

Similar to the debt workout strategy I talked about for the public sector debt

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from the central government level, with respect to the state enterprises we will undertake a debt workout strategy for selected enterprises. State enterprise debt, of course, is a contingent liability. It is an off book, you do not see it. We will have to start to put it on the books and let people know what is happening. And, therefore, we will take that debt of selected enterprises, and we will put them into a special purpose vehicle that will undertake a full debt restructuring programme. [Desk thumping] We will establish a new centralized unit within the Ministry of Finance, staffed by experienced and capable individuals to oversee the management of the debt strategy for these enterprises. A special task force will be established and mandated to implement the debt workout strategy.

I turn now, Madam, to our plans for reforming public utilities. There is a greater need for a better quality of service across the board in our utility sector. Taxpayers should not be paying bills for a service that many of them do not receive. If we are asking citizens to do better, the State has a responsibility to do even better because of the social contract we must have with our citizens. All of these utilities have accumulated significant losses and, therefore, significant debt being a drain on the Treasury and on the taxpayer. WASA and T&TEC are in dire financial straits. The business models of all our public utilities have not been successful. Since these utilities perform essential activities, their transformation should not be done in the same manner as the other state enterprises. And so, we must ensure that the delivery system for water, waste water services and electricity supply is reliable and cost effective.

A new UNC Government will do the following: improve the operational efficiency of WASA and T&TEC, setting clear goals and targets, and following up with accountability which will be the mantra across the board. [Desk thumping] We will also undertake a debt workout strategy for both WASA and T&TEC. We
will place the debts of WASA and T&TEC in a special purpose vehicle to undertake a full debt restructuring programme. We will work with the RIC to strengthen the current regulatory framework for WASA and T&TEC to better protect consumer interest about price, quality and reliability to be delivered to our citizens and also, with respect to delivering targeted subsidies, Madam, and lifeline tariffs for the poor and lower income groups. [Desk thumping] We will carry out similar reform efforts to improve efficiency and performance of PTSC and TTPost.

I turn now, Madam, with respect to reducing the tax burden. I had said earlier when I identified the problems, this was one of the problems, the tax burden on the people. This Government has implemented several non-energy taxes, making the taxation regime more complex with a heavier burden on those who can least afford to pay, and made it even more difficult for government to collect taxes, Madam.

A new UNC Government will restructure the non-energy taxation regime so to make it simpler, fairer and pro-growth. The non-energy tax system will move away from one based on tax and income to a broad-based regime, which taxes consumption on goods and services. [Desk thumping] And, therefore, a new UNC Government will strengthen, reengineer and transform the Board of Inland Revenue, the VAT office and Customs and Excise. [Desk thumping] That strengthening is important to improve revenue collection and address weaknesses in tax administration and compliance. The Minister told us I think in his first budget, “We will bring an army of tax collectors”—I do not know if that army ever arrived, I really do not know—“bring an army of tax collectors and we will increase the tax revenue collection”. And I have told you earlier that tax revenue has declined [Desk thumping] in spite of all the new taxes. So we are talking about strengthening and reengineering—[Crosstalk] Madam, you know, if they want to
moan and groan, go outside, please. “Tell them take ah walk please, nah.” [Desk thumping] You always send my Members outside.

**Hon. Member:** Take a walk.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** “Take ah walk, please.” [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I am sure they will comply now. Please continue. Do not be distracted with your precious time, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you, Madam. May I say, I do not want to go against you, but it is not that they are distracting me, it is that I have to raise my voice louder in order to talk over their noise. So I thank you for your protection. Yes, Madam.

I started talking about the VAT office, customs and revenue offices to increase weaknesses in tax compliance and administration. So they were bringing this army of tax collectors, never happened, and so on. They now tell us what they want to do. They did not now tell us. They told us from the first year, four years later about revenue authority, revenue authority, revenue authority. Madam, we will scrap the proposed revenue authority. [Desk thumping] And that is why I said we have to strengthen the existing offices.

**Mr. Charles:** Very good. [Desk thumping]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The Minister in his presentation confessed that the BIR has demonstrated the capability and capacity for efficient tax administration. So why do you want to get rid of them? Why do you want this revenue authority? And from the draft legislation we have seen, we have seen that it places tremendous powers in the hands of the Minister. [Desk thumping]

We will scrap the proposed property tax. [Desk thumping] The Minister came back from Promised Land. They have been promising that, how long now? Since they came into office. Never happened. Scrap that. Now he wants to know
well, what will we do in place? This controversial tax is badly conceptualized. It will be a burden on citizens who have invested in their homes. Imagine a public servant, all over the years you take to build your house, you have a mortgage to pay. Now, at the end of your life when you are no longer working, you are retired, this burden that you want to place on them. There is no clarity on the formula to calculate the property tax; insufficient capacity to administer this very complex tax. Instead, Madam, we will engage in strengthening land and building taxes to ensure that it works in the interest of the citizens. [Desk thumping]

I am still dealing with reducing the tax burden. We will reduce personal income tax, the PAYE. [Desk thumping] This had started under the administration of former Prime Minister Panday and Minister Kuei Tung about how you go about doing this on a gradual basis. So you review the income tax regime to lessen the tax burden on the lower income and more vulnerable persons, and we do that, as I say, on a gradual basis. So the ceilings, we will set the ceilings, Madam, at a different level and at different rates. At the moment, everybody above a certain level you have to pay 25 per cent, but we are of the view that for the more vulnerable, that we should give a different kind of approach. So, more to come on that.

We will reduce corporation taxes. Businesses will pay between 18 and 20 per cent corporate tax. [Desk thumping] You cannot tax a country into prosperity. You cannot tax a business into prosperity. Many businesses have shut down—small, medium and big business. I keep mentioning in the USA where they reduced the taxation level for corporation tax, what has happened? More jobs have been created. Employment has grown in the USA. So when you can reduce this, you will be able to help the businesses to grow, create more employment, create more revenue and, therefore, get growth in your economy.
The VAT system, we will simplify it to make it fairer, simpler and easier to administer. [Desk thumping] We will consider removing, again, the VAT on the 7,000 items. [Desk thumping] Exemptions will be limited to necessities such as food, education, health and the VAT zero-rating will be limited to direct exporters who actually export goods, thereby bringing revenue, foreign exchange in the country. [Desk thumping] The Government has stifled businesses and crippled their cash flow through non-payment of the VAT refunds.

The Minister announced a kind of Band-Aid formula about giving them bonds. They cannot take the bonds, you cannot spend the bonds. You have paid the taxes, you need it back to keep the business going. So the bonds, in my respectful view, is a very bad idea to try to settle VAT refunds. [Desk thumping] What we will propose, Madam, what a UNC Government will do, a new net VAT refund, net VAT, Madam, very important, which allows them, instead of paying the money from new VAT down the road, offset it, offset it for what is owed. [Desk thumping] So if they have to today pay 2 million in VAT and they owe you four, set it off, offset it. [Desk thumping] A new net VAT refund system will be established to deal with these arrears.

And I ask the Minister, you know, you are so—they just like to hide things from people. The Minister comes here and tells us, when the UNC left, VAT arrears were 4.5 billion. Well, how much it is now? Why do you not tell us that? [Desk thumping] Why? Why do you want to hide it? Tell the country how much is owing in VAT arrears now after your four years. We need to know. We need to know in order to deal with it—you must know the problem in order to find a solution. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Lee: Tell them.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We will increase duty rates on non-essential
imports. All right? So to compensate for removing tax—income tax and so on—import duties will be raised, but it will be on non-essential items, Madam. [Desk thumping] Certain basic food, medicines and essential items will be exempt from import duties so to allow affordability to the poor and vulnerable. [Desk thumping]

Close tax loopholes. Again, we want more tax, we want more revenue. The answer is not to tax people more and more. So it is another way in which we can help with revenue. Create all tax loopholes. We will consider, Madam, the common practice of treating interest on Caricom countries’ bonds as tax exempt. We will consider stopping that to ensure that government receives its due share of taxes from those transactions. Over eight billion in taxes have been lost from this tax loophole. The common practice of, we may well be laundering profits via offshore institutions will be investigated and legislation introduced to bring closure to same. We can raise between 4.5 billion to 7.5 billion in domestic revenues per year by improving the efficiency of the tax system through these institutional reforms that I have shared with you. No revenue authority is needed, none. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, with these initiatives, we expect—these are the fiscal initiatives, Madam—to attain a balanced budget and stabilize public debt at 60 per cent of GDP by 2025. [Desk thumping]

I turn now to monetary and exchange rate policy. The UNC recognizes that the conduct of monetary and exchange policy falls exclusively under the purview of the Central Bank. A new UNC Government will commit to the following to help protect our external position: Work with the Central Bank to ensure a competitive exchange rate. [Desk thumping] The Minister of Finance will work with the Central Bank to make sure that our exchange rate is competitive, eliminating the current dirty managed float and allowing market forces to operate within a crawling band. Their transition to a more balanced foreign exchange
market will be supported by an opening up of the foreign market allocation system to allow [Desk thumping] for a far more equitable distribution of foreign exchange, especially to small- and medium-sized businesses. I do not know if you all have any idea—when last you “went down and watch in a bank and see man lining up” to get, what? A hundred US or US $200 and, therefore—

Mr. Young: They should just come by you.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister Stuart Young, they should come by your daughter. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member. Now, you see, this is what happens when crosstalk gets out of control. Okay? So that, may I ask that we all respect the Standing Orders? Leader of the Opposition, you will direct your contribution here. Members, in terms of comments, please restrain. It is a debate. You will get your opportunity to stand and speak. Member, if you will just withdraw that statement and let us proceed, please.

11.45 a.m.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Monetary and exchange rate policy—

Madam Speaker: Just—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, is she going to withdraw—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Oh, I am sorry—

Madam Speaker: No, no, no—no, no, no. Wait, wait, wait. [Crosstalk] It is not “is she”, okay? We remember that we call each other by our portfolios or the constituencies which we represent. So, Leader of the Opposition, I ask you, just withdraw that statement.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sure.

Madam Speaker: Do not let people lead you down a path that you know much better than.
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sure. “Do so eh like so”, but I will withdraw the statement. I withdraw it. I totally withdraw it in this House, Madam. You see, the truth hurts, that is what is going on. [Desk thumping] That is what is going on in this Parliament today.

I am saying as we transition into a more balanced foreign exchange market that will be supported by the opening up of the foreign market allocation for a more equitable distribution. That is where I was, and I came to talk about people standing in the lines, standing in the lines to get that foreign exchange in the bank. That is an important matter for this country, Madam. So it is the inequitable distribution. They have handled the monetary policy so badly.

In addition to the fact that you have scarcity of the forex, what is happening? There is a black market for US dollars in this country. [Desk thumping] That is what they have created. That is where we have gone back to, those bad old days. We will request the Central Bank to raise interest rates, and that, Madam, will help us with that, raising interest rates. It is because if your interest rates are better, you will invest your money, you will save. You will not take up your money and send it somewhere because when you are getting such a low interest rate here, what happens? There would be a competitive rate, you will get more money, more returns on your own money. We acknowledge the monetary policy consideration by the bank are always finely balanced against the lowering inflation, safeguarding the balance of payments and supporting economic growth. There is a fine balance.

The Ministry of Finance to request the bank to have monetary policy cooperate with fiscal policy as far as possible by raising the repo rate. [Desk thumping] This will send a signal for the transmission of higher and rising interest rates throughout the financial system, including an increase in savings, as I said before, and deposit rates. Higher domestic interest rates would help to limit capital
outflows, improve our foreign exchange availability. [Desk thumping] This will also help depositors and pension funds struggling with real negative returns in the low interest rate environment of the past decade. The UNC recognizes the need for closer coordination between fiscal and monetary policy to achieve and maintain macroeconomic stability. Madam, with these initiatives, we expect by 2025, we will build up international reserves to US $10 million. [Desk thumping]

Madam, I turn now to some other areas. One of the most pressing issues of economic transformation, Madam, has to do with the fact that for the four years they talk, and they are still talking and mumbling there, they did nothing. They have displayed irritation when you come to talk about economic transformation. You know, every time the Prime Minister is confronted with the old word—the old word was “diversification”, the new word today is “transformation”, [Desk thumping] but every time the word “diversification” came up, the Prime Minister seemed to get annoyed with that word. But that is the way we have to go, we have to transform. We cannot keep doing these things the same way, the old way and expect to get a different result, so we have to change. And one of the main pillars then, Madam, is for transformation we see is in agriculture, to create a food secure nation and to create jobs. [Desk thumping]

The fact is food production has declined to its lowest ebb ever under this administration. In their dying days they have now come to tell us they were going to give some tax free incentives; they gave those things already but it has not helped. [Desk thumping] It has not done anything. It has not worked. All these repeated promises and plans each year, talk and talk and no action. [Desk thumping] Why? You know why that is happening too? You did not do it at the start, you did not have a plan. You did not have a holistic plan. You are just vaille-que-vaille, fumbling, like “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod”, “disfumbling” and
stumbling, [Desk thumping] and then trying to come and mamaguys and fool people in this last few days that you have that, “We are going to do all these things”, all these grand plans all over again. We will not be fooled. We will not be fooled. [Desk thumping] This is an ad hoc attempt to make up for the woeful neglect they inflicted on the sector to the detriment of the nation’s food security. Remember they closed down Caroni Green, or something. Yes, and up to now they cannot give a reason why they closed it down. Just spiteful. Just spiteful. Some, like the Members on that side, will tell you it cannot be done, Madam, and some, meaning those on this side, we can get it done. [Desk thumping]

Madam, by reducing our nation’s high food import bill, and I said that is six billion, about $6 billion, agriculture will annually save us that $6 billion if we can reduce these imports. It will also save precious foreign exchange. It will also generate foreign revenue because we can export, so we will import less but we will export and get it. And of course it would help to create jobs and it would help in the fight against climate change. Agriculture will be the foundation of food security in our land. We will make it more attractive and commercially viable by implementing the right policies and institutions and ensuring that the necessary budgetary resources and land are available. Right now what the farmers are crying about? You come to give them tax incentive. What are they telling you? What they say, “Look, you must have land tenure and we do not have land tenure, and the State for four years has failed to put into place where you could get tax incentive, but that tax incentive is only for those with land tenure.” So again, “pie in the sky” plan, “pie in the sky” plan. Why did you not come and say, “We will work swiftly to deal with the issues of the land tenure, to process the applications”? So you cannot put—what they say—the cart before the horse. They are giving the incentives but not—sorry—when they cannot even apply for the incentives not
having the required qualification of land tenure, and, you know, it is very interesting.

I said we will make it more attractive in agriculture and commercially viable by implementing the right policies and institutions and giving it the necessary resources. You know, imagine, I was stunned a little when the Minister stood up to tell us, “For the first time in our history”—and this is an achievement under agriculture, eh—“First time in our history”—his Prime Minister is the first Prime Minister with an advisor on agriculture in the Office of the Prime Minister. [Laughter] You know, this thing was so unreal. It was so unreal. It was like a fantasy movie. You know what, “For the first time that is an achievement under agriculture”, but you know what I want to ask them, tell me this. Can you tell me what that advisor has achieved in this critical sector because everything has downed? But, you know, more important, was that the same advisor who advised the Prime Minister to say, “We cannot do agriculture because we have no land”? [Desk thumping] “What nonsense” does Minister Imbert like to say, “Nonsense—nonsense.”

We will revitalize traditional viable agriculture industries such as sugar cane. So the traditional ones, cocoa, coffee, citrus, rice and dairy, but we would also go into non-traditional commodities in which we have a comparative advantage and where there is significant market opportunity. [Desk thumping] You know, their vision is so short-sighted, all this laugh and thing going on there, you know they shut down Petrotrin which was to export things so we got money; we got foreign exchange, to do what?—to import the same things, the fuels, and the process project sale, lubricants, and so on. They shut it down, but they did the same thing with Caroni. You are laughing about sugar cane now, you shut down Caroni and now we have to import sugar. What kind of wrong side, wrong side, wrong side
policy is that? Shut it down and then laughing when I talk about sugar cane. I will show you, you just do not know what to do. In other countries, like Brazil, at that same time whilst you were shutting down the thing, in Brazil they were taking it to make stock feed, [Desk thumping] using it for so many things you can use it for. It did not just have to be for sugar.

So here we continue, Madam, non-traditional things now. We will go into non-traditional commodities, and those are the things where we in this country have a comparative advantage and where, of course, we have the advantage but we must also have market opportunities. This means encouraging the development of agricultural cooperatives in which small growers and others in the value chain can come together to pool resources, lower risks and own the business venture in collaboration where needed with Government. A new UNC government is committed to the following initiatives:

One, swiftly resolve all outstanding issues regarding former Caroni workers and cane farmers. [Desk thumping] Whilst we had to file a court case on behalf of those cane farmers to get access to the—the case we won. We won the case for cane farmers to get the EU funding, the further tranches. All has not been done because the case—there are so many of them so the cases were filed on behalf of some of them. So we will pay the cane farmers in full from the second and third tranches of the EU funds that were legally mandated for that purpose. We will lease 25,000 acres of Caroni lands to create agricultural parks to kick-start new agriculture. [Desk thumping]

We will lease 25,000 acres of the same to registered farmers and private sector investors to create agricultural parks at strategic locations.

We will put idle lands to work. [Desk thumping] These parks we propose to be of a minimum of 100 acres with the necessary infrastructure to focus on local
crops, new ones that we could substitute for imported food. We can also use them for organic super foods and non-traditional export crops.

We will redirect the CEPEP to provide labour and infrastructure to the farming community in these parks. [Desk thumping]

I am sharing the specifics with you today so that you understand the plans and policies are in place. There will be no honeymoon period when we get back into office and truthfully, our country cannot afford to waste any more time. We have wasted four years already. [Desk thumping]

We will align the PSIP to upgrade in the physical land infrastructure. A new UNC government will devote at least 10 per cent of the PSIP or some 500 million per year to develop and improve agricultural access roads, irrigation and drainage for these parks. [Desk thumping] The road infrastructure will be enhanced to reduce transportation costs between farmers and their farms, the processing plants, domestic consumers—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, just 53, please, I am being disturbed—

Madam Speaker: Members, again, you know, I am hearing a buzz. I do not know where it is coming from, please maintain the buzz. You might be compassionate in giving me an opportunity to rise but I think we could do the exercise another way. Any Member who finds it tedious could most probably visit our lovely water stations. Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Madam. Thank you so much. And so I am saying that the road infrastructure to reduce transport cost between the farms, processing plants, domestic consumers and air and sea ports.

We will develop an agriculture insurance protection plan system. [Desk thumping] We will establish a multi-peril agriculture insurance programme to cover farmers against loss from flooding, drought, pest and diseases, praedial
larceny, fire and business interruptions. [Desk thumping] Insurance coverage will be offered for crops, livestock, apiculture, aquaculture and will be mandatory for registered farmers. Private insurance companies will provide the policy coverage while Government will subsidize the insurance premiums and provide support through the Agricultural Development Bank which will be the executing agency for this.

We will eradicate the scourge of praedial larceny. [Desk thumping] Within recent time I have seen so many stories of people losing their livestock just a week or two ago, so we have to deal with this. It is a matter we could deal with. The prevalence of this is a serious threat to the livelihood of the farmers. Conservative estimates suggest that one-fifth of the value of farm output is taken by thieves which results in the loss of millions of dollars each year.

12.00 noon

We will therefore establish a praedial larceny squad within the TTPS, so officers will have full powers of arrest and back up and response to deal with this problem. [Desk thumping] We will establish a buy local campaign, a buy local agricultural campaign, to encourage citizens to buy more of our local products, and that will raise the profile of agricultural exports. We will also mandate local content for agriculture. This buy local campaign will be supported by more local content in agriculture. We will partner with countries who have mastered innovations in agriculture. Our government will partner with countries like Israel, the Netherlands, the Philippines and other countries such as India to strengthen our existing agri-centres of knowledge and innovation. Farmers will be trained and educated on specific leading edge technologies and practices that will maximize productivity of land space and minimize water and nutrient loss though advancements in green housing, drip irrigation, hydroponics and bioponics.
There is a lot more to agriculture than just planting cassava and raising goat and sheep, Madam. There is a lot more to it. There is a lot more. This will make the industry attractive and lucrative, by utilizing technology and business models that would see tremendous growth.

We will incentivize local innovation in agricultural practices, processes, and technology. We will implement a create-to-own policy at the University of the West Indies and at UTT, to drive innovation and commercialization of research.

We will establish an organic sugar and sugar derivative manufacturing and packaging facility, and that is why I talked about sugar cane. Since the closure of Caroni 15 years ago, we have spent $300 million doing what? Importing sugar, and not only that, all these thousands of people lost jobs. They lost their jobs. And so this is our suggestion: We will invite private investors to establish a new state-of-the-art cooperative sugar manufacturing company. This company will purchase sugar cane grown by private farmers at market based prices and will produce organic raw sugar and products like jaggery, I think it is called, for sale to the domestic and export markets. So what? We are creating jobs, yes, and as well we are getting revenue for what we will export from this industry.

We will establish the Brechin Castle Agro-processing Complex. On average T&T spends $510 million every year importing preserved vegetables, fruits and juices. We will again invite private investors to establish an agro-processing, preserving, drying, canning complex at Brechin Castle. This will capitalize on supplies from the agricultural parks that we propose, and a zero waste policy will ensure by-products of the processing, that we can use that for feedstock for farmers. So it is a circular plan, where one feeds into the other. A circular vision of how things are all interrelated and how they work.

We will create a fine or flavour cocoa industry. Fine or flavour cocoa is like
brown gold, and we have been blessed to have one of the highest qualities. We are one of the few countries that has the conditions, the soil, the climate and so on, to grow high grade Trinitario cocoa beans. You know, Madam, I was using an app from Google to spell check my document, and when I put in “Trinitario”, they said this word is not in our dictionary, and yet Trinitario is one of the best quality cocoa beans that you can get. It can fetch upwards of US $5,000 per tonne in a specialty or premium chocolate industry worth over $1.5 billion. So you have US $1.5 billion, so you have market space for this product—US $5,000 per tonne in a—oh, stop talking about “she, she, please nah, like little children or like we say ‘macomeh’ women or something.” [Laughter]

Madam Speaker: Members. Members to the front, again, I caution you all with respect to the chatter. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam. We will work with the Cocoa Development Company, cocoa farmers and stakeholders to create fine flavour cocoa products for the high end international chocolate market.

The expertise from places like the Netherlands, which is the world’s leading cocoa processing nation, will be sourced to establish private cocoa processing facilities in major cocoa-growing communities like Gran Couva, Tortuga, Moruga, Cumuto. We will also make available the technical services of the Cocoa Research Unit and the germ plasm bank at UWI, St. Augustine, to create a genetic bank for all the Trinitario cocoa trees on the island.

We come to the rice industry. We will have to rescue this rice industry. We spend, Madam, $135 million every year, to do what? Import rice. May I say when I was growing up I planted rice with my grandmother, and many, many people were farming rice. All that is gone, the curse of oil and gas. So people stop
producing the things that they eat, and decided to import. If we add up all these things that we import, which we can grow here, which we can do here, you see how much you are saving in foreign exchange. [Desk thumping] You will create jobs and you will save foreign exchange, and you will make foreign exchange by exporting some of these things.

So, we spend $135 million to import rice. We will work with rice farmers and other stakeholders to rescue this industry. It is on the brink. I think it is “collapsed”. I have here it is on the brink, but I think it is collapsed. Major problems contributing to the rice industry crisis involves lack of seed supply, recurring late Government payments to rice farmers and the uncertainty surrounding the planned divestment of the rice mill at Carlsen Field which processes the farmers’ paddy.

A new UNC government will join the Latin American Fund for irrigating rice to obtain new rice seed varieties and technical service, supplemented by certified rice seed production on 200 acres of land at El Carmen. We will bring lands into rice production. We will invite private investors to establish a new rice mill and parboiling operation.

I turn to the livestock industry. On average we import meat and meat products, you know how much money for the year? Madam Speaker, $745 million in meat and meat products. Can you imagine if we can rescue the livestock industry how much growth we will get, how many jobs we will create, how much foreign exchange we will earn? Yes, and that is where we want to be. We do not want to be taxing to get revenue. These are the plans to earn revenue, not from taxes. [Desk thumping] We will work with the farmers and others to revive the livestock industry.

We will expand—I do not want to mispronounce a French word—Morne
Jaloux and the La Gloria forage programmes, to encourage small ruminant farmers to improve livestock production, to reduce our high import bill, create revenue again, and save foreign exchange.

Let us talk about dairy farms now. We import about $655 million in milk and milk products. You know, that is how we get the food import bill, it is about $6 billion a year—$6 billion. You know how much you can do with that? How many hospitals, and schools and texts books and so on? So we import this. We will work with dairy farmers, private investors and others to rehabilitate the cow’s milk industry which has remained largely underdeveloped and like subsistence stage, except for a few large commercial farms in Carlsen Field, that is how it has been. Our goal is to become at least self-sufficient in cow’s milk.

When I was growing up I remember, again, my grandparents, I spent a lot of time with them, behind the house we always had cows; not a herd, one or two. So all the milk that we drank as children they produced it themselves from the cows. Paynoose, that too; got it from there, Madam. Self-sufficient in this cow milk production, we use technical assistance again from countries like Israel. They are a model for dairy industries worldwide.

We will introduce very high producing Israeli Holstein cows. You know why? Because they have a very high productivity yield. We will have computerized milking and feeding systems, which as I said learned from other countries. And what we can then do, Madam, we will trade map. We will have brand Carlsen Field as a sustainable dairy brand. [Desk thumping]

We will develop the dairy goat industry, working with farmers and stakeholders to get a more vibrant dairy goat industry. Consumers are now becoming more aware, smart people, of the health benefits of goat milk and goat cheese. We will help establish a central pasteurization facility to collect,
pasteurize and market goat milk. We will also provide technical assistance to improve productivity of milk yield per doe on all farms, and to improve the quality of milk to international food safety standards from farm to table.

The fishing industry: We will work with the T&T fishermen and other stakeholders to revive this industry. We will also protect fishermen from pirates at sea [Desk thumping] and vandalism of engines, fishing equipment and pause to carry out general infrastructure upgrades. We had done a lot at the fishing ports when we were in office. I think they built one and the people do not even want to go in it, is that true, somewhere in Diego Martin? Carenage. A fishing facility, sorry.

I think one of the most heartrending things that happened to fishermen in this country was with those seven fishermen recently—heartrending, and therefore something has to be done. [Desk thumping] We need the fish, so it has to be done. That was most heartrending. You know what was worse than that? First of all was when we discovered not a single Member of that Government, not one, offered any comfort, any hope, not a single one. You are so hard hearted. I just do not know. Laventille West, I do not know what happened with him. I really do not know.

[Crosstalk]

**Hon. Member:** “He fraid to go by water.”

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia, direct it this way.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am not doing anything, I am just watching this foolish person. [Desk thumping and laughter] I am not saying anything.

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order! Member for Siparia, just withdraw the comment directed to your colleague on the other side and let us proceed please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I withdraw and carry on. [Desk thumping] Fishing industry, revived.
Mr. Hinds: [Inaudible]—drunk. [Crosstalk]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You see, Madam.

Hon. Members: Put him out! Take a walk.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam, you will not get him to withdraw.

Mr. Padarath: “When yuh had be drunk in de Senate yuh didn’t say nothing.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Hinds: I withdraw that, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: Go take a walk.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Take a walk.

Madam Speaker: Now, we are going to start afresh from this moment. All that has happened we are leaving it behind, and we now are all going to comply by the Standing Orders. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you so much, Madam. “It hurting them.”

The truth hurts. [Desk thumping]

I move on to the coconut industry. Global demand—[ Interruption ] Madam, please, put him out, please, please.

Hon. Member: Put him out. Take a walk.

Madam Speaker: I am not hearing anything.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: He is repeating exactly what you asked him to withdraw.

Madam Speaker: I am not hearing anything. Let us continue.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I hear it very clearly.

Hon. Member: Everybody else hear it.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am sure the Hansard reporters will report it as they reported Roodal Moonilal’s comments.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia, I am on my legs. Please continue.
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you again. Coconut industry: Global demand for coconut products is growing at the rate of 10 per cent. So that means there is market. There is market space, market opportunities for coconuts. Supplies cannot meet demand for high end products such as coconut water, virgin coconut oil, and so on. There are strong niche markets emerging for coconut based snacks, milk, yogurt, ice cream, coconut flour and coconut sugar. And so a new UNC Government will work with CARDI and other stakeholders to replant at least one million coconut trees across mega farms and formerly neglected coconut estates in east and south Trinidad, and so we can lead a resurgence of the local coconut industry to earn foreign exchange to create jobs, and reduce our food import bill. [Desk thumping]

Forest industry and other wooden products: Nearly half of our land mass is covered with forests which we need to manage sustainably. We will plant valuable tree species such as teak, mahogany, samaan, cedar, pink and sandalwood to provide a heritage investment for generations to come. [Desk thumping]

12.15 p.m.

Again, when I was growing up, Madam, I remember another set of grandparents. You have maternal and paternal, the first set I spoke about was my maternal grandparents. They said, “We going down to a place called plantation”, and we would go, “rell hot sun and thing, eh”, go down there, going down on the road to Los Iros beach.

And what the Government had done then, which was a good thing, which is what I think we could do again, we were planting teak, but before they could plant the teak, they had to get the land cleared. So they allowed people, farmers, to go there, clear the land for a certain period of time and then what?—plant the teak. That is a heritage to come but it takes years, but that way you can ensure that you
have the lumber products that you will need. So I say that we will plant these valuable trees that we could use for lumber and so, you know, make sure we are creating revenue for our children and grandchildren down the road for generations to come.

We will develop our local furniture industry to meet most of our commercial and household needs and add value to our teak to create export market for furniture and sandal, furniture and wood products.

We will continue the beautification, highways and public places, again, you plant trees, flowers. When you drive along the highway I want you to remember, if you do go south, I want you to remember along the highways those trees that are now in full bloom, they were planted as an initiative under our time. It is in the vicinity of—where is it?—of Couva I think. Chaguanas along the highway, Charlieville, yeah. All right.

We will also capitalize on growing global demand for non-traditional food products. We will work with farmers and private sector investors to capitalize on the demand for non-cropped, non-traditional, and these are like hot peppers. I am told any hot pepper you can grow for export, it is snapped up very quickly, hot peppers, avocados, mangoes, soursop, breadfruits, pineapples.

We would streamline both the Agricultural Development Bank and NAMDEVCO and strengthen the operations to better finance agricultural projects on a more timely basis and therefore we could properly export these commodities onto international markets.

I am asking you, what time do I have to stop? End, end, end. Madam, under the agricultural initiatives, with these initiatives we expect by 2025 we will create 10,000 new jobs, cut the import food bill by $2 billion, generate an additional billion [Desk thumping] in agricultural exports. So we have targets as well and we
will have the time. They just have a couple of months left, so they cannot do any of the things promised by them.

I turn now to another driver for the economy, Madam Speaker, another sustainable driver to strengthen our national identity, and this is the creative industries. The creative sector, in addition to strengthening national identity, fostering a spirit of unity and diversity, can also contribute enormously to economic transformation and dynamism in our country, create jobs, bring in foreign exchange, create more revenue for our economy. We have an abundance of talent in music, in theatre, in dance, visual arts, film, literature and fashion. The creative arts suffer from a lack of private capital, managerial talent, business support, and they have a weak institutional framework. A UNC government is committed to the following initiatives to ensure that our creative arts sector becomes self-sufficient and flourishing.

A new UNC government will, one, establish a steel pan manufacturing industry in Laventille, East Port of Spain. [Desk thumping] We will do this in collaboration with Pan Trinbago and other stakeholders. We will establish a cooperative-type steel pan manufacturing facility, the birthplace of the national instrument, in Laventille. We will incentivize local and regional artistes who have global appeal to become brand ambassadors for the steel pan, and encourage local and foreign film producers and directors to use the National Steel Symphony Orchestra to produce musical scores for their films.

Let me tell you something, this Government since coming into office has not exposed these great men and women to any international audiences. This is a great revenue earner, this is the greatest—is the acoustical instrument that we have invented, the only one in the 20-what Century; 21st Century. Why do we not use them? The last time they were utilized and exposed internationally was under
Minister Lincoln Douglas during the time that we were in. [Desk thumping] So we will incentivize local and regional artistes who have global appeal to become ambassadors to expose this great instrument and music to the world. Again, when you get that exposure it means people will hire us and you make money, earn foreign exchange.

Further, we will develop a Trini creative arts street in the west Port of Spain. We will invite private investors to establish a space within the western side of the City of Port of Spain to showcase major iconic themes from each of the major countries which influenced our rich and diverse culture.

Three, we will establish a full carnival-in-a-box franchise for international markets. We will invite, again, private investors to develop and market their full carnival-in-a-box franchise to give us a cultural footprint in the wider world. [Desk thumping] The franchise will offer a complete Trinbago carnival package along with local musicians, and bands, and artistes, promotion event management, to any city in the world. Again, to do what?—earn foreign exchange, earn revenue.

We will assist more creative productions in developing strategic alliances and commercial arrangements with international studios and networks like Disney who are currently seeking, and they are always seeking, new original and creative content. [Desk thumping] We have that here, we have it here.

One example of this local production which I think is a highly, I mean, so successful, is that “Christmas Joy”. It is an annual concert which is the brainchild of master designer Brian Mac Farlane. This is something that we can expose to the world.

Another example is the Ramleela community festival and Hosay festivals, Divali, and the Tobago Heritage festival, all of which have strong economic potential and global cultural appeal. This is what we are talking about, creative
talent to be harnessed in order to earn revenue, to create jobs. That is what we want to do, to create sustainable jobs for the people.

Madam, five, we will market T&T as an alternative Bollywood/Nollywood island destination. [Desk thumping] As you know, Nollywood are movies from Nigeria, film makers from Nigeria, and Bollywood are Indian film makers, they have a great talent in film making. We will encourage them, Madam Speaker, market our destinations as alternative destinations for filming, again, creating jobs and earning revenue, forex and so on. We expect by 2025 these initiatives will generate about US $50 million in foreign exchange and contribute about 1 per cent to the GDP. [Desk thumping]

Another economic driver will be tourism, promoting brand Tobago and communities. Tobago is endowed with an enviable array of sandy beaches, coasts, barrier reefs, vibrancy and a very, very interesting history. It is also one of the most pristine environments in the western hemisphere and its main ridge forest reserve, but tourism, the mainstay of Tobago’s economy, is in crisis. Passenger arrivals have dropped sharply, occupancy rates have fallen dramatically, and several tourism-related loans have gone into default. This has led to the shutdown of the sanctuary resort hotel in Grafton on the sale of the Manta Lodge in Speyside. This has been brought about partly by the spectacular collapse of the sea bridge ferry service linking Tobago to Trinidad, and this has worsened the situation. The Magdalena Grand Hotel has been running into financial difficulties.

The time has come to develop the tourism potential of Tobago fully. We will move away from the outdated thinking of the current Government and focus on what makes Tobago so unique, its developed but semi-rustic, idyllic environment rather than just a destination [Desk thumping] for sun, sea and sand, because we compete with so many other Caribbean islands and elsewhere for sun, sea and sand
visitors. So we have to go outside of that. Yes, we will still attract those visitors who want sun, sea, and sand, but we also have to go further. And this offers, this environment of Tobago, offers opportunities in several niche markets such as eco-tourism, diving and water sports, events, and cultural attraction, weddings and honeymoons, historical sites and health. We promote Tobago for these as well.

When we completed that Scarborough Hospital in Tobago we said that that was to help us to attract medical tourists to come to Tobago, again, bringing revenue and so on. That is what the Couva hospital was about, to bring people from other countries who would come. [Desk thumping] They will come, and when they come they will pay for the hospital. Our citizens will get it free, but they will bring foreign exchange from the islands. People go Venezuela and other places, that state-of-the-art place would have given us medical tourism, [Desk thumping] brought revenue, created jobs, but out of spite and malice, they will not open the hospital, they will not open. I tell you, a new UNC government will open that hospital. We will. We will. [Desk thumping]

I come back to tourism sector in Tobago. A new UNC government is committed to working with the THA and other stakeholders for the following initiatives. One, invite through proper procurement private sector investors to build and/or manage the first locally branded hotel resort in Tobago, [Desk thumping] the first locally branded. Invite international investors to establish an international cruise ship marina complex in Plymouth. [Desk thumping] That complex will attract larger cruise liners such as Royal Dutch Caribbean and Carnival to the shores of Tobago, boosting tourist arrivals and the demand for local goods and services. Plymouth is well-suited to host this complex because we will have at the complex fuel bunkering services, shopping and entertainment with local content to promote the Tobago brand.
Three, we will designate Tobago as a duty-free port. [Desk thumping] We will establish a proper rescue and rebuild loan programme for Tobago hoteliers. [Desk thumping] We will restrict the loan guarantee programme administered by the Tobago Tourism Development Fund into a proper rescue and rebuild programme.

We will recapitalize the Tobago Tourism Development Fund and to provide a high interest rate subsidy and extend the loan maturities. We will develop the north-east Tobago as an eco-tourism destination, the flora and fauna at Charlottesville, Speyside, Main Ridge Forest Reserve, have considerable potential for the private sector to further develop the tourism product, this tourism product, north-east Tobago, whilst at the same time we will be protecting our environment.

The eco-tourism product could include eco-lodges, a biological research institute, and revival of the agricultural base especially, as I said, cocoa production. Again, building brand Tobago, we will develop a creative Tobago creative arts street.

Seven, we will invest in local hoteliers for high standard quality guest houses, apartments, and hotels. We will increase training of hoteliers’ staff for optimum service delivery. We will invest in-service training for students at the TTHTI in Tobago. We will invest in making Tobago restaurants premium restaurants whilst maintaining local content. [Desk thumping]

We will support a renewed Tobago tourism thrust with our commitment to a fully functioning and efficient sea bridge. [Desk thumping] They crashed the sea bridge as they crashed the economy, as well as a proper functioning, reliable air bridge, and also to look at security matters, adequate security matters for the protection of the people of Tobago.

We expect by these tourism initiatives we will generate 4,000 new jobs,
generate an additional US $250 million in foreign exchange, obtain US $500 million in FDI flows, for foreign direct investment inflows, and increase tourism arrivals to about 100,000 persons.

I turn now to another prosperity engine, the economy, infrastructure, connecting people, places and communities. Infrastructure is obviously central to every aspect of life. Our roads, highways, airports, sea ports are key to connecting places, people and communities, as well as spreading income, wealth and development across the country wherever people live. Yet daily we are impacted by a failed inadequate, underdeveloped infrastructure. This is apparent in the deterioration of our roads and highways, overburdened public transport system and countless unproductive hours spent in traffic. I think there are some people referring to Trinidad as a “pothole capital” of the Caribbean; substantial investment will be needed to deal with this.

12.30 p.m.

And so, our initiatives in this sector, infrastructural sector, this prosperity engine, are as follows: A new UNC government will be committed to the following initiatives regarding infrastructure and private investors would be invited to bid to use their own money, Government will be facilitated with these initiatives.

One, redesignate Chaguaramas as a special development zone. [Desk thumping] We will continue the work started while in office to engage the CDA and other stakeholders to transform the 14,500-acre peninsula in north-west Trinidad into one of the Caribbean region’s most idyllic investment and entertainment destinations. [Desk thumping]

Two, we will create a south-west peninsula special development zone linking Cedros to Moruga. And the reason why Cedros and Moruga and not
further, we do not want to interfere with the forests there in Moruga because that is great lungs for our country creating green [Interuption] green—

**Hon. Member:** Forget her.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where you come from? [Laughter] You just suddenly appear and start disturbing me. The Speaker gave everybody warnings. [Laughter] The Speaker warned everybody when you were not here. Lord. Where you come from?

We will create a south-west peninsula special development zone linking Cedros to Moruga. We will invite private investors to create a special development zone linking Cedros. This will become a major economic hub in the south-west peninsula. [Desk thumping] This zone will comprise a commercial port, agriculture, real estate, housing, and other business activities as well as, very important, a military base. [Desk thumping]

Three, we will create a south-east peninsula special development zone linking Manzanilla up in the east to Mayaro in the east. We will invite private investors to create this development zone linking Manzan to Mayaro. This will become a major hub in the south-east peninsula of Trinidad. This zone will comprise ecotourism, tapping into the enormous potential of the Nariva Swamp, also agriculture, real estate, housing and other businesses. So we have the north-west peninsula, south-east peninsula, north-east, north-west. Then we have down in the south-west corridor, and then we go down the whole east coast, Manzan to Mayaro. We will build highway systems to link economic zones and growth poles. Our colleagues would talk a little more about those growth poles and zones. We will invite private investors to build one high quality, high capacity highway and extend an existing one linking the new zones, economic zones and growth poles across Trinidad. The new highway would be the one from San Fernando to
Mayaro, [Desk thumping] we will build it. We will build it. [Desk thumping] The Point Fortin highway will be extended to Cedros. [Desk thumping] The Manzan/Mayaro—may I have some water please?

The Manzan/Mayaro Road will be upgraded to support development on the south-east economic zone. These highways and roads would link many communities along the Naparima/Mayaro Road.—the MP for Naparima would be happy for that—along the Naparima/Mayaro Road—Mayaro would be happy for that—and remote areas such as Granville and Los Iros, and bring in more commercial, new commercial opportunities.

Five, we will establish an aircraft maintenance repair and operations hub at Piarco. [Desk thumping] And please leave the airport with the name Piarco in honour of our First Peoples. Leave it. Leave it there. Leave it there. Why do you want to change that? Nothing better to do. We will invite private investors to build and manage aircraft, maintenance, repair and operations hub in the AeroPark at Piarco Airport. Trinidad and Tobago serves as an aviation centre for the wider Caribbean. We have significant experience in airport administration, air traffic management, aircraft inspection and air navigation services. We will leverage these strengths into building a comprehensive aircraft facility, as I mentioned, to provide for maintenance, line maintenance and aircraft painting. We will also open the UTT Aviation Campus at Camden to provide a path for students and graduates [Desk thumping] of aviation training programmes to apprentice or work at the hub.

Six, we will develop T&T as a major international airline hub for the Caribbean and South America. [Desk thumping] We will sign the necessary air service agreements with international airlines which have routes to major cities in Asia and the Middle East. Did you see recently Guyana has signed an air
agreement—Guyana—with the Emirates, and this is what I am seeing.

Hon. Member: Qatar.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Qatar airlines. So we will partner then with these major airlines. We will invite the private investors to build and lease to the Airports Authority a new start-of-the-art terminal dedicated to international flights to be used by these major airlines. The existing facility be converted into a terminal hub for Caribbean travel.

Seven, we will establish water-taxi hubs along the western coastline from Felicity to Cedros. [Desk thumping] We will invite private investors to establish that water-taxi hub at Felicity, Carli Bay, Point Fortin and Cedros. This will assist greatly in moving people in and out of Port of Spain and San Fernando, thereby helping what? Reducing the traffic congestions on that highway. Madam, I do not know if you will ever believe and understand for people coming to work in Port of Spain from outside, that traffic gridlock takes you hours as you are coming into the city. This can help to reduce traffic. Each water taxi hub will catalyze economic development in that area, create business opportunities, generate employment, provide the travelling public with an essential good and service. We expect that these initiatives would create 5,000 new jobs and generate US $1 million FTI inflows [Desk thumping] by 2025.

I turn to another prosperity engine, renewable energy, reducing our carbon footprint. The UNC is committed to ensuring a sustainable energy future for T&T by strategic transformation of the energy matrix of our country. Energy is all around us daily, we require to cool our homes, to power industries, drive cars, cook our food, turn on our lights. Every single aspect of daily life involves the use of energy. Now we acknowledge that most of our energy comes from fossil fuels. Indeed, that is what built the modern world but they also created price volatility,
unequal access, and, of course, rising carbon emissions. As a progressive society we have now learned how to harness the sun and the wind, the rivers and the oceans, energy from under the earth and above it, from plants and animals. Renewable energy is critical to a sustainable future for our planet and for humanity.

The world is approaching a point where fossil fuels, oil and gas and coal, well coal went, that was the last industrial revolution when other things take over coal. Coal was the main energy. That is why he talked about the fourth industrial revolution now. The world is approaching a point where fossil fuels are becoming depleted and there are these increasing concerns about climate change and environmental distraction. This is driving very rapid investment into renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal energy and various forms of biomass. Over the coming decades, alternative energy sources will power more homes, streets, communities, ships and planes. Further, our overdependence on fossil fuels has helped to make us one of the largest carbon emitters in the world per capita, in per capita terms, and therefore what does this all mean, we need to increase our share of renewable energies in our overall energy matrix.

A new UNC government will be committed to the following renewable energy initiatives: Establish a solar energy park in Tamana. [Desk thumping] Again, inviting private investors to bring the money, we will do this park, Government will facilitate the work. This park will develop energy efficient modular solar solutions. So people “doh” want light bulb, you know. These are the kinds of solutions that we can get to earn revenue and so on, create jobs, solar tech park. You know, the last day we were here, Monday, I walked in here and I saw two machines, I was not sure what they were, and I want to congratulate the Parliament for going solar [Desk thumping] or environmentally friendly with

UNREVISED
appropriation (financial year 2020) bill, 2019 (cont’d)
mrs. k. persad-bissessar sc (cont’d)

respect—for going environmentally friendly with respect—

hon. member: solar.

mrs. k. persad-bissessar sc: oh please!—by having—[crosstalk]

madam speaker: members—

mrs. k. persad-bissessar sc: like little children.

madam speaker:—could you all please keep silent! member for siparia.

mrs. k. persad-bissessar sc: yes, madam, with respect to environmental initiatives and so on, and green initiatives, i congratulate the parliament for the two machines to stop us from using the plastic bottles and so on. [desk thumping] but you know whilst that is a great thing, there are thousands of people who do not even have water in their taps right now far less for green water initiatives, but we move along. [desk thumping]

so i was talking about solar, solar energy park in tamana. this will develop energy efficient modular solar solutions which can be retrofitted to existing buildings or integrated to the new construction projects and uses several other areas such as marine communication and transport. tamana solar tech and supply solar technologies through licensing and supply agreements and the product supervise specialist turnkey energy solutions to communities within our region. again, create jobs, create revenue, create foreign exchange too. we will incentivize the purchase of both new and used electric and hybrid vehicles [desk thumping] including, through reduction or elimination of import duties. all public institutions will be mandated to purchase electric vehicles for their fleets. a pilot project will start with the ptsc fleet, extend to wasa, t&tec and ttpost. we will lead by example. [desk thumping] we will also provide incentives to the private sector to use solar energy charging stations for their electric vehicles, install solar carports, repurpose electric vehicle batteries beyond their useful life. again,
this will cut our fuel imports and save us very valuable foreign exchange.

Three, we will establish a green building incentive programme. A green building programme uses minimum amounts of energy, consumes less water, generates less waste and creates space for healthy and comfortable living. Public housing developments built by the HDC or other government agencies will be outfitted with renewable energy technologies. Also, all lighting in these public housing developments to be solar-powered, solar or wind-powered. Private sector companies participating in the green building programme will benefit from, among other things, attractive financing packages from the Home Mortgage Bank. Persons purchasing green homes will benefit from, among other things—[Interruption] What are you worried about me? Every word I pronounce, you want to say it better. [Crosstalk] Persons who would buy green homes will benefit from, among other things, a lower mortgage rate through the TTMF. Town and Country will encourage green buildings, energy efficiency systems and solar and other renewable features in homes and buildings.

Four, we will develop a policy for feed in tariffs to encourage the use of renewable energy technologies. We will request the RIC to develop a policy for feed in tariffs. This will allow citizens and companies who invest in renewable energy systems for their own use to have the ability to sell any surplus electricity to the national—[Desk thumping] We will make greater use of the Green Fund for NGOs, NPOs and CBOs for projects geared towards environmental awareness, protection and climate change. Madam, with these initiatives, we expect by 2025 that we will create 3,500 new jobs, we will cut the fuel bill by 500 million, and we will raise the share of renewable energy to 5 per cent. [Desk thumping]

I turn now to the digital economy, Madam. And this digital economy will leapfrog us into the fourth industrial revolution. Technology is a great equalizer,
an opportunity creator. We must build more services to promote inclusion and empower the average citizen in a way that removes the barriers and opens new possibilities. New possibilities open up for starting a business, accessing funding, generate revenue, and ultimately, building sustainable wealth. We will create an entrepreneurial class.

12.45 p.m.

I want you to imagine, Madam, Aldon using his phone, mobile, to sign up for a national digital ID which he can then use to unlock a suite of government services, including basic public services and grants. Imagine Camille opening a bank account from her mobile phone and then making and receiving payments for her micro business from that phone. [Crosstalk] Imagine Lester being stopped by a police officer, using his mobile phone to show proof of his drivers permit and vehicle insurance. That is what technology can do. Imagine Leela receiving her payments for her housekeeping services right on her mobile phone instead of cash and running the risk of getting the cash stolen. “It coming”, stay tuned, it is coming, four years later. It is time to democratize access to essential services with an environment which is entrepreneurial and inclusive; we must leave no one behind. [Desk thumping]

Today the new technologies of the fourth industrial revolution are giving birth to brand new business models and economic opportunities. The tech revolution comprising the internet of things, big data, advanced analytics, robotics, artificial intelligence and augmented reality can give T&T a great chance to speed up and transform the economy. Our education system produces graduates with science and technology skills but there are insufficient research centres and systems to place the graduates to continue to work in the sector and to keep up with rapid advances. We will develop our local model of the classic triple helix
university using private sector and government to leapfrog to the fourth industrial revolution. We can do it, UNC works, PNM talks, but the UNC works. \textit{[Desk thumping]} A new UNC government will undertake the following initiatives in order to harness the digital economy for the fourth industrial revolution.

One, we will increase investment in R&D, research and development, to 1 per cent GDP. \textit{[Desk thumping]} UTT will play special emphasis on research into the internet of things, artificial intelligence, robotics, block chain, securing IP protection, intellectual property protection for this research wherever possible. NIHHERST will conduct a foresighting exercise to determine which best bets digital technology areas have high growth and earnest potential to broaden adoption and use within specific industries.

Two, we will establish a national venture capital fund to promote technology and entrepreneurship. \textit{[Desk thumping]} Three, we will invite private investors to establish a digital innovation park in Sevilla. This park will attract entrepreneurs and firms to create a cluster of world class export companies in selected areas of innovation, technology, coming out of the foresighting exercise I spoke of before. Such areas— \textit{[Crosstalk]} such areas—

\textbf{Hon. Member:} Foresighting?

\textbf{Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:}— “Foresighting”, go and check it. \textit{[Laughter]}

Such areas could include—

\textbf{Hon. Members:} Read. Google it.

\textbf{Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:}—fintech, agricultural innovation, health tech, payment processing, software development and call centres, business process, outsourcing. We will provide appropriate incentives to attract the research centres of technology giants such as Microsoft, Google, IBM, Facebook and Amazon to set up innovation launched by us within the Sevilla digital park. \textit{[Desk thumping]}

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This will provide a platform for our local software developers and IT professionals to access regional and global ideas and opportunities.

1. We will institute a national digital identification programme.
2. We will implement a national e-payment platform for government service. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Charles: “They doh know bout that. They doh know bout that.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A national e-money platform can be linked to ttconnect, the single electronic window and the customs A-S-Y-C-U-D-A system—yeah, I know, I do not want to misprint—

Hon. Member: ASYCUDA

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: ASYCUDA, thank you very much. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Order! [Continuous crosstalk] Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and to pay for services online. I think at the moment you can pay things to the Judiciary, the courts, so that is something that would need to be expanded. Madam, with these initiatives, you know, it is funny you know, they cannot take it, it is hurting them. [Laughter and desk thumping] And so all they could do, no substance, all they could do is to try to ridicule, ridicule, ridicule, “she, she, she”. I am not taking them on, Madam, I will take your advice.

With these initiatives in the digital economy, we expect by 2025 we will create 5,000 new jobs. [Desk thumping] We will move our country 40 places on the ease of doing business plan. [Desk thumping] We will move our country 25 places on the world economic forums, ECI. [Desk thumping] And we will increase R&D spending to at least 1 per cent of GDP.

I turn now to recycling, recycling. [Crosstalk] So, recycling, to protect the environment. We are a small island; we have limited land space; we have a very
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Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont’d)

fragile ecosystem; we must be environmentally conscious; we have to encourage people, rethink, reduce, reuse and recycle. Rethink, reduce, reuse and recycle, as part of a circular economy where waste products are reused or repurposed as many times as possible rather than just you use it once and pelt it away. The cumulative result of improper waste management we have seen the result of that, not just of a climate change, but the flooding issues in our country. By working together to improve waste management we can save space in our over-burdened landfills, create new jobs in the reduction, collection and handling of waste, protect our environment and emit less greenhouse gas emissions. A new UNC government, we will commit to the following recycling initiatives:

One, ban all single use plastics and Styrofoam products by 2025. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Madam, they said it once, they said it twice, they said it a third, and a fourth time, coming soon, coming soon. [Desk thumping] Promise, promise, promise and never delivered it. The PNM talks, the UNC works. [Desk thumping]

Two, we will promote market incentives for recyclable and reusable materials: paper, plastic, metals, rubber, organics; and products like beverage containers, car batteries, tyres, electronic equipment, bulbs; use of all of these are recycling market.

Three, develop a network of waste collection centres, materials recovery facilities in work places and public spaces. Further—so people get drop-off places for the recyclable things which can then be taken up, centralized and recycled.

Four, we will establish a system of fiscal incentives to encourage manufacturers to produce and market eco-friendly products. These will help us in terms of including removal of import duties and taxes on products composed of 100 per cent recyclable materials, tax rates on equipment to be used for recycling,
provision of seed funding from a repurposed Green Fund to develop innovation, reuse materials and the removal of VAT on products composed of 100 per cent recycled materials.

Five, provide incentives to encourage small businesses to enter the recycling industry. [Desk thumping]

Six, implement a national recycling educational awareness programme. A national communications campaign will ensure public buy-in of and participation in this programme.

Seven, establish recycling industrial parks. Working with SWMCOL, we will invite proposals from local recycling companies and international investors, others, to establish industrial recycling parks mainly along East-West Corridor of Trinidad. These parks will recycle the waste products: plastics, car tyres, papers, scrap iron. You know, they put a tax on tyres last year, I am just remembering. I wonder how that worked? What became of the tyres? Did they recycle them? Was there a programme or was it just to put another tax? We will re-direct the CEPEP to provide labour and infrastructure support to the recycling community.

With these initiatives, Madam, we expect by 2025 to generate 7,000 new jobs, [Desk thumping] recover 10 per cent of total waste through recycling and reduce by 10 per cent total waste generated by our citizens. [Desk thumping]

I turn to the driver now. I turn to the prosperity engine of biotechnology. Our nation has a unique comparative advantage to leverage the growing global demand in biotechnology. Food and beverage companies can exploit opportunities in bio-farming. Several indigenous plants are known to provide health and wellness and can form the basis for therapeutic and nutraceutical products. These—there is a growing global demand, Madam, for essential oils, sports drinks, herbal beverages, herbal teas, dried herbal spices and things for cosmetics.
Angostura already has a global presence in the health and wellness market with a product that they make, Bitters, the Angostura Bitters, a famous brand coming out of Trinidad and Tobago, a great global presence.

So we can use bio-farming to spawn an entire network of companies in the food quality and bio-safety area. Giving our documented biodiversity we have a vast gene pool from which to develop and commercialize unique biological control agents for a range of crop and livestock pests. So a new UNC government, the initiatives in this sector will be committed to the following: increase biotechnology research and development funding; secondly, establish a national venture capital fund to promote biotechnology start-ups. So you get businesses in biotechnology. Attract biotechnology giants to set up bioresearch launch pads; establish, most important—so many people along the corridor have lost their jobs—establish the East-West Corridor biotechnology manufacturing corridor. [Desk thumping]

This manufacturing corridor will attract entrepreneurs and firms, both local and international to create a cluster of industrial applications in agro, health and wellness and industrial and environmental biotechnology. Such areas could include exotic livestock development, integrated aquaculture systems, biopesticides, crop genetic improvement, ageing medicine, which some of us need, generics and biosimilars, bioinformatics and environmental conciliation.

Five. Develop a science city in Couva. We will reserve the work we started in office to establish a science city in Couva. [Desk thumping] NIHERST had begun work on a 52-acre parcel of land in Couva to establish a campus to give children and adults an engaging member educational experience in science technology and innovation, namely, “a science city”. [Desk thumping] This is how we will prepare our children for the jobs of the future. [Desk thumping]
That Government is a party of the past, the UNC is a party of the future. With these initiatives in biotechnology, Madam, we expect by 2025 to create 5,000 new jobs, obtain US $1.5 billion in FDI in full sum. [Desk thumping]

I turn now to the energy sector, Madam, very quickly. In almost every area in the energy sector we have declined. My colleague here for Pointe-a-Pierre will give some more details on this, but the natural gas shortage has not been eliminated. Companies at Point Lisas are now struggling to pay the gas prices that the number one salesman went and negotiated with them. Remember when they went off together with the other Minister and they went off to Houston and they negotiated prices, companies are now struggling because they put it too high, too high.

We have had the closure of the Mittal steel complex; we have had the closure of two MHTL plants in 2017; we have had the closure of the refinery, of course as we know, 2018; we now face the possible mothballing of Atlantic Train 1 in ’20; we have had 57 per cent reduction in drilling activity since 2015; oil production has declined to levels last seen in the 1950s. The PNM has overseen the collapse of oil production at Trinmar; the much hyped Dragon deal is dead and the only ray of light here comes from the deepwater exploration campaign being conducted by BHP Billiton, which was mentioned by the Minister of Finance. That has resulted in significant discoveries of natural gas. That campaign, Madam, exploration, has its genesis, conceptualization in initiation—under whom?—under the government we led, [Desk thumping] during which time all nine deepwater production sharing contracts were signed.

1.00 p.m.

So what will we do? A new UNC government will hold regular, competitive bid rounds. [Desk thumping] This Government, they had one bid round and guess
what? It failed. It failed. Within our first 90 days of coming into office, we will remodel the fiscal regime to meet the reality of a low price commodity environment. They promised, and they promised, and they promised, they never did it. A key element in that will be the complete reform of the SPT—the supplemental petroleum tax regime—and royalty rates.

One, a financial capital and investment goal where it is most viable.

Two, we are not the only country with oil and gas. And so, we must be competitive. This will unleash investment in new oil and gas projects and reverse the slide in oil production.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Three, we will start and complete phase two of the Galeota Port. We had completed the [Desk thumping] phase one. The UNC government will start and complete phase two and you know why? So we could service the new oil industry in Guyana [Desk thumping] and possibly that in Suriname, and possibly that in French Guiana.

Four, we will create jobs in south-east Trinidad in this way. Mayaro. Definitely for Mayaro. We will address concerns around the ease of doing business in the energy sector to free up a lot of projects to get that industry working again.

Five, we will expand the lease operator and farm out programme to put idle acreage in the hands of small operators. They will bring their own capital.

Six, we will work with private investors to re-establish an iron and steel industry at Point Lisas. [Desk thumping] Through their own negligence, that company left. We will work with private investors to get an iron and steel going again, to get jobs, to earn foreign exchange, yes, and all the other goodies you can get from having that industry.
I am surprised the Member for San Fernando West let that happen because he was their lawyer. I am surprised you let them shut it down. [Crosstalk] I shut them down?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Will you give way?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sorry. Boy, ArcelorMittal was shut down under this Government. [Desk thumping] Be real, shut down under this Government. They said they begged to meet the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, but she did not have time to see, man. Remember that? Remember.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Would the Member give way?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, I will never give way. No way, no way, no way. Let us continue because that is fluff, wasting time. I love the powder puff on your face by the way. Yes Sir, Speaker, we will—oh, leave the Member of Princes Town alone. Leave all my Members alone. [Desk thumping] And so, we will work with the ease of doing business. We will expand the lease operator and farm out programme, putting acreage in the hands of small operators. We will work with private operators, as I said, to get the steel industry going.

Seven, we look forward to getting the refinery working again. When that refinery issue restarts we will not have to import fuel. We will avoid this energy crisis, we will save foreign exchange, provide meaningful employment including in fenceline communities.

With these initiatives in the energy sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we expect by 2025 to create 3,000 new jobs, [Desk thumping] obtain US $1 billion in foreign direct investment, and generate US $2 billion more in foreign exchange.

I turn to jobs and skills and I will say very quickly we have to prepare for the future of work. The jobs of today will not be the jobs of tomorrow, and therefore, we must train our workforce, train our children, the youth, to be able to function in
the future. And so, our transformation thrust is linked to developments of strategic clusters, as I said, growth poles, and so on. We will invest in our students to create a well-trained labour force with the right skills and talent for jobs of the future, and to foster entrepreneurship and innovation especially amongst the young.

To do this we will commit to the following: A new UNC government—we will align GATE funding to the economic priority areas [Desk thumping] and labour marketplace. We will foster a business environment and it is conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation. We will transition CEPEP to private sector employer, gradual transitioning. [Desk thumping] And as I indicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we expect from these plans that by 2025 we would have created 50,000 jobs. [Desk thumping]

With respect to foreign policy, we will reengage with our allies, with other countries. We have seen people bouffing up the US, bouffing up the—[Interruption]

**Mr. Charles:** English.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** English, the BBC. So what we will do in terms of foreign policy? We will reengage fully with Caricom, promote as much as possible a common and proactive policy stand on critical cross border issues; we will rekindle our relationship with the United States, our main trading partner [Desk thumping] in the western hemisphere. It is strongly in our country’s interest to support US global leadership which has built, contributed to, and led post Second World War international order; we will reinvigorate cooperation with the United Kingdom. The UK is one of the countries, also a very important partner, and its exit from the European Union will not change the foundation of our framework agreement. We will use this transition to reinvigorate relationships. We will pursue closer cooperation and deeper economic partnerships with the new
and emerging powers in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. We will
development new approaches to harnessing our soft power asset with non-state
actors. Engaging non-state actors such as multinationals, civil groups and so on,
would provide foundations to add to our international influence. So with these
initiatives, we propose and expect that by 2025 we will sign economic partnership
agreements with Israel, Philippines and the Netherlands. [Desk thumping]

Now, when I talked about creating the 50,000 jobs—where “yuh” getting
that money? Where are you getting that money? I am going to tell you how. Our
financing strategy. They cannot do it. We will scale up domestic revenue
mobilization, and I shared with you with respect to the fiscal insanity as versus
restoring fiscal sanity. We will leverage public sector resources to obtain private
sector participation in financing priority development. We will build strong debt
management—well rightly, debt through under your governance—and negotiation
capacitating governance. I have already spoken of our strategies of consolidating
debt managing.

We will set up a national food security fund [Desk thumping] to identify and
invest in attractive assets in the global food and agriculture value chains. We will
establish a national infrastructure development fund. This will support investments
in public transport, green infrastructure including solar water, waste water, climate
resilient infrastructure. This fund will reduce government’s need to borrow or
increase taxes. It will help us to fund major infrastructure projects such as road,
airports, sea ports, hotel. It will reduce the risks of poor transparency and
accountability, and cost.

We will establish a national climate trust fund. This will repurpose the
Green Fund into a national climate trust which will finance new green technologies
start-ups and provide the backing we need financially to create low carbon
The $5 billion in cash balances of the Green Fund will also be used to capitalize this climate trust fund which will also attract international grant funding and leveraging private sector capital, and so boost the pool of funds available. We recognize the very strong potential contribution of our diaspora to economic growth and development. Our diaspora who live mainly in the US and Canada, they save an estimated US $700 million or almost $5 billion a year. We will issue diaspora bonds [Desk thumping] and so tap into the patriotism and wealth of our diaspora, offering them an investment opportunity to express their desire to do good for their homeland.

These diaspora bonds will be used to finance projects in which the diaspora has an active interest such as housing, schools, hospitals, concrete benefits to families, or the community back home. We will establish a venture capital fund to encourage and facilitate private sector participation by promoting venture capital investing networks and similar type. These venture capital investors will be successful entrepreneurs and professionals who are seeking opportunities to invest in start-ups and other nascent companies in which they take an active interest, mentoring, contributing time, experience, as well as offering introductions to valuable contacts.

Implementing the plan, Sir. We shared the plan. We have told you, shared with you how we will finance the plans. Now, how do we implement it? Clarity on the roles of different actors and stakeholders is paramount for effective implementation of economic master plan. The private sector will play the driving role in implementation of the plan, undertaking the most of actual investments and projects that have been identified to bring about the transformation needed. The Government for the most part, a new UNC government, will play a facilitative role.
ensuring that proper physical infrastructure is in place, macroeconomic stability is maintained, quality human capital is built, and the rules of the game are set. [Desk thumping] This is the way the Government ought to form.

The Government should not be in business. Let the private sector and the businessmen do the business in Trinidad and Tobago. That is not the job of the Government. The Government is to facilitate that development. We recognize implementation challenges, and so on, so what do we do? A new UNC government will establish an economic strategy council to help us to implement the plan. This council will implement and manage flagship projects, programmes, consider transformational and industrial instrumental to achieve targets. This shows the UNC is light years ahead of the light bulb gang. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So in the remaining time I have left, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will just quickly run through our 90-day plan before I close. [Desk thumping] The first 90 days:

1. Work with the bank, Finance, CSO, to determine the true state of the economy—because we have been hiding the statistics—country’s finances, capital projects, and share information with citizens unlike the conmanship we are seeing;

2. We will immediately provide the Office of the Procurement Regulator, with—proclaim the law and budget bureaucracy;

3. We will prepare a divestment plan for the state enterprises and a debt work out strategy for those enterprises;

4. We will repeal the property tax legislation; [Desk thumping]

5. We will scrap the proposed Revenue Authority; [Desk thumping]

6. We will examine and address the issue of outstanding VAT refunds; [Desk thumping]

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7. We will prepare legislation for using personal income and corporate taxes and simplify the VAT regime; [Desk thumping]

8. We will begin drafting legislation to fully integrate the HSF into a new fiscal responsibility framework; [Desk thumping]

9. We will mandate each Minister to prepare a one-year action agenda to be considered by the Cabinet; [Desk thumping]

10. We will share with citizens our priorities for action during our upcoming budgetary period; [Desk thumping]

11. We will formulate a project plan for the completion of all projects that were currently in train—unlike them who shut down everything and then they could not get it restarted; reach four years later with no accomplishments;

12. We will prioritize resolution of the issues regarding former Caroni workers as well as former Petrotrin workers; [Desk thumping]

13. We will incorporate the praedial larceny squad into the TTPS;

14. We will establish the economic strategy council;

15. We will have discussions on forging economic partnerships with other countries;

16. We will implement a fully functioning sea bridge and air bridge; [Desk thumping]

17. We will work with stakeholders to commence operations at the oil refinery;

18. We will begin a public green building programme;

19. We will mandate NIHERST to conduct four citing exercises to consider the adoption and use of biotechnology and digital technologies within specified industries.

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[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

20. We will immediately ban all single-use of plastic straws; [Desk thumping]

21. We will illustrate the process of outlining GATE funding to economic priority areas to meet the needs of labour market; [Desk thumping]

1.15 p.m.

22. We will request both Finance and Central Bank to start the process of creating the national food security fund, the national infrastructure fund, the national climate trust fund. These innovative funds will mobilize the resources for the economic transformation that we have to do [Desk thumping] without raising public debt.

23. We will request both Finance and bank to prepare an action plan for issuing the diaspora bonds to the T&T diaspora.

24. We will re-establish the Ministry of the People and the Ministry of Justice.

Within my speech, I have identified 12 prosperity engines, I have no need to go back for them and so today, I will conclude. I will conclude as follows. [Interruption] May I just correct the $4.2 billion I spoke of was TT dollars of the drop in the Heritage Fund.

Madam, I am so thankful that this budget is the last of this failed Government. [Desk thumping] I do not think the country should have to endure anymore of the triteness which came last Monday. There was no imagination, no innovation, no creativity, no ideas, no vision. The presentation was pedestrian as all the others. [Desk thumping] But worse, because they have achieved so little over the 200-and-something billion dollars they spent in the last four years, and because this was his last budget, when he had to sound loud, joyful, and triumphant
for election purposes, the Minister had to keep repeating things they promised during the last four years to make it seem like is “ah lot” that was done.  

In their fifth and final year, instead of having fruits of strategic interventions to celebrate, we were being told of coming soon, as I said, stay tuned to a cinema near you. This is a fantasy movie, coming, coming, coming soon and never reaches. So forward, this confirms the fact that they had no plan when they got into office. They just fumbled and stumbled around for the last four years and so forward now to a brave new future and not in any vague generalized way. We have thought long and hard about it and as I demonstrated today, we know exactly what to do to transform and resurrect our economy. We must leave behind the incompetent performance of this Government, the promises, the emptiness of their promises and those again in the 2020 Budget.

Through you now, Madam, with your permission, I address our beautiful nation. To every citizen I say, we can still save our country. I ask you to examine for yourself the plans I have outlined for you in considerable detail. Talk about them, debate them, ask questions, make suggestions, get involved. Let us have a national conversation. Let us bring all the people in that process. This must not just be my plan, it must be our plan. We must work together to execute for ourselves and for our children and future generations.

I therefore issue a call for national action. We will now spread this plan far and wide. We will preach the gospel. We will demonstrate there is no trickery, gimmickry or despicable fakery here in these plans. Others came telling you they were ready when the truth is they are empty and we have seen the fruits of that deceit in duplicity over the last four years when they have taken our country over
Today, Madam, we inaugurate a new political culture in our country when one whole year before general election, we tell you what we are going to do when we ask you to judge us and we ask you to question us, not on promises but on the substance of our concrete plans and our proven track record of delivery. And there are other plans which we will reveal for the country’s social and institutional regeneration. Our aim is a complete renewal, transformation, resurrection, of our country. Our plan demonstrates that we have the vision and conviction for the task ahead. We will get to work immediately. With diligence, resolve, and shared vision, we can transform our beloved nation and ensure a brighter future for every single one. But the people need the opportunity to realize this vision. Remember the PNM talks, the UNC works. [Desk thumping]

And so, once more, I call upon the Prime Minister to call the general election and not “brakes” by calling this local election. I want you to know the UNC will meet you and beat you at the polls on December 2\textsuperscript{nd}. [Desk thumping] You do not need a five-dollar lightbulb to show you that. Bring it on. The UNC is ready to transform and resurrect Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you all very much. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [Crosstalk]

[Mr. Lee stands]

Mr. Mitchell: Would you please sit down?

Hon. Member: What is the point of order? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Lee: When are we breaking for lunch? When are we breaking for lunch after three hours? [Crosstalk]
Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: [Desk thumping] Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker. I have been around this Parliament for quite some time and as a consequence, I can truthfully say I know the difference between fact and fiction, untruths and truth, political desperation and of course, bravé danjé. Madam Speaker, I heard a lot of that for the last few moments and I recognize it and I suspect the people of Trinidad and Tobago recognize all of it very, very clearly. I must begin, notwithstanding my longevity in this place, by expressing on behalf of the people of Laventille West and all of the decent right-thinking people of Trinidad and Tobago whose comments we have been listening to and reading for the last few hours since the delivery of this budget, I must, on all our behalf, congratulate the Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping]

This budget, Madam Speaker, is nothing short but a work of art. [Crosstalk] It is a coherent work, a work that is designed for the benefit and the uplift of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] And if you look on the last four budgets, Madam Speaker, you will see that golden thread focused on the people taking us from devastation and misery to where we can proudly say we are today. [Desk thumping]

In this regard, I must as well extend our congratulations to the Minister of Planning and Development [Desk thumping] who has been working through those years along with the Minister of Finance. But most of all, it is leadership, dignified leadership, intellectual leadership, [Desk thumping] noble leadership, honest leadership by the Member for Diego Martin West [Desk thumping] that has put all of this together. The Member for Siparia would not get close on any of those tests and the nation knows that. [Crosstalk] The nation knows that.

Madam Speaker, I expected from the Member for Siparia a serious analysis
of the issue of our environment. In particular, [Crosstalk] Madam Speaker, I expected the Member to deal frontally with the measure of the LED lights and the $7 million that we have decided to expend on bulbs across the nation, but from day one, she was flippant about it and her flippancy continued today. But, Madam Speaker, the reality shows us and the ordinary members, not lawyers like the Senior Counsel she gave herself to be, not a Member of Parliament but the regular ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have worked out that that initiative alone will reduce the demand for our natural gas, a finite, a diminishing resource, in electricity generation by 564 cubic metres per day. They have calculated that this volume of natural gas has a quantifiable daily value of US $1.4 million per day. They have worked out for us the cost of the programme, that is $7 million, can be recouped in 0.72 of a day and annually, the total reduction of the consumption of natural gas would have the equivalent market value of TT $3.5 billion. And, Madam Speaker, it can also reduce the volume of carbon dioxide that Trinidad and Tobago releases into the atmosphere by 30,000 tonnes per day.

But from day one, we heard the Member for Siparia being flippant about it, but the national community has seen the wisdom and they have embraced this idea with both hands. The Member for Siparia came and spoke hypocritically about the question of solar energy and promised that they would create jobs in this regard and it would create forex. As I have just read for you, Madam Speaker, that is precisely what this small measure of the LED lights would do and we expect to phase out on that understanding incandescent lights over our period in the next term in Government.

Madam Speaker, it was the Government led by the Member for Siparia that mortgaged our Green Fund. Let me talk a little bit about environment. When they were scratching around looking for money, when oil revenues and gas prices and
revenues had gone down substantially and they knew that from 2012 and they were looking for more money for their largesse and their gifts to try to win the last election—which they did not—they went to the Green Fund and when they saw that the law did not permit them to take that like the $16 billion in NGC, they mortgaged it and they have used it in mortgage, got money and spent it on other things and we have spoken enough about those other things. I do not need to dwell on that today.

They also tried to build an administrative or a sport complex on the Eddie Hart Ground which is a known aquifer, no respect or regard for the environment, Madam Speaker. So all that I heard this morning can be initialled hypocritical in the extreme. And I heard a lot about “by 2025, by 2025, by 2025”. By 2025, I assure you, Madam Speaker, the UNC will be right where they are in Opposition in this country again [Desk thumping] and the Member for Oropouche will be the leader. Oropouche East would be the leader and the Member for Siparia will be a thing of the past.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Dais improper motives.”

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, she took me on a journey to imagine. She told us imagine and imagine in the context. [Crosstalk] The Member for Siparia. Well, I could not resist it, I too went into the mode of imagining and I would like for our benefit to imagine the Member for Siparia speaking the plain and ordinary truth. I would like us to imagine, Madam Speaker, the Member pronouncing her words this morning properly and coherently. [Crosstalk] And I would like to imagine the Member for Siparia walking a straight line—a political line. Imagine. [Crosstalk]

The Member for Siparia spoke incessantly about the new UNC, the new UNC. I have to ask on behalf of the people of this country: Is it that the Member
for Siparia is now disassociating herself from the 2010—2015 UNC? [Desk thumping] Is it a snide apology she is extending for the wrongs and vampirism that they put on the Treasury of this country for those five years?

**Mr. Lee:** 48(5), Madam Speaker. The Member keeps referring—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you have a point of order?

**Mr. Lee:** 48(5), Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** Just continue.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, we would have all seen and heard the Opposition Leader this morning stumble through her presentation like someone who had just awoken from a deep sleep. The Member for Siparia sounded like someone living in 1919 [Laughter and interruption] and that she had a long dream which she babbled for us this morning. The Member for Siparia even used a very unparliamentary M-word and when I heard it, I thought she was accosting and attacking the Member for Princes Town but it might have escaped your intention, Madam Speaker. *Hansard* might reflect it. [Crosstalk] I know.

The Member for Siparia spoke about my constituency, the constituency that I represent, Laventille West, and promised in her political desperation this morning, recognizing that the thing is going further and further away from her, she promised a pan factory.

**1.30 p.m.**

I would like the Member for Siparia to know we have that in Laventille. [Desk thumping] And it is not a state entity or state activity, it is run by a private owner, private owners. It is a private firm and they have been operating for years. But Madam Speaker, they supplied pans for the Pan in Schools Programme across Laventille and across Trinidad and Tobago. Because the UNC identified it as a PNM thing, and they have issues, some of their supporters with the national
instrument, no sooner did they come to office in 2010, they wrecked the Pan in Schools Programme and that company and other pan companies closed down. They wrecked it. [Desk thumping]

It takes this PNM Government, in recognizing the value of the national instrument, and as Chalkdust told us recently, only a couple days ago in his writing, that music and culture in schools is a very important component in their learning. It takes this Government and we are in the process of rebuilding that and giving them sustenance again, Madam Speaker. Talk about unprincipled, one of the reasons why I said earlier that there is no comparison between the Member for Siparia as Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister who leads this side, is on the issue of principle. On the issue of principle. [Desk thumping] Only yesterday, Madam Speaker, only yesterday, in a press release from the Member for Siparia, they were hostile to the idea of the OWTU and Patriotic. [Crosstalk] Only yesterday, taking ownership of the refinery as the discussions are now heading to, Madam Speaker, but by today, unprincipled as they are, telling us this morning that her big concern is how the OWTU would fare.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(4) “as unprincipled as they are”. Who is unprincipled?

Hon. Members: You.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All of all you. The whole side.

Madam Speaker: Member, Member for Caroni East, I am sure you are seeing me standing. All right. Hon. Members, I would like you all to remember that certain things are unparliamentary and as I have always reminded, I think it was the Member for Tabaquite who has told us, “An eye for an eye will make everybody blind”. So I will ask everybody to capture their composure. Continue, Member.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. In passing, the Member for Siparia
described this budget, this wonderful work of art, as a condescending insult to the poor of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to suggest to the Member that more insulting is stealing the patrimony of the poor. [Desk thumping] And in this regard—

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: And in this regard, Madam Speaker, by four years in government, the UNC was having its head crushed on the anvil of corruption in this country. And it went on and by 2015 they cast them out of office and they swear, the people, they do not want to hear them, see them again for the next 15 years. By contrast, to date in this final budget not one single justifiable allegation against any Member of this Government for corruption. Not one, not one. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

And I venture to suggest to the Member for Siparia, incoherent and obviously ignorant in its purest sense of the details of this budget and what it means for the people of this country, I venture to say to the Member for Siparia that every single thing in this budget affects and benefits the poor and the small man in this country, 90 per cent at any rate. The Member scathingly criticized 2.50, $2.50 implying that it is only 2.50 from $15 in the minimum wage to 17.50. Well it is an increment, and then boasted that they did two increases. And they were aiming to get it to $20. Well with the two they did and the 2.50 we put it still is not yet at $20, and you know why. Because the economists who advised the Minister of Finance, when the Minister of Finance speaks here—not the $10 million Minister of Finance that they had you know—but when the Minister of Finance speaks here, he speaks on the basis of the advice of all the economists in the Ministry of Finance, and the Central Bank and other sources. He is advised, and
takes into account all of the issues that will be impacted by an increase in the minimum wage including, of course, the desire to give the ordinary man greater income for his work. All of that is taken into account and you proceed in an environment of the ability in which to do it. And the Member so ignorantly, as well, condemned the $5 LED bulbs, demonstrating her ignorance as to the impact of that for the environment, and as the facts are revealed and that it could save forex and all of that.

The Member spoke about CEPEP and told us untruthfully that the Member did a calculation that shows that they would be in receipt of an income that is below the minimum wage. Well the law is the law, this is a legal requirement and nobody including a state entity, CEPEP, could pay less than the minimum wage. [Desk thumping] And, [Crosstalk] I am further advised that it is actually pegged to the minimum wage. And therefore they get a 15 per cent increase in light of that and that came from the Member for Siparia who put her hand in the cookie jar and took herself Silk. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Lee: And (6), 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Order, order! Whip, you have a—

Mr. Lee: 48(6) Madam Speaker, and also 48(4).

Dr. Rowley: Where it came from?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Where you get it from?

Dr. Rowley: Me, I doh have it. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Order, order. Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister, I am standing. Member for Laventille West, I will ask you to restate that in a way that I know you are capable of doing it within the confines of the Standing Order, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Okay, that was given to her by the then Attorney General and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at that time [Crosstalk]—by the Prime
Minister. Madam Speaker, two things I will say on that, at the end of the day the way the process works it is the Prime Minister of the country that has the final say in the matter, so that is my context. [Desk thumping] But more than that, it may very well be a breach of the Integrity in Public Life Act. [Crosstalk] Himself to himself. Herself to herself for a benefit. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Order, order! As I said, it is a debate every Member will have an opportunity. Every Member will have an opportunity to give their contribution. I now recognize the Member for Laventille West. [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you for your recognition, and Madam Speaker, as always, as always threatening us about going to court. We have court clothes, we are not afraid of that. That is to start with, but more than that, when they cannot win in the polls, when they cannot win in the intellectual debate in this House, they resort to their friends in the courthouse to try to tie up the Government’s activity. That is what they do. And they probably believe they have friends there too. [Crosstalk] And do not find that too strange, you know. There was a judge called Herbert Volney in this country who was taken from the Bench and put as a candidate in an election obviously and “common-sensically” approaching that you will see that the discussions must have taken place while he was on the Bench. [Desk thumping] So when I talk about principles, I know what I am talking about. We would not do that. We would not do that. So it is not too far removed from the ugly UNC—

Hon. Member: It is true.

Hon. F. Hinds:—with a small u. And then the Member had the temerity, the gall, the gumption as the Member for Diego Martin West would say to get up here, and talking about CEPEP, say this is not putting hands up and hands up. That was the Member for Siparia as Prime Minister that got our children up to the Hilton in orange suits looking like one of her friends who was in a Cabinet will wear in a
short while in the United States. And I will tell you something, Madam Speaker, got these youngsters up to the Hilton in a programme called “Colour me Orange” and personally tell them hands up, hands out, hands down, like fools. They did that like fools to our children.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Humiliate.

Hon. F. Hinds: And humiliated them and coming to tell us about hands up this morning. Unprincipled they are. [Desk thumping] And talking about the small man, let we just remind those who might have missed it, that we are increasing the number of OJT places to 8,000. [Desk thumping] We have decided and we will increase their stipends by 10 per cent. [Desk thumping] I have already told you of the minimum wage which we are proud to have done as the circumstances would now allow, but 194,000 little people will benefit from that, not Krishna Lalla, little people in this country, 194,000 of them. We index public sector—public service pensions; that means as inflation moves their incomes would move.

Credit unions, I practise in the civil arena from time to time, non-contentious civil, and it was always an issue—a person leaves a beneficiary on their credit union account or accounts and the law says, the Co-operative Societies Act, that they would only receive $5,000 the beneficiary that is, and they had to go through the probate process in order to get access to the rest. We have now for the small man who saved his pennies in the credit union, we have now increased that to $50,000. [Desk thumping] And we have now put in place as we can now afford a 3,500 minimum pension at age 60 for those daily-paid workers, of which there are many in this country. Little people. All of that for the small man.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia talked about they settled 180 negotiations, we know one thing—

Hon. Member: 133.
Hon. F. Hinds:—133—when we came to office we met six billion in debt to some of those who they negotiated and settled. And this Government had to find it, and we did, and we paid it, to keep a smooth and quiet industrial climate in the country because the country was already traumatized by the activity of the UNC between 2010 and 2015 and the economic stresses that the Minister of Finance had to deal with, and the Prime Minister and the Minister of Planning. When he was told gleefully by a very good friend and a former governor that we had three days sustenance to go. And we settled that debt so with all they said they did, it took this Government to settle it too because their friends would have been saying “we wa’ money now”, “we wa’ we money now” and we did that. [Crosstalk] You could say that, you could say that, but those are the facts. We all live on principle on this side of the Atlantic. All of us live on principle [Desk thumping] so do not be surprised if you hear me proudly repeating the words of the Member for Diego Martin West, I will do no such thing in relation to Siparia though. “Assure you ah dat”.

Madam Speaker, in respect of the Couva hospital, let me place on record again, because they have been going around mischievously, and in childlike fashion a serious matter of the nation’s health, telling the people of this country that they built a children’s hospital in Couva and that now we have reduced it to a drugstore; that is their line. Let me place on record that it was not any children’s hospital.

We met 150 adult beds and 80 juvenile or children’s beds. It was a normal hospital. [Desk thumping] But they wanted one in Couva as they wanted a law school down in Debe.

1.45 p.m.

Ms. Ramdial: But what is wrong with that?

Dr. Moonilal: What is wrong with that?
Hon. F. Hinds: As they wanted an airport in Couva.

Hon. Members: So what is wrong with that?

Hon. F. Hinds: They were trying to work a certain agenda, Madam Speaker. A certain agenda. [Crosstalk and interruption]

Hon. Members: Racist, racist!

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I stand on 48(6). He is imputing improper motives and bringing another bad—[Continuous crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, if you want to make a point of order, you stand. I am recognizing Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am standing on 48(6), imputing improper motives and bringing an aspect into this House which is sinister, which is sinister. [Crosstalk and desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Overruled. Member for Laventille West. [Continuous crosstalk and desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: One minute. Member for Caroni East, I am still on my legs.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I am hearing coming certain words, I would ask Members to just desist. Member for Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very warmly. What did we do? We met it unfinished and we finished it. [Desk thumping] And today the Minister of Health will tell this country truthfully that several diagnostic testing procedures are well on the way and so far, 1,400 have been successfully completed at that institution [Desk thumping] and the plan by this Government, which is being rolled out, is to find modern business-like management for the facility.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Four years. Nothing to—
Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, that is all right, that is all right. We do it on principle and on process and we will take it forward in service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, it is there so we make use of it. Right. So there it is.

Madam Speaker, the Member unashamedly told us here today that we will scrap the TTRA, the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. I do not know what is their issue with the revenue authority so much, you know. It may very well be that some persons in this country have assets and income and money that they do not want a really close look at.

Mr. Mitchell: Avoidance tendencies.

Hon. F. Hinds: It may be about avoidance. I do not know what they have with the TTRA but I will tell you what. I sat yesterday at the Radisson Hotel and listened to the Minister of Finance in a most transparent way for the third time: Spotlight on the Economy, “Spotlight On Budget”, “Spotlight on Energy”. For the third time, we went to the country and told the country the state of affairs with our business. And I sat there yesterday and listened to the business chamber representative and the TTMA representative with no political axe to grind, say openly, we have to put aside petty foolish politics. It is clear from their business perspective that the TTRA is necessary, [Desk thumping] useful and good for Trinidad and Tobago. Because they consider it unfair that some people pay taxes and some people do not and the current arrangement simply allows for that. It is in the TTRA that you will get better management and monitoring and more likely to correct revenues.

Madam Speaker, we dealt with a FATCA matter here and it is in dealing with that and reading about Uncle Sam and his tax regime that I realized how serious taxes are to the United States and any serious Government. It is about
revenue. And we are in a climate where we had, under the leadership of the Member for Siparia, expenditure projected at 64 and $65 billion with revenue at 37 billion. Revenue is critical with all of the things the Member said “we will do, we will do, we will do” and with all of the things we prudently said we will do in this budget, it depends on the availability of money in order to do it. But we want to raise taxes—the Member for Siparia said we will scrap the property tax. But as was pointed out earlier, some of them have places in Miami where they pay it.

And the point is these two will provide enhanced revenues for the country and greater equity but they are dead set against it, and shamelessly tells us, “We will scrap it, we will scrap it”. But we know the motives behind that and we will do what we have to do in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. So we raise taxes, they have a problem. We borrow money, they have a problem about public debt. We draw down on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, they have a problem with that. But they are the same people who, every minute, demanding goods and services from mother Trinidad and Tobago which it will only take revenue to do. That is why I say they are unprincipled in their thinking. The Member for Siparia said they will reduce corporation tax. So “she gonna” give up some more revenue again and this is why I described it as desperate political clinging and campaigning and—[Interruption]

**Brig. Gen. Antoine:** Abracadabra.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And abracadabra as my friend is saying. Yes. Just trying to win friends in the national community to bite them again.  

*Laughter* They do not want us to do anything that is good for this country.

Madam Speaker, Siparia outlined—*[Crosstalk and interruption]* I am responding to Siparia. She outlined some so-called transitional plan on five principles. I have one question to ask or a couple of questions actually. All of the

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lofty plans that the Member for Siparia told us about this matter, when the Member was in office, what did she do about them? [Crosstalk] Why was the Member voted out of office? It is because they squandered the nation’s patrimony, they destroyed our institutions, they wrecked our international image including with financiers and of course, they took five-day weekends, three-day weekends.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And we did so much, you would imagine. [Laughter]  
Hon. F. Hinds: Did so much. And that is why the people of Trinidad and Tobago kicked them out of—cast them out of office in 2015 and they swear it would not happen again.

The Member told us in passionate sounding but insincere tones that some people, some of the former workers of Petrotrin committed suicide. I do not know if that is true and it is a very sensitive issue. What I would say is that if persons in this country, whether they worked with Petrotrin or not, committed suicide, that is always a sad state of affairs and since I do not have the facts and figures, I cannot say more about it other than to commiserate with them if that happened. [Crosstalk] However, I am almost certain, knowing the Member for Siparia as I do, no serious enquiry was made to find out how many because she is not able to tell us that this morning and I will give way. I will give way to the Member, tell us how many.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many what? [Crosstalk]  
Hon. F. Hinds: The Member would not be able to tell us the exact cause of people’s issues and why but it is glib and nice to just come here and say it. Madam Speaker, what I do know is that of the sums that were made available as a golden handshake on their parting from the company, every cent that was put on offer was collected. Every cent was collected.

And I saw a young man proudly, a couple months ago, on the television
being featured, a former Petrotrin worker who is now operating some food outlets in the San Fernando area and was telling us he was doing quite well and there are others. So the Member pretends to be speaking for them but of course, they have a different story for themselves. And more than that, they are now living with the joy and the hopes and the prospects of being part of a new arrangement by Patriotic where they will now have to operate the refinery again if all goes well in that regard. So there is a lot of hope and there is a lot of happiness. The Member for Siparia is a killjoy at Christmas. [Desk thumping and laughter]

And, Madam Speaker, I must restate a fact that was stated yesterday by the hon. Prime Minister in his deliberations at Radisson. He reminded this country with all the talk about unemployment, not one single gazetted public officer was relieved from post in the last four years. Not one. I looked at little Barbados next door with 26,000 public servants. Because they are involved in an IMF standby arrangement, they had to rid their country, I think of about 3,000 public servants. And talking about that, we as a major achievement and I want to state it loudly and proudly for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to take note. We have with all of the difficulty that we have, time and time again, openly and transparently related to the national community, we kept Trinidad and Tobago away from the IMF. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Gopeesingh: They dictated everything to you.

Hon. F. Hinds: We did that and the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development, led by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet more generally, we constructed our own austerity programme. [Desk thumping] We said this might be bitter but better we make it because all of the subsidies which we enjoy in agriculture, in health, in education, in the social development programmes, all of them would have been at risk had the IMF come here and the
UNC in Government last was taking us straight to the IMF.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Really?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Because they were reckless in their management of the affairs, they left us bankrupt.  *[Desk thumping]* NGC, they raided, they maxed out our credit accounts.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We left you $178 billion.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** They mortgaged our unemployment levy and the Green Fund as I said. Wherever they could find money, they just took it. And every time I go in my constituency and I look across the highway and I see that white elephant called the Beetham wastewater plant, I remember the Member for Siparia and I remember SIS, her good friend Krishna Lalla.

**Hon. Member:** “Build her house.”

**Hon. F. Hinds:** The man who built her house and she admitted that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, that is not true. No, no, no. You are not getting away with that insult.  *[Crosstalk and interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** One minute. Order! Order!

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Member for Siparia, what is the Standing Order?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much.  *[Desk thumping]* With elevator too and talking about do not like little people. In all of the melee concerning that, two things did not escape the Member for Laventille West. One, when the house was being constructed, the logo on the backhoe and on the tractor was all painted off, somebody did not want somebody else to know who was working in Philippine.  *[Desk thumping]* It is a fact.
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 48(6).

Mr. Charles: “He cyah get away with that.”

Hon. F. Hinds: That is one.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Madam. 48(6), Madam.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: [Laughter and interruption] And the other matter that did not escape the Member for Laventille West—

Madam Speaker: Could we have some order please? Member for Caroni East. [Interruption] [Member stands] Member for Caroni East, while I am standing? [Interruption] Member for Naparima, just get back to your seat while I am standing please.

Mr. Charles: Could I stand in one place?

Hon. Members: Nooo.

Madam Speaker: Get back to your seat. Member for Caroni East, I believe you wanted to adopt a particular course. When I sit, you can. [Interruption] When I sit, you can but you will do it in an orderly manner. Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: And the other thing that did not escape the Member for Laventille West is that in all of that dust, in all of those clouds, dark clouds, a young man by the name of Christian and his lawyer wife bought property in this country for a high-profile citizen from Philippine in this country known to all of us. That is a fact. I have the documents in my possession [Desk thumping] and if anybody wants to dispute that, let them say so.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopesingh: What is your point?

Hon. F. Hinds: My point is that we are a principled and honest bunch who the country could trust. [Desk thumping] And the country must never take the chance
with the UNC again.

I heard the Member for Siparia tell us today that business is losing confidence. Madam Speaker, I just told you. I just told you a large chunk of the returns from the successful amnesty which netted, I think it was about $2.4 billion, more than four times the projected 400 million or 500 million, I am sorry. A large chunk of that, the Minister of Finance tells us, came from the business community.

2.00 p.m.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is correct, 600 million.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Six hundred million. They paid up their taxes, demonstrating that people are willing to pay taxes, demonstrating that the current arrangement allowed them to escape unscathed until the amnesty, to avoid the penalty and the interest. And demonstrated, of course, that they intended to continue in business; they have confidence in the economy, led by the Minister of Finance, directed through the Government. Yeah. Those are the facts.

So this thing about loss of confidence. That is what they do. They get from this pulpit or this platform, they get on platforms all over and bad mouth and bad talk Trinidad and Tobago. And that is part of the load we carried for the last four years. So we have done—“yuh” know like Brian Lara? “Dey say” he was a great batsman with great statistics. But if he was not cheated out so much his statistics would have been even better. Well the load we carried, when what we met and what we had to deal with and the court and other opposition from the Opposition, Madam Speaker, we really did a fantastic job colleagues, a fantastic job. [Desk thumping] We did it against all odds and we will continue.

And I must say in going forward, talking about local contractors, they gave a contract in a hotel room somewhere I think in Brazil.
Mr. Al-Rawi: South Africa.

Hon. F. Hinds: In South Africa, sorry, to a company called OAS, OAS Construtora, and they embarked upon a $7.2 billion enterprise to take us to Point Fortin, an extension of the Hochoy highway. Well, all the story about that, the country well knows. What I could tell the country today, there is a tremendous amount of litigation taking place, arising out of land acquisition in those matters. We have hundreds of properties that they acquired that is not needed for the project. We have properties that they paid for. The people stayed there. “Dey get pay again.”

One company, the company ran away, crashed on the job. Minister Young and others had to go to London to fight to get the bond money, the performance bond, which is what is now being used to continue the development of that highway; just to remind the national community. And today, in respect of local contractors, we broke it up into packages and every single package or segment of that highway in now under construction in the hands of a local company, [Desk thumping] local company.

So when they sit outside or they are in their bars, or in their cars, or they are in their offices, and they listen to the Member for Siparia, they know it is just a tinkering sound, hollow, meaning nothing, all in design just to entrap them again. And the country, Madam Speaker, and the statistics will show, when the Minister of Works and Transport presents in this budget, the statistics will show that we are now enjoying large contract prices for 30 and 33 per cent less than the 2010 to 2015 period, because a new culture has developed, open, honest, fair bidding processes and no kickbacks to no Government Minister. [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And how the Chinese get the housing contract?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yeah? The one thing—“Chinee” contract? The one thing they
have not alleged in that is any corruption. [Desk thumping] They cannot, they cannot say that nobody benefited from nothing, or was about to benefit from nothing.

Mr. Young: When the Prime Minister “walk and say ah want one ah those and one ah those and one ah those.”

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, yes. We are very un-UNC in that regard and wholesale PNM. Great is the PNM, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] “Ah sounding like Naparima now. Ah sounding like Naparima, ‘Great is de PNM. De PNM is de only party dat could take us out of the morass and de wickedness’ that the UNC put us in.” [Desk thumping]

The Member for Siparia just mentioned the word “forex” and I "geh vex". Because forex was going good, good, good in Trinidad and Tobago until her governor friend went and tampered with it. “And de next thing yuh know, de next thing yuh know, de whole system was in chaos.” A crisis and a shortage was created and it took real effort to stabilize that and sort it out again. Today, just like with the ferry service to Tobago, you are not hearing the consumers, the end-users quarrelling about nothing. We have resolved the problem of the sea bridge. We have resolved the problem of the forex so far, thank God, going forward; so far.

And the Member tell us a formula that she wants to work out. What we heard from what she explained incoherently as it was this morning, is that she intends to devalue the currency of this country. So that some people will benefit. The Member went as far to say they will raise the repo rate. That is the cost of borrowing.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up, if you wish.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. I will access it. We cannot do that

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because, of course, that will give a serious boost to food inflation and we will have a problem, Madam Speaker.

So Madam Speaker, we have done particularly well. The Member spent a long time, about 20/25 minutes of her contribution dealing with the question of agriculture. But again I must ask, on behalf of the people, the farmers, the consumers in this country, the voters even, I have to ask: When they were in government, between ’95 and 2001, and 2010 to 2015, what did that Government do about agriculture? If it is so bad today, what did they do? Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is why you are there.

Hon. F. Hinds: I know, that is why we are here. And that is why we must stay here, Member for Siparia. [Desk thumping] Because you are destructive to the well-being and the people of this country.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6), please.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: “Better I careful ah ask back for meh law degree and meh GATE too yuh know.”

The Member mentioned about Clico. Well the story of that is well-known. Two hundred and twenty-four million dollars has been paid out in dividends in that NIF fund. And I listened to a young man on the radio this week, boasting that he was fortunate to have bought some NIF shares and how good it is working for him. So the Member for Siparia could stay here and talk from her high horse incoherently as she does but, Madam Speaker, the people of Trinidad, the ordinary man, the little man who was given an opportunity to buy shares, gilt-edged supported shares, in the Clico assets, that the Government had to fight for, to get back their own money, we made it available to the very little man and taxpayer and I am now hearing them boasting and thanking God for it, because it has worked
As for the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, the Member was bold enough to mention it this morning. Well I will say the law arranges, the law permits a government, in section 15 of the Heritage and Stabilisation Act of Trinidad and Tobago, allows the Government to access moneys in certain circumstances, in particular where the projected revenue in energy was less than that which was projected by at least 10 per cent and it permitted. So we did it quite lawfully and properly. We went into it on two occasions, if I recall. And today I am happy to say at US $6.25 billion, the Fund is better now, after those two withdrawals, than it was in 2015. [Crosstalk] Yes and according to the Member incoherently, we took out US $4 billion.

Yeah? And I just want to mention the global economy is what it is. Trinidad and Tobago is a part of it. We cannot avoid that. And in all the circumstances we have done very, very well.

So, Madam Speaker, our efforts—and my colleague of the Office of the Attorney General, he will spend some time telling us about what we have been doing there, what we have been doing there. My job was to respond to some of the issues raised by the Member for Siparia and I would have spent my time doing that.

But let me say, the Member spoke at length about Tobago, what they would do for tourism. “That is the same persons” who gave the impetus for fighting against a major tourism project in Sandals. And they had their friends in Tobago object to it on frivolous grounds, chased the prospects of that away, would not contest an election, the UNC in Tobago, and coming to play here now that “you” talking to Tobago. [Desk thumping] “But de people of Tobago know where barley and balisier grow and dey will drag dey bow in 2015, Mr. Fiddler, fuh dem.”

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But I want to say, the development of which we speak is not only taking place in Trinidad, the stability, the shoring up of the economy, the winning of the respect and the commendation of the World Bank, the IMF, Moody’s and the other rating agencies, Standard & Poor’s, all of that as a result of the good, stable, sober work, led by the Member for Diego Martin West, we share that with the whole country. [Desk thumping]

They met the Brian Lara stadium. They left it cold and unused and derelict for five years, and they thought we would do the same with the Couva Hospital. We are so not so petty. We are nationalists. So we went in and we fixed it and it is now to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

But I just want to say, we reached across the water. In Tobago, construction is taking place. The Moriah health centre—it finished yet, Member for Tobago West? The health centre, rehabilitation and widening of parts of the Claude Noel Highway, two interceptors for Tobago. I am just making these little examples; an administrative complex to house the immigration, T&TEC, WASA, licensing office, Inland Revenue, all of that taking place in Tobago. We spread this development trust for the benefit of all the people of the country.

I think I should close, Madam Speaker, by calling on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In light—I think I have about 10 more minutes? [Laughter and crosstalk] Madam Speaker, when I looked as closely as I did, at the proposals in this budget, when I really thought deeply and seriously as a citizen from whence we came and where we could have been, had we been in the hands of the UNC and their shenanigans, I realize that the only missing link in all of this is the productivity on the part of the workforce in Trinidad and Tobago. I feel very strongly, looking at China as an example of optimum productivity, if only we all at our various stations will exert sincere and best efforts at our job, if only the Leader
of the Opposition will get serious and do her job properly and with dignity, then this whole country, Madam Speaker, will be far better off.

So I am now taking this opportunity, in light of where we are Trinidad and Tobago, having been taken out of the rough waters, having stabilized the economy and TT Trinidad and Tobago is now on an even keel ready to continue towards its path, developmental and other path, and social well-being, I am asking the people of this country, the managers, the supervisors, the leaders, to really get us going on the business of productivity and we will all be better off.

The other thing I will ask, in closing, is that we all be more compassionate and fairer and more honest on each other. Because I can tell you the Government gets blamed for prices, this and that but there are no price controls here anymore. We used to have that. That is a thing of a bygone era. You cannot have that now if you are operating in the international economic world as we do.

And Madam Speaker, I had the experience recently of going to price an item, a small electronic item, at a store in west Trinidad and the price tag on that was $995. I calculate that to be about US $155. And when I looked online—and the Member for Siparia criticized the online tax but there is a market for that, because when I looked online—the identical issue was $15.87. So that those who trade in this country have a way of jacking up prices rather abusively and causing grief and pain among the people and sometimes the people wrongly think that it is the Government.

Madam Speaker, with those things said I would like to thank you for an opportunity to have responded to the Member for Siparia and I know, as I began by telling you, I know the difference between truth and untruth, fact and fiction, political stability and political desperation. And on those tests I would choose this one, the PNM every time. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [Desk
Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I think now is a convenient time for us to break for lunch. We will return at 3.15 p.m.

2.15 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

3.15 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): [Desk thumping] Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the Member for Laventille West as he made his contribution early, and it is clear why he cannot visit his constituency without public and private security. Madam Speaker, I believe he would receive a baptism, wetting after wetting. Madam Speaker, I listened to him. I saw hate, Madam Speaker. I saw bitterness, Madam Speaker. I saw anger, Madam Speaker. I saw acrimony, Madam Speaker. I saw nastiness, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I saw a man completely out of control, Madam Speaker, [Desk thumping] completely out of control. And it is no wonder, Madam Speaker, that the former Prime Minister, Mr. Mervyn Augustus Manning, never made the Member for Laventille West a Member in his Cabinet. [Desk thumping]

But I would like to ask some questions of the goodly gentleman from Laventille West, Madam Speaker. He talks about him being righteous and those on that side being righteous and of good nature and character. And I would like to just ask him a question: If he is aware of a certain case in the High Court between Marlon McPherson and one Fitzgerald Hinds? This was a court case, dated the 15th of June, 2011, before the Honourable Madam Justice Jones, where it is hereby ordered, the defendant, and the defendant in this case is my colleague from Laventille West, the defendant has to purchase the said portion of the claimant’s land encroached on and by him in accordance with the survey plan, et cetera, et cetera. And he was ordered to pay $84,393 to the person upon whose land he
squatted. This is in the public domain, Madam Speaker.

At the same time, can he tell us who is the MP who had to beg NIPDEC? And I am not casting aspersions on anybody. But could he tell us who is the MP who had to beg NIPDEC to write off over $100,000 in housing loans?

Madam Speaker, the principled Member for Laventille West talked about no one suffering or committing suicide because of the closure of Petrotrin. We do not revel in this, we do not, but facts are facts and facts are stubborn things. We would not call names. But it was in the *Trinidad Express*, August 07, 2019, the head—and I am saying this because he has challenged us to name anyone. He even sat down and gave us the opportunity to respond. But we would respond. We are responding, in the fullness of time. The *Trinidad Express*, August 07, 2019:

“Fired worker commits suicide”

That was the heading and they quoted a relative as commenting on the death of a former Petrotrin worker. And he said that the man suffered severe depression following the closure of Petrotrin. And I only say this to say that when you take actions that are hurtful to the society, that there are repercussions. There are human repercussions that result from the kind of incompetence and poor decision-making that takes place on the other side. [Desk thumping]

I think he is a psychiatrist, Dr. Varma Deyalsingh, said that losing a job is a most stressful experience. So when you make decisions and you smile and just say 5,000 workers gone, all, all, do not call me, you are dealing with the lives of human beings. That is the situation in Trinidad and Tobago. He said that CEPEP workers were and will be receiving the minimum wage after the 15 per cent increase. Well, our only response to that is we will decide that in court. We have a different view. We win cases in court, and if as you say there is a whole group of individuals who make a livelihood of winning cases in the courts, then so be it.

**UNREVISED**
The courts exist to give us justice, Madam Speaker.

But I want to go to a significant point. The Prime Minister was quoted last night on television as saying that it was because of prudent fiscal management and cost cutting by his Government that they avoided the IMF, the International Monetary Fund. Well, Madam Speaker, Ms. Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, she had to go to the IMF, because when she got into office, there was not a cent of foreign exchange or reserves in the Treasury, nothing. The previous Government left them nothing. So they received a US loan of $229 million from the IMF. And Jamaica, Madam Speaker did the same thing in 2013, and they received a US 600 or thereabouts loan arrangement from the IMF. So they got 600 in one case, and 292. So this incompetent Government that we have now, did not go to the IMF because we left them over $100 billion in foreign exchange and in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, $100 billion, $10 billion in reserves, and close to $6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So what Barbados and Jamaica went to the IMF for, we had 10 times that, in terms of the reserves and foreign exchange that we left them.

Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Member for Siparia on her contribution today. [Desk thumping] It is the first time, after leaving the UN that I heard such erudition, such foresight, such instant vision that I thought I was back at the UN. I really thought. I nearly said Madam Guterres, but sorry, I realize I am back in Trinidad. I was transformed, Madam Speaker.

The Member for Siparia gave us today what could only be described as a real budget speech. [Desk thumping] It was the real budget speech. She pointed out the woeful inadequacies and incompetence of this Keith Rowley administration. She laid out a roadmap for prosperity, for good governance and for hope for Trinidad and Tobago. And Madam Speaker, you know I have been
talking about smart goals. I have lectured at three universities, yes, yes, yes. And we always talk about goals are not statements of intent. They are specific. They must be measurable. They must be attainable. They must be relevant and they must be timely.

Madam Speaker, when we look at page 57 of the Member for Siparia’s—a seminal address to us, to the country today. She spoke, the key targets, she said, by 2025, the Member for Siparia, she said create 10,000 new jobs. So that is very specific; that is measurable; that is attainable and that is timely. You give a time bound, 2025, 10,000 new jobs.

The Member for Siparia is going to cut the food import bill by $2 billion. We are not saying that we are going to cut the food bill and we are going to do this and we are going to do that and we are hoping that it will work out. A specific, measurable target was set by the Member for Siparia.

The Member said it will generate an additional one billion in agricultural exports and it will increase to 5 per cent agriculture's contribution to the GPD; specific. This is the kind of thing, the level of erudition that one gets in a First World Parliament, and I was transformed today. And no wonder the document is entitled “National Economic Transformation Master Plan 2020 to 25”. This, Madam Speaker, will take Trinidad and Tobago to the First World. It will take Trinidad and Tobago. And Madam Speaker, when I talk about Singapore, they think that I am speaking about aspirations to be like Singapore. We want not to be like Singapore, but to exceed Singapore. Singapore must take lessons from us, and this is a road map, a master plan to achieve that.

Madam Speaker, so visionary was the contribution by the Member for Siparia, that to steal her thunder, to steal her thunder, what do you think they did? They called an election. They called an election. [Desk thumping] When they
were exposed to the level of erudition, it was like a class in Harvard University today. They decided they cannot deal with this and I see them fumbling and fidgeting. So they decided what they are going to do is that are going to call an election. But you cannot fool all the people all the time. Since we all know that they have no plan.

The Member for Laventille West made another comment. He said at the OWTU, and we need to correct the record. We always supported the fact that the OWTU was selected as the preferred bidder. We objected, however, to the way it was done. The fact that the refinery is heavily mortgaged and lastly that it should never have been closed down in the first place. Madam Speaker, the last point, based on what I heard from the Member for Laventille West, we solved 143 wage negotiations. That is not in dispute. We paid the increased sums when they were necessary to be paid. The Member for Siparia did not, when she came into office, she did not cry like a “poor me one”. She did not cry and blame the PNM. She acted like a man. She acted like a man, had responsibilities and she stood up to it, faced it and paid it.

**Hon. Member:** True leadership.

**Mr. R. Charles:** True leadership, my colleague is reminding me, true leadership. We hear on that side, we left them with 143 negotiations and, you know, “poor me one, we cyar solve it” and they go into their mantra, blame the UNC, blame the UNC. For once we say, be like a man. They call it man up to your responsibilities; man up to your responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, you see I got distracted by the diatribe from the contribution for Laventille West, nothing of substance, nothing of substance. Just picking here and shooting there and commenting on this and not giving a vision, an alternative vision or substantively critiquing what the Member for Siparia
presented, cannot do that. So you resort to ad hominem attacks and slippery slopes arguments and falsehoods in order to present a contribution. When you analyze it, it amounts to a lot of sound and fury, but it signifies nothing. Yes.

So, Madam Speaker, it was a most trying experience. I am getting now to my contribution, spending three hours and 20 minutes to that most garrulous, verbose, loquacious, effusive rambling on Monday last.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, 53; Standing Order 53.

**Madam Speaker:** Which one of 53? 53 has (1)(a) to—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 53(1)(a), Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** “A Member present in the House during the debate—

(a) shall enter or leave the House with decorum;”?


**Mr. R. Charles:** Madam Speaker, sometimes I am reminded, Madam Speaker, of my primary school days, my preschool days, hearing the bantering from that side that makes no sense.

Madam Speaker, I would have liked to give the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I would have liked to give his presentation a passing grade. But given recent events in Penal, I do not wish to make another grave mistake, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the US President, with 300 million citizens and a US $4 trillion economy, takes less than two hours on average to deliver their state of the union address. Madam Speaker, in the United Kingdom the Chancellor of the Exchequer normally takes one hour and 40 minutes.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, 53(1)(e), please.

3.30 p.m.

**Madam Speaker:** “A Member present in the House during the debate—

(a) shall enter or leave the House with decorum;” [Laughter]

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Mr. Lee: 53(1)(e).

Madam Speaker: Just now, you said 53(1)(a)?

Mr. Lee: I said 53(1)(e).

53(1)—“(e) shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking and shall not interrupt…”

Madam Speaker: You meant “e” as in egg? I am sorry, I heard “a”. All right, so, all right. We have all had lunch and we might have a lil extra energy. I ask everyone—Member, Member, Members for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, Diego Martin North/East and Couva North, right. So, as I was saying, you know, we might have a lil extra energy having had lunch, but I would really like—we will channel it into listening, so that we will all get our chance to speak when the time comes. Member for Naparima, continue.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, in the United Kingdom the Chancellor of the Exchequer normally takes an hour and 40 minutes for an £800 billion economy. Not this Minister of Finance. Here we have the Minister of Finance detaining us with his repetitive self-congratulatory overweening ambition to hoodwink and deceive us. His contribution consisted of 23,000 words, with 97 uses of the words “we are”, 97 uses of the words “we are”, and 75 uses of the word “I”, an increase of 11 from the record of 64 last year, Madam Speaker. Surprisingly, he only blamed the UNC 15 times. Normally we get 40, but he was gracious, we got 15 times he looked to blame the UNC.

Madam Speaker, what we did not see in his budget, what we did not see: no measurable targets for reducing the murder rate, none. No significant contribution of sustainable jobs to the economy, none whatsoever. We did not see “no” new sustainable non-oil revenue streams. We saw no diversification of the economy, we saw no indication of when the Forensic Science Centre will become fully
accredited as it is in Singapore. Nothing about that. No time frame for when our foreign exchange will reach the 10.5 billion which we left in 2015, nothing at all.

Three hours, three times what a US President would take to address a whole nation, right? Three times what a UK Chancellor of the Exchequer would take to address the fellow citizens of the United Kingdom. No idea, Madam Speaker, of when the 69 early childhood centers built by the UNC, will become commissioned and become fully operational. [Desk thumping] Do not cry crocodile tears about us being concerned about the early childhood preschool education. You have 69 schools at the moment collecting vines and homeless people occupying them, and you refuse to open them for four years.

Madam Speaker, no indication in the budget about when CEPEP, URP and OJT workers will be transitioned out of that temporary arrangement that was stated in the original plan when it was conceived. No idea when they will be transitioned to permanent, sustainable and well-paying middle class jobs. Madam Speaker, but we heard from the Leader of the Opposition, the plans to create 56,000 jobs with a road map for creating those jobs, Madam Speaker. Plans, plans; facts are stubborn things, intellect always shows.

And, Madam Speaker, I am going to send this to my colleagues at the UN and Singapore, and I am sure I will get—and I will at the same time send the presentation by the Minister of Finance, and I am sure what they are going to tell me. But you see they could come in Trinidad, they could come in Parliament and say anything and get away with it but you cannot fool people who know what they are about. You cannot. No indication of whether we will avoid a future like Haiti, Madam Speaker, for which we see heading.

And I will tell you, it hurts me to say that but I am going to say it. You know why we saw none of these things? It is plain and simple, the Minister of
Finance, and we have to face it in Trinidad and Tobago today, he is a qualified engineer, but he is not a finance man, he has no finance qualifications that would give him the intellectual backdrop to take us out of the morass that we are in, Madam Speaker. I will always compare to—they do not like to hear about Singapore, but the Singapore Minister of Finance has an MA in Economics from Cambridge University, and a Masters in Public Admin from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and was Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so we have a reverb in the Chamber and I would really like the reverb to be switched off. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Madam Speaker, I will get to foreign affairs, the specific area. And I will get specifically to Trinidad and Tobago’s nomination for the positions at the United Nations. When Prime Minister Dr. Rowley returned from his long overdue trip to the United Nations General Assembly, he spoke at a press conference on October the 1st, and stated that, and I quote:

> We intend at the next opportunity to advance our country for a seat on the Security Council.

The actual election for that would be in 2026, Madam Speaker. You see, Madam Speaker, from his statement one would get the impression that it was his Government that was doing the work to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago got a seat on the Security Council in 2026. But facts are stubborn things, and the fact is that all the groundwork for Trinidad and Tobago’s nomination for a seat on the Security Council was done when the People’s Partnership was in government.

[Desk thumping]

And Madam Speaker, I have the evidence and I will send it to the media. The GRULAC chart—GRULAC is the Group of Latin American and Caribbean
countries. And it was last updated on the 30\textsuperscript{th} of September, 2019. And hear what it said:

Listed as the sole GRULAC candidate for membership on the Security Council for 2027/28 term is Trinidad and Tobago.

But more importantly, date of the receipt of the application was the 21\textsuperscript{st} of May, 2013, Madam Speaker. Who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2013? A distinguished colleague from Tabaquite. And who was the Prime Minister when our nomination was placed? And the records are there at the United Nations.

**Hon. Member:** And who was the Ambassador?

**Mr. R. Charles:** And I will not tell them who was the Ambassador. [Laughter] I am a very humble man, I will not tell them. But it gets better, it gets better, Madam Speaker, I will inform those on the other side, that listed as the sole candidate for the position of President of the 78\textsuperscript{th} General Assembly for the term 2023 to 2024 is Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, the date the application was received was September 03, 2013, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

You see, we had a vision of global leadership. President of the General Assembly, Trinidad and Tobago must be on the Security Council. We did the action, and at the United Nations you cannot get President of the General Assembly “just so”. It happens every five years, they rotate it among geographic regions. So our term in 2023 to 2024 is going to be GRULAC, Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries. So once you put your name, it rotates and once you put your name and you do your lobbying so other candidates would not compete with you in the group of Latin American countries, then it is taken as automatic. So Trinidad and Tobago, I announce today will have a President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2023.
But, Madam Speaker, you see why I have problems with my colleagues on the other side, I have problems—[Interruption] Yes, great is the UNC. Trinidad and Tobago is listed among 64 bad-paying countries at the United Nations. So we are going and putting our name for President of the General Assembly and for a membership of the Security Council, but they are not telling us that we are a bad-pay country. You cannot hold your head high at the United Nations when you do not pay your fees, Madam Speaker.

Trinidad and Tobago is one of 64 out of 193 countries yet to pay their mandatory annual contribution to the UN’s regular budget and working capital fund for this year. According to budget documents, Trinidad and Tobago was supposed to contribute $5.7 million to the UN regular budget and capital fund in 2019. And how much does this revise—when I looked at the Revised Estimates of Expenditure for 2019. How much was allocated? Zilch, not even a fraction was paid. Moreover, out of $14 million in fees budgeted to be paid to the UN for 2019, the Revised Estimates for 2019 show that $13.29 million remains unpaid.

Madam Speaker, nothing paid towards UN peacekeeping operations. Nothing paid to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean budgetary support; nothing paid to the International Criminal Court. Madam Speaker, that is criminal. Our former President and Prime Minister ANR Robinson was the person who gave birth to the International Criminal Court. President Anthony Carmona was a judge in the Criminal Court. Right now we have a judge, the honourable Geoffrey Henderson. He sits on the court. You know how embarrassing it is when you sit on a court and your country is not paying its dues? It is embarrassing.

Nothing paid for the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and, Madam Speaker, nothing paid for the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. We
had gentlemen, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Lennox Ballah, we had fellas like Francis Charles, sitting on the tribunal, Justice Anthony Lucky. And we are not paying our dues, bad-pay. You see, they could bad-pay contractors in Trinidad and laugh “kee kee kee” and get away with it. But in the international fora you have to live up to your responsibilities, Madam Speaker. And it gets worse, in the Commonwealth Secretariat we are not paying our dues. They cannot be serious, they are a bunch of jokers, Madam Speaker. How can they claim to care about our international image?

So this budget as far as I am concerned from the foreign affairs standpoint, “is vaps, yuh chook ah figure here, yuh put in sumtin dey, and yuh hope dat yuh talk fast and yuh talk nice, and yuh have yuh support from your side who will clap”, and you get away with it.

Madam Speaker, if you look at our budget and our planning and our whatnot from a dispassionate eye, you see issues, you see challenges. Madam Speaker, the Government’s stated intention in the budget to establish an embassy in Qatar, $1.5 million allocated for a site visit as recorded in the PSIP, and to look for potential accommodation and if they find it, make a down payment. Last year we heard it was Abu Dhabi in UAE for a new mission. Why switch to Qatar? Qatar is right now in a conflict with Saudi Arabia. Why do we want to get in there when the world is moving away from a fossil fuel economy? And we are going plump in the centre of a fossil environment.

What about the establishment of a High Commission in Guyana? They claimed to have looked at properties and yet no word on what is being done, if anything at all. Madam Speaker, Guyana will soon become the energy capital of Caricom. And we should be seeking— [Crosstalk] —yes, yes—

Madam Speaker: Order, order.
**Mr. R. Charles:** We should be seeking to leverage our century-old expertise in energy to the mutual benefit of both of our countries, Madam Speaker. And we hear complaints from Guyanese businessmen, last week, of major difficulties in accessing our market for meat and agricultural products. For heaven’s sake, you spent $6 billion on the food import bill, well let us spend some on a fellow Caricom state, let the money circulate in the region. But there is no foresight, no planning, no thinking by those opposite. [	extit{Desk thumping}]

**3.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, a few days ago, a few eh, there was a Caricom meeting in Barbados with the President of Kenya. Present were the Prime Ministers Mia Mottley, Allen Chastanet from St. Lucia. Ministers representing Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname and the Caricom Secretary-General Irwin LaRocque who was there. Trinidad and Tobago was notably absent or left out. What is really going on? What is really going on? If we are not careful, under this administration, Trinidad and Tobago will be irrelevant to what is going on in Caricom. So we are talking about $5 million in the budget is listed for PSIP for the relocation of the Ministry’s head office. This unnecessary expense at this time, this guava season, Madam Speaker? Could this $5 million not be better utilized?

Venezuelan embassy issues: Maybe a portion of that five million would be better served ensuring that our staff are paid, Madam Speaker. The 	extit{Daily Express} reported on the 5\textsuperscript{th} of October, a couple days ago, that a Trinidad and Tobago Immigration officer based in Caracas, his name is Balroop Beebakhee, who went to Venezuela in early July, following the moves to impose a visa system in Caracas. He is saying he is now in dire straits and forced to live out of his own pocket as his monthly foreign service allowance is not being paid, has never been
paid since he arrived in Venezuela.

So our embassy staff in Venezuela cannot buy even arepas. I understand that their family has to send doubles for them to make sure they are eating. Madam Speaker, what a shame. This is a country of which I am greatly proud, and when I talk to my friends outside it is almost like a laughing stock, how Trinidad has reached, what has happened, what has befallen us, what sin have we committed. I know what the sin we have committed is. We sit next door. So that the Minister of everything, Port of Spain West/St. Ann’s West, has already issued a statement from the Ministry of National Security, because the gentleman is an immigration officer, that over 1,900 visas have been granted up until the beginning of October and that work has not stopped. That is inconsistent from what we are hearing from the Caracas embassy. Could it be once again that the left hand does not know in this Government what the right hand is doing and therefore we are left confused?

But, the registration process, Madam Speaker, after the registration process, even though many Venezuelans were registered, 1,600 I am told, we are still faced with the fundamental question of how many Venezuelans reside in our country. As usual under this Government we have no accurate data, no statistics on how many are here. Yet they are telling the BBC that their figures are wrong. If you are telling somebody your figures wrong, it means I have a figure. Right? We do not have a figure. Nobody on that side.

So we are running a country, this is our country and we do not know how many people are in that bedroom or sleeping downstairs. We have to get serious, Madam Speaker. With no real lockdown of our borders, we are left vulnerable. In terms of the refugee crisis and human rights concern, and let us always say we are concerned that the Venezuelans are treated humanely, but we are saying that the process must be transparent and it must be able to stand scrutiny. It must be
consistent with best practices.

So, Madam Speaker, no consultation with any global refugee organization before addressing the Venezuelan crisis. Government claims most of the Venezuelans registered while the entire country suspects that over 40,000 Venezuelans are living here and the numbers are growing daily. No health care policy for these persons. No education plan for their children. No plan for what happens next year—they are going to rush to the Parliament and say the year has finished and the Government after looking at it, we have decided whatever they decide—or they get up in the morning and decide. A serious country would have had a registration, no stage one is this, stage two is that, stage three is that. So that we all sit like First World countries and we can talk with confidence based on well thought out comprehensive policy decisions. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, no control at the borders to restrict criminals from entering. No plan to—this is critical—utilize their skills base to offset our own deficiencies. Madam Speaker, one of the 16,000-plus Venezuelans may be a forensic pathologist. And we need forensic pathologists. We should have picked up that, picked up his qualifications, picked up where they are accredited and ship him here so that we could deal with crime once and for all. But you see that requires a level of imagination, critical thinking, a level of analysis, level of reading—[Interruption]—and level of vision, Madam Speaker. Thanks very much, vision. No vision, no plan. So you “go tell” me what? You could fool me, but you cannot fool Trinidad and Tobago. And you are doing a disservice to our country and to generations yet unborn.

So, in terms of our international image, it is bad, Madam Speaker. In the last few years the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia have all issued travel advisories for Trinidad and Tobago warning about increased levels of crime.
Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, travel advisory on Trinidad and Tobago, 28 June, 2019, warned citizens of high levels of violent crime. Multiple travel advisories warn potential tourists that, and I quote, I am quoting here: “Shootings, kidnapping, and other gang and drug related violence occur and there is risk of you being in the wrong place at the wrong time.” That could happen to any of us, all of us could be at the wrong place at the wrong time. You sit in a pub in Trinidad and you see somebody coming with a hoodie and your blood pressure goes up. So a lot of us walk with our blood pressure tablets, because of the incompetence of this Government on the other side. They only talk, they do not perform, Madam Speaker. Talk, do not perform.

Coast guard, and even that was not enough, the “ghost guard” I call it, and may I say we have nothing against the officers in the coast guard. We feel they are poorly managed, we feel that they are not given policy prescriptions so that they could operate optimally and we feel that they are under-resourced. That is the reality. The question is: Why are they always nowhere to be found when our fishermen are under attack?

Last night I was listening on TV to a gentleman who was kidnapped and he was released and he is saying that, in his view, that it is better—that the coast guard we have and nothing is the same. And I am not saying this with joy. I am saying that I am sure the officers want to perform, they want to be of service so the fishermen could say the coast guard is our friend and we can work together. And the question I ask: Why can we not give one example that when fishermen are subject to piracy that the coast guard has intervened, captured the pirates and freed our fishermen who are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker, crime: In this budget we see no vision or clear plan to combat the criminal elements. All we see are frills. Superficial promises that will
only assist in locking up the small man but not in addressing the underlying causes for him to resort to crime. Nothing aimed at catching the financiers of crime.

**Hon. Member:** “Oooooh”.

**Mr. R. Charles:** And “the big fish”, “the big fish”. Madam Speaker, we hear talk, “El Capo” something, something that Mr. Manning said—

**Hon. Member:** “El Tutti Capo”.

**Mr. R. Charles:** “El Tutti Capo” big words. We hear on that side, “we passing legislation to catch white collar crime”, Madam Speaker, talk a little about that. So while people are being slaughtered on our streets, in their homes, and at their workplaces, the Prime Minister continues to fail to provide any measure of comfort to us as citizens. Talk and talk but they do not perform, Madam Speaker. And we have an Attorney General who is expert on passing legislation after legislation, a “suite”, he likes that word, a suite of legislation. Madam Speaker, I have to ask what the benefit is. You see, when we talk about targets, measurable, achievable, attainable. What is the measurable achievement of all this legislation? What are the concrete results? Yes, arrests have been made under the anti-gang law. Arrests have been made, but arrests do not equate to convictions. I would say the law is working, you have arrested, you have convicted 40 persons and I would say that that is some result. So in my book, there has been no result, no measurable result and we see it in crime.

The Government has our police officers sharing non-lethal weapons. The Member for Siparia spoke about that. Three hundred body cameras for close to 7,000 police officers, it equates to less that than 4 per cent of the TTPS. What we achieve, but 4 per cent walking around with body cameras and the rest doing what we do before—

**Hon. Member:** What is that?
Mr. R. Charles: You see, I—which is getting involved with a community. There is conflict and there is no evidence, no visual evidence to say that the police acted appropriately or the citizens, you know, were at fault.

Madam Speaker, technology such as drones, pepper sprays, Tasers should be supplied in greater quantities for it to have a measurable impact, not a PR thing to say you bring 100 and most of the 7,000 people do not have body cameras or Tasers. For years we have heard rhetoric that the Government had to be frugal in its spending and give value for money but it is clear it is not true. For National Security and the TTPS combined, we spent, the UNC spent $21.19 billion, we spent 21 billion. Guess how much they spent? They spent 28.31 billion, Madam Speaker, and in 2020 when you take that allocation of 5.87 billion it is going to work out to 28 billion. So they spent 7.1 billion more than we spent but crime was lower when we were in office. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, you see during our term in office the statistics show that we were making headway in the fight against crime. Soon as they came into office, crime rate shot up and today it is now worse than ever. So 7.12 billion more spent and they have nothing to show for it. They talk and throw borrowed money at problems, not real money, you know, borrowed money, bonds here, this here, NIF there, they borrowing money. They paying off housing debt by borrowing money from the citizens to pay off the debt.

That reminds me of a partner and he used to be in every credit union in Trinidad. He have debt here, he will join that credit union, and he pay that debt. He join that credit union, he pay that debt. He join that credit union—we are at the same place, a lot of sound and fury but signifying nothing to people of the capacity to think. Sometimes I get—I should not have gone to school, you know, sometimes, because it is better to sit and ignore and take it and have a nice time.
Because when you see Trinidad going nowhere, when it dawns on you that those opposite, probably well-intentioned but they do not know what they are doing, they do not know whereof they speak and once you understand that you get scared, Madam Speaker, you get scared.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken; they will distort it so I will say precisely what I am saying. Mass incarceration is a problem globally, mostly in the United States and I am not talking about at-risk youth, I am not dog whistling, I am stating the fact. The Government fails to realize that jailing is not the answer. What is the big picture with these citizens? Some of whom are innocent. In Remand Yard, Madam Speaker, some are innocent. And after they go to jail for years and return to society, then what? What benefits does mass incarceration bring? Yes, we may have—and if people have done wrong they should be jailed. But I am saying a policy that is premised on jailing more and more people without any analysis and not comprehending the unintended consequences can lead us to irreparable problems down the line, Madam Speaker.

They are not thinking about the consequences. You bring more legislation, you bring more harsh fees, you lock up more people and we have performed, we are great, we jail people. But children losing one or more parent to incarceration can set a child up for a life of poverty and detrimental mental health issues. Communities that suffer from high rates of mass incarceration have no rehabilitative institutions in their communities, thus children often experience their first arrest in the early teenage years—children of persons in prison.

Madam Speaker, in the Sixth report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Impact of Mental Health and Family Life of Remandees—

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, your original time is now spent. You
have ten more minutes to wrap up.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Ten more minutes?

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Ten more minutes. It is reported in First World countries there are systems in place where inmates have an account and can earn money in order to buy items from the commissary. Commissary is like a prison parlour. In Trinidad and Tobago prisoners do not have access to the store. There is no means for them to purchase except through visitors. So if your loved one goes to prison and you are unable to physically go to prison, you will not be able to add money to the inmate’s account so that he can make purchases. This puts extra strain on the remandee’s family and I see these women, Madam Speaker, in San Fernando and you see these poor people with a bag “ah ting” to hand, they trying and I am saying, you know, there must be a better way, there must be a better way.

According to the Trinidad and Tobago prison website, commiserate prices can be 20 to 50 per cent higher than on the outside. So—and I am quoting here from the post: the price for items is very different from the outside, water for instance, is $5 in the store that is outside and $9 in the commissary; be prepared to pay almost double for some things, Madam Speaker, you know—okay. We are not saying to go soft on criminals, but there must be 1,001–plus opportunities for somebody who has slipped through the crack to come back into society and live a fulfilling and rewarding life.

So let us bring more legislation and feed our jails and overwhelm our Remand Yard? That cannot be a policy that makes sense. It costs 20,000 to 25,000 per month to keep a prisoner in Remand Yard; that was given by the Attorney General. It can reach up to 50 million per month for 2,250 prisoners and billions stretching over the years and nobody on that side would sit down and say, “Listen
this is money going down the drain and therefore, let us see what we could do to reorganize it”.

But, Madam Speaker, it is estimated that there are probably 4,000 children of remandees in society, and we have to be concerned and we ask what is being done for these 4,500; not financial, but mental and social support. What is being done to provide father figures? Men who are positive role models. What is the allocation towards guidance counsellors in school and I will ask my colleague to look at that, but that is a problem. What is being done to encourage young men to become teachers, Minister of Education? I understand that the gender imbalance of teachers in primary schools is something like 75 per cent female, 25 per cent male. So if you have a male without a father figure going into a primary school, he has no responsible male figure like we had, Mr. London, Mr. White and a whole set of others we could pattern your life after.

Madam Speaker, they talk, and talk, and they talk. So we need to focus on existing laws, focus on measurable targets for crime. Police response time, recidivism, and rehabilitation, trials before courts, reducing murders, shortening the time. But, Madam Speaker, I have a concern for a Government that has to stop this pipeline of poor males going to prison.

So when I look at the budget—this budget—our Cadet Force, almost three-quarter of the 2019 allocation was not spent for goods and services and minor equipment purchases. Vision on Mission whose mandate is to reintegrate and rehabilitate prisoners, et cetera, half their budget was unspent in 2019. Madam Speaker, MiLAT, 5 million unspent in 2019; Police Youth Clubs, half their allocation was unspent; Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy, half unspent; 4H Farmers Clubs, a measly 60,000 spent out of 250,000. Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture, nothing spent. Rehabilitative programmes under the
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, 8.5 million allocated, 383,000 spent. But the SSA, the spy agency, you know, and Madam Speaker, I would just say when we write our speeches now we do not send it email. We have been warned. I say no more. But the SSA, the spy agency receives a whopping $198 million for 2020.

The little boys who are looking for hope, who have no father figure and who are depending on this Government to help them, the money goes into locking up people, the money goes into the SSA, they cannot be serious. Forensic Science Centre, Madam Speaker, we know the problems, I would not repeat them here but I ask one question: We have no idea of how many pathologists are needed to meet international standards and what steps we are taking to make it happen. We just hear we appointing two and we are recruiting a pathologist, but we do not know how many are needed in order to become accredited. Madam Speaker, they “doh” like to hear it, but in Singapore forensic science laboratories achieve accreditation by the American Society for Crime Laboratory Directors Accreditation Board. “We eh dey yet. We eh getting dey yet.” But we talking about crime and solving crime.

We talk about murders, do not want to go into there, et cetera. Madam Speaker, my constituency in the remaining time I have, the problems—we met with about 1,000 of the constituents; we were mandated by the leader: unemployment is the issue. Madam Speaker, anecdotal evidence is suggesting that the under-employment and unemployment rate in Naparima exceeds 35 per cent. Water woes and I am calling the names because I want them to listen when they start to blame us. St. Croix Road, Lengua Road, Sahai Trace, Sattar Avenue, Kanhai Road, Garth Road and Coryal Road, no water sometimes for months. Deplorable roads: they have named a highway Garth Road, they have renamed it
the “Colm Imbert Boulevard” and they have signs all over the road. The most potholes in Trinidad and Tobago.

PTRC allocation, they get 1.5 million, Madam Speaker, for 700 secondary roads and agricultural traces. It works out to $1,000 per trace in Naparima, Princes Town and Moruga/Tableland, 1,000 per trace. That is Trinidad and Tobago and we talk about agriculture and we doing this and we creating agro-processing plant in Moruga and whatnot, 1,000 per a trace.

Health centres, Madam Speaker, no medicine. I challenge you, Madam Speaker, to go to the Lenga health facility, not you, oh sorry, I challenge anybody in Trinidad who is listening to go right now to the Lenga health facility and seek to get medicine for diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer. They are not going to get, regardless of the utterances we hear in this House, Madam Speaker.

Schools, Reform Hindu, Ben Lomond Early Childhood Centre and the Reform Early Childhood Centre, vines growing over. I have said this every budget speech. Flooding, Madam Speaker, I want to— Leocott Dowlat, owner of Dowlat Farm, located at South Oropouche Road, Barrackpore, lost 20,000 chickens in 2017. And I want him to hear, because they think we are not advancing their case. He lost hundreds more while trying to evacuate his livestock last year during the flooding because the roadway collapsed due to floods and his trucks slipped into the water. He has received not a single cent of compensation from this Government, notwithstanding, what they say.

Madam Speaker, this Government is shameless, they have fired over 50,000 workers, and they have caused countless businesses to shut down due to lack of foreign exchange and a smaller customer base. They have increased hopelessness among the society. Make no mistake, however, it was UNC policies which improved the lives of the hard-working citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It was
UNC policies, not PNM, and I repeat, not PNM which gave the people of Trinidad and Tobago hope for a future for themselves and for their children. As the old people say “you cannot plant corn and expect to reap pigeon peas”. You cannot vote this incompetent PNM and expect prosperity, happiness and a fulfilling and worthwhile life. I thank you. 

[Desk thumping]

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join this debate and I would like to go very quickly into a structured contribution. Firstly, I intend to address some glaring inconsistencies in the contribution by the Member for Siparia, touching some of the equal inconsistencies offered by the Member for Naparima. Secondly, to then speak to the issue of crime and the economy through the lens of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs. And thirdly, to speak to issues in my constituency, San Fernando West.

I must say, Madam Speaker, that my first order of priority is to give commendation to Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, the Member for Diego Martin West, to the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and, of course, to the structural arrangements by the Minister of Planning and Development for Arouca/Maloney and I will tell you why I say that as quickly as I ought to. It is not an easy situation to have managed the financial situation of Trinidad and Tobago in the time that Prime Minister, Rowley led and had led and will continue to lead our Government well into the next decade. I will say why. Quite simply put, precipitous decline in revenue is something that is real. Diversification is something that is hinged into success only when your main plantation structures can actually feed that drive.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia effectively said accept the UNC “plan”. The Member for Siparia says that the UNC plan, quite simply put, is to
create 50,000 jobs to stimulate the economy by the removal of taxation. And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia says that that will be done, listen to this, that will be done by increasing the repo rate at the Central Bank. In other words then, telling the Central Bank to raise the cost of borrowings in Trinidad and Tobago for the average householder, mortgages go up, personal loans go up, tuition borrowings go up, vacation expenses go up, living expenses go up. The Member for Siparia says raise the repo rate.

Mr. Imbert: And devalue the dollar.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The Member then says, Madam Speaker, that Trinidad and Tobago effectively ought to devalue its currency. So the UNC mainstay driving force on this economy translated is simply raise the repo rate, raise the cost of borrowings and devalue the dollar.

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that eh.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: That is exactly what the Member said.

Hon. Member: That is what she said.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The Member then says that Trinidad and Tobago is to also find itself in the predicament of having to rely upon underwriting the expense of this new economy because the Member stood up and said build highways all over Trinidad and Tobago, construct new initiatives all over Trinidad and Tobago, raise repo rate, et cetera. And the Member says that that is to be funded, Madam Speaker—listen to how that is to be funded—by a diaspora fund that for people who do not understand what it means, means tell people outside of Trinidad and Tobago, bring your money back into Trinidad and Tobago. The only way that that could work is to offer a bond so that they can park it, but the bond must be backed by assets.

4.15 p.m.
So, when the Minister of Finance introduced NIF and packaged NIF with a basket full of assets—Angostura, Republic Bank, et cetera—local assets that the Government managed to take in the trade-off for Clico, the Member for Siparia called that a Ponzi scheme, told people do not invest. Thank the Lord that Trinidad and Tobago has a sensible population; it was oversubscribed by multiple times. But the Member has not said to the people of Trinidad and Tobago how these bonds are to be backed. The Member then says that the funding for the UNC vision for 2020 to 2025 would also be done by taking WASA and T&TEC, taking their debts and putting them into a special purpose company.

Madam Speaker, I must ask myself now, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, was the Member for Siparia awake at any Cabinet meeting while she was the Prime Minister? Because WASA does not have a debt management problem. WASA has an expense management problem with over $2 billion in subsidy for wages and recurrent expenses. The debts due at WASA, if any at all, are because successive governments, including this Government, have traded the subsidy. We have taken taxpaying dollars, we have taken earnings, and we have said to people, leave your water rates where they are for now, leave your electricity rates where they are for now. So it is incumbent to unearth the arrant nonsense of the argument put forward by the Member for Siparia, because there is no way on this earth that one can develop a country in the fashion suggested by Siparia if, Madam Speaker, you do not have the money to do it.

So, Madam Speaker, permit me to address just a few more things that Siparia said that are just plain wrong. Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia comes forward and tells Trinidad and Tobago that, first of all she, the hon. Member, is going to court to sue because CEPEP and URP wages are going to be lower than the minimum wage. Just let me deal with that very quickly. Madam
Speaker, the Civil Proceedings Rules, fortunately, have an amendment to them, and they allow for something called “wasted costs”. If a lawyer is uneducated enough to pursue a cause of action that has no grounding at all, the court can order the lawyer to pay the fines and fees personally. I look forward, on behalf of the taxpayers of this country, to taking a wasted cost order application against the Member for Siparia. Why? CEPEP and URP are extrapolated on the back of the minimum wage. When the Minister of Finance says there is a 15 per cent increase in URP and CEPEP wages, it is 15 per cent beyond the minimum wage, whatever that might be. In other words then, Madam Speaker, it is a formula. So I would say to Siparia, bring on the application, be met with a wasted cost order and be prepared to pay the money yourself.

Madam Speaker, the second thing that the Member said that is just completely wrong, false, dangerous and misleading, is the Member came here and tried to drop a pseudo bomb. As the member for Mourga/Tableland often says, “it eh no bomb that drop”. It was a fun snap. The Member came to this House and said, and tried to implicate the Minister of Finance and said the Integrity Commission should investigate the issue of the sale of the traditional life insurance policies from Clico, and the Member says the Minister of Finance must stand up and tell the country how he approved that process.

Madam Speaker, Siparia saw it fit to bestow onto herself Senior Counsel—former Prime Minister that presided over Clico for five years. Siparia was the leader of the Cabinet, Siparia was a past Attorney General, Minister of Legal Affairs, Minister of Education, and Siparia cannot read section 44D of the Central Bank Act, where the process is that the Central Bank, admitted into the equation under emergency power regulation to deal with Clico, the Central Bank has the responsibility of negotiating the Clico sale, managing the sale, determining the
price, getting the valuation. The Minister of Finance, in exercise of his responsibilities at law, only steps into the equation at the very end of the process to look at the national position. And, Madam Speaker, again, I welcome Siparia’s tirade because it would be met with another wasted cost order. So do not attempt to come to this Parliament, most respectfully, Madam Speaker, and raise that degree of nonsensical argument to try and implicate the Minister of Finance in a fantasy that just does not exist.

Madam Speaker, there is another fantasy. The Member said—and the Member for St. Joseph stood up and asked the Member to quote the source of the Member’s position on this matter. You quite correctly stepped in and said the Member need not give unless it is for Hansard record. The Member came and said to Trinidad and Tobago that this Government raided the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and took out US $4.2 billion. When we asked for that position, the Member said it was in a footnote to her speech. How a footnote to an oral speech works, I do not quite understand. But, Madam Speaker, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, at March 2009, stood at roughly US $3 billion. At 2019 July, it stands at close to US $6 billion, 6.25. Madam Speaker, if this Government were to have taken US $4.25 billion from that fund, it would have been completely “de-stabled” and eradicated. And, Madam Speaker, that exercise in fantasy and dishonesty, which has gone out into the public domain has to be corrected, Madam Speaker. That is not the case. Footnote my foot, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there is a third issue that I would like to touch. The hon. Member—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I stand on 48(6). He was referring to the Leader of the Opposition and using the word “dishonesty”, in other words, linking dishonesty to the Leader of the Opposition. I stand on 48(6).
Madam Speaker: Attorney General, just withdraw that word and continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, what was said is untrue, incorrect, patently wrong, deliberate, said on multiple occasions, repeated and then compounded, Madam Speaker and, therefore, it is intended in my humble opinion by way of argument coming from the Leader of the Opposition, to mislead the country in what is in effect to be apprehended as a dishonest statement, Madam Speaker. I hope I have clarified that for my learned colleague, the Member for Caroni East.

Madam Speaker, the other point that I would like to get on to quickly before I get into the other matters that I have signalled, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia, again with the capacity of her history, comes to this Parliament and says that the Petrotrin debt, Madam Speaker, is an incredible situation to be managed. The hon. Member came and read supposedly from a deed of debenture done with First Caribbean, comes to say that three companies mortgaged the Petrotrin assets and that the OWTU, in its capacity as a proposed purchaser for the refinery is going to find itself in deep trouble because the Minister of Finance will not be able to give the refinery when Petrotrin comes to that position, if it does, that it will not be able to go debt free. First of all, I would like to tell the hon. Member, it was not three companies, Madam Speaker, it was four. So get your facts straight.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, came to this country and congratulated Petrotrin on doing the impossible. Every international agency said that the management of that US $850 million bond and its refinancing was not capable of being done and, effectively, that the Government would have to have swallowed the debt, meaning, the Government would have to have put that debt on its books. The Minister said, in plain English, that he congratulated the Petrotrin team for getting that done without a Government guarantee. Madam Speaker, money is not given without collateral and, as a
lawyer, Siparia ought to know that that is a basic tenet of lending and, therefore, it is axiomatic that there would have been an underwriting of the assets, a charge on the assets. But, Madam Speaker, when the Minister of Finance says that Petrotrin will be given in its refinery disposition debt free, that is just a matter of a release of a part of the assets and a replacement of security, Madam Speaker. And I dare say, the replacement of that security now is an easier target. Why? Because of the courage of the Member for Diego Martin West, $2 billion a year was stopped from being lost.

In one half of a year, we have turned into a profitable position of nearly half a billion dollars, and that is Heritage alone. In those circumstances, a bank would now see Heritage’s position, the larger group position, as a profitable one, Madam Speaker, and one can easily—ABC of the law of financing, clearly lost upon the Member for Siparia—see this is an easy situation to be dealt with.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia says, “Let us get T&T working again.” And here is where I begin my deep submission having answered these, and I will come back to interactions of the Member’s speech in the relevant positions of my own contribution. I want to put on the record and ask people during the course of my delivery to remember this. UNC’s submission, get T&T working again. And I say, as I am about to embark upon my venture, the question for Trinidad and Tobago is: Get working for who? And I would like to put my submission that Trinidad and Tobago is now faced with a PNM position, a governmental position, which I would like to encapsulate in the use of one word. We offer the word “value”, because our policies and positions are to be measured by way of technical compliance, meaning, do we have structures and remedies to do something, and then they must be measured by way of deliverable outcomes. And, Madam Speaker, my own submission is that there is value in the structural
approach that we have taken, and I would like to get now to what Naparima was touching on, which is crime.

Madam Speaker, there are two burning issues in this country. The first one is the economic position which I think the Minister of Finance has dealt with in the delivery of his budget. The second one is pegged to the issue of crime. Madam Speaker, both of these two require the operation of something called “confidence”. An economy could have all the money in the world, if there is no confidence in the economy it will not prosper. You can have all of the support in terms of national security, in terms of legislation, if there is no confidence in the system you are going to destroy the effort.

Madam Speaker, picture this for a moment. Every leading, all time rock star movie that is war based, historical or otherwise, usually has a protagonist; a main lead that stands in front of the troops. Picture Mel Gibson in “Braveheart” with the blue paint and white across his face. Picture Maximus in the movie the “Gladiator” as he stood before the hordes, or in the Colosseum. All of these generals, all of these people that took on the war on crime or injustice, stood before their troops. Churchill, historically so. And what did they do? Mandela in Apartheid. What did they do? They stood there and they extolled the virtues of their suggestion of their position, the virtues of their fight. They then rallied the courage in the hearts and weak knees of their troops.

But, Madam Speaker, they did not stand on the battle mount on horseback and point out to their troops, “You troops! Flank on the left, your knees are shaking, your horses are sick, you are starved. There is nothing for you. Just over the hill you have one shot in your pistol and you will miss.” Madam Speaker, you catch where I am going to? The UNC offers this country, and, indeed, I dare say many other people say to our country: “Go to war, pick the hill you will die on and
then bad talk your troops.” And, Madam Speaker, let us now offer the remedy to that situation.

The UNC speak of a crime plan. I understand that. We in the PNM speak of an anti-crime plan. Madam Speaker, the anti-crime plan that Naparima asked for is to be delivered not in a budget speech. Naparima need only to have reflected upon the legislation and suite of legislation. He sought to mock my reference to the interoperability of law and the organizational operationalization of it. Naparima then stood up there and said: “I accept that the Anti-Gang Act is working and that the law passed, but we are not seeing any results.” Where is Naparima to witness the arrest of 15 gang members? Where is Naparima to witness so-called big fish standing before the court? Where is the front page of our newspaper on these issues, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, let us get to what works. What is the criminal justice system? What have we done as a Parliament? The criminal justice system requires the inter-operation of laws, bodies in places to deliver a result, acquittal or conviction. In Trinidad and Tobago, the problem is it takes too long. Crime, therefore, does not become something managed by way of deterrence, because if you do the crime, you ought to do the time, but how does that work in a system where it is 20 years long in the cycle?

Madam Speaker, the first layer of managing crime in this country that this Government has dealt with, is to treat with it logically. You cannot change your society unless you deal with plant, machinery, people, processes, and law. Let me repeat that. Plant, machinery, people, processes, and law. And, Madam Speaker, when we came to the country in 2015, the first exercise done in the Office of the Attorney General was to speak about the prison system. We went into the data. We showed how many people were there, how long they were there. You just
heard Naparima quoting my own statistics, the Government’s statistics, as to how much it costs per head and the billions spent in incarcerating people on remand. We went there because the prison is a litmus test to show you how your system is working or not.

Madam Speaker, in treating with that position, we now know as a matter of fact we have 29,000 preliminary enquiries in arrears. We have 140,000 cases per year on average coming to the Magistrates’ Court. We have 36 judges at the High Court; we have 43 magistrates in the Magistracy; we have 12 Court of Appeal judges when we came into office. Madam Speaker, when we came into office there were two Masters of the High Court. Madam Speaker, when we came into the office, there was a criminal side of the equation and there was a civil side of the equation. Madam speaker, in dealing with plant and machinery, people and processes as the core to making law work, let me tell you what this Government has done in relation to legislation and operation.

First of all, Madam Speaker, the first thing we recognize is, you cannot have a trial if you do not have judges. And, Madam Speaker, when we dealt with judges, I put on record, Family and Children Division Bill, Act No. 6 of 2016. Secondly, Miscellaneous Provisions (Supreme Court of Judicature and Children) Act, 2018, No. 15 of 2018, and I put, Madam Speaker, on the record, the following. Those two pieces of law birthed, Madam Speaker, the ability to move judicial complement from 36 judges to 64 in the High Court, from 12 Court of Appeal judges to 15.

And, Madam Speaker, the second aspect, after you create the capacity for judges, is where you are getting them from. Those judge, by those pieces of law, can now come from the Commonwealth, not just from limited jurisdictions. Madam Speaker, when you have judges, what is next to be considered in the
criminal justice system is, where are you putting them?

The UNC talks about courts forgetting that section 34 was built on the back of creating courts, masters and structures. That is the preliminary enquiries abolition law, Act No. 11 of 2011. Madam Speaker, when that came into operation, I can tell you now that the United National Congress Government talked about crime and did not open a single courtroom in Trinidad and Tobago after spending nearly $400 billion in this economy. Let me tell you what we have done. Madam Speaker, we have already now hired 19 Masters in the High Court. Let me repeat that. We went from two Masters to 19 Masters. How did that happen? The Masters are intended to case manage the equation.

Madam Speaker, we opened the Children Court Fyzabad, we opened the Children Court, St. Clair, and in the four courts each that stand there that is eight courtrooms. Madam Speaker, in treating with the position of courts, we also saw the need to create more divisional structures, and the hon. Prime Minister announced to this country the decanting of the Parliament from this site across to the Red House. And, Madam Speaker, that allows the civil division of the High Court to move here. And, Madam Speaker, do you know what that results in? The opening in this life of this Government of 65 court hearings—hearing rooms, chamber court applications—at the Hall of Justice. So, let me add that up—eight plus 65, Madam Speaker, is where we at 73 courts, Madam Speaker, to treat with crime.

Madam Speaker, let us go further. Where is the Magistracy going? The UNC talks about courts and justice and positions. Madam Speaker, let me tell you what we have done. Madam Speaker, when we treat about the courts, I would like to say that we have already allocated an “R” in the course of building out the Siparia courts. We have already vested into the Judiciary, the land which was
lying idle in the AG’s Office at Irvin Park in San Fernando, right in my constituency, for the establishment of a brand new Magistrates’ Court in San Fernando. We have added into that, Madam Speaker, Rio Claro. We have dealt with Penal, Madam Speaker. We have opened already the Children Court in Tobago, and that was opened just last week.

So, Madam Speaker, while they talking and talking and talking, I am now telling you, Madam Speaker, about bricks and mortar tied into legislation. [Desk thumping] But, Madam Speaker, forget bricks and mortar and judges. Who is going to run the court? How are you going to run the court, Madam Speaker? Let me tell you what we did, not what we are thinking about doing and have not thought out, as the UNC offers as an alternative, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, our Cabinet did something which was dynamic.

Madam Speaker, when we came in we realized that the Judiciary needed assistance in reorganization. We created a Family and Children Division, a Criminal Division, a Civil Division and a probate division will come this year, and in creating those structures, Madam Speaker, after you have judges and you have places, bodies are required. Madam Speaker, I put on the record now, we have created 357 positions. Let me repeat that. Three hundred and fifty-seven positions for the Criminal Court. A similar number in the Family Court, children court arrangements, Madam Speaker. In other words then, we are talking about the creation of approximately 600 positions to run. Why? In creating the Criminal Division, Madam Speaker, we said it was nonsensical for matters to take four and five years to transfer between the Magistracy and the High Court. We said that the Magistrates’ Court needed to operate in a particular system—judicial research assistants, judicial support officers, clerks, orderlies. We said that you needed a registrar to run the court. We said Justices of the Peace needed to be legally

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appropriation. Madam Speaker, I can tell you today, all of that has begun. [Desk thumping] The Criminal Division is in operation, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] So I am not talking about guess and calculate and Miss “Coulda, woulda and slogan”. Five years and three months the Members opposite had $400 billion, not a court open, not a body hired, not a law amended. But, Madam Speaker, let us get deeper.

We have been talking about night court for years in this country. Madam Speaker, you do not need night court and day court, you know. You need a cause list. You need somebody to manage the cause list, hence the Masters. When you create the list and you judicially manage cases, Madam Speaker, they have to operate in a rules-based environment.

When we came into office, we had the Civil Proceedings Rules and the Family Proceedings Rules, Madam Speaker. You will recall that, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we did not stop there you know. We added in the Children’s Rules. We added in, Madam Speaker, the Criminal Procedure Rules in 2016. We added in the Probate Rules, Madam Speaker. So while they talk, I can speak now and tell you what we have done, Madam Speaker. And what have the Criminal Procedure Rules yielded? Naparima runs from the Chamber. He is not even here to listen.

Madam Speaker, the Judiciary’s Annual Report has already testified that the criminal disposition has jumped by 44 per cent in the criminal arena. But, Madam Speaker, we did not stop there. Trials need to move faster. That is why we came up with judge only. That is why we came up with plea bargaining. And whilst the UNC mocked those two pieces of law, I can say now as Attorney General, as a Member of this Government, we have had five judge alone trials. The first one done by Madame Justice Lucky was a murder trial. The UNC’s position in
opposition to that law, as they stoutly refused to support that law, nobody will use the law, nobody, especially nobody in the criminal arena charged for murder. But, Madam Speaker, we have made history in this country by the use of judge only trials. Secondly, Madam Speaker, they said when we proposed that plea bargaining needed to be arranged, because you want to get people faster to the dock. Those that do not need to be there can be filtered out in a system called maximum sentence indication or good year principles as well as with plea bargaining.

Madam Speaker, we did 400 maximum sentence indications in one month alone last year August, 400 in one month alone. Madam Speaker, the first plea bargaining case to make history in this country is a case involving criminal charges for senior members of the UNC, Madam Speaker, made history with plea bargaining. I would not go into it. It is sub judice, but I am speaking about the plea bargaining law, Madam Speaker. Rodney Charles, hon. Member that he is, Member for Naparima, wants to know about deliverables, Madam Speaker. I wish he was here and had the courage to listen to the deliverables, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let us go further. You are in the courtroom, you have the judge, you have the rules and you have the environment. Madam Speaker, where is the prosecutor? Let me tell you what we did, Madam Speaker, because a trial cannot go on without a prosecutor. Madam Speaker, I refer you to the Criminal Division Act, which is in operation and I refer you particularly, Madam Speaker, to the fact that we did two things. Number one, we took to the DPP on the process side and said: “DPP, you have been far too long begging for staff and for buildings.” We have already opened the DPP Tobago office. We did not talk about it. We did it. We have secured and it is in the process of build out, the DPP San Fernando offices at Gulf City. The DPP Park Street office for Port of Spain is
being built out by UDeCOTT as we speak now. Madam Speaker, we increased the
staff of the Judiciary. We went from 27 per cent of staff filled to 40 per cent, and
every single post after that will be filled as soon as we have the accommodation for
it. All of this, Madam Speaker, not “coulda, woulda, shoulda and slogan”. These
are things that have been delivered, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the Judiciary’s Report demonstrates in its criminal
dispositions, and I invite everybody to read Transformation for Enhanced
Delivery, the annual report to the Judiciary 2018/2019. I would read one thing.
Listen to this.

The Magistracy stands on the threshold of its single greatest change in 150
years as the criminal court package of bespoke court case rolls out. [Desk
thumping]

Not my words, Madam Speaker, the Judiciary speaking. I apologize for raising it.
The Judiciary speaking to this.

But in this book, Madam Speaker, there is a very powerful statistic that
treats in the criminal disposition of matters that says to us, when they disaggregate
the reasons for delay in criminal trials, Madam Speaker, 90 per cent of the reasons
are because of the unavailability of defence counsel. There are approximately 20
lawyers that control the Criminal Bar. And, Madam Speaker, we did not talk about
it. Here is what we did, Madam Speaker. This Cabinet, under this Prime Minister,
birthed the first-time provision of a public defenders division. What is that? If
your lawyer is not going to be available, your counsel of choice, if statistically it
results in the abortion of trials, if you cannot get the criminal justice system
moving, then you need to have competent counsel.

4.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say, at 23 Stanmore Avenue the office of
the public defender is being built out as we speak now.  [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that we have created 50 positions for lawyers in the public defenders division.  So while they “coulda, woulda, shoulda”, I am telling you now about what has been done, Madam Speaker.  [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, we did not stop there, 95 per cent of prosecution in this country is done by the TTPS.  What did we do?—“not no ‘plenty for 20 plan’” like Siparia comes with, Madam Speaker.  We came forward and we said, “Let us make them clothe the law with the capacity to prosecute”, and, Madam Speaker, we did that in the Criminal Division Act.  But we went further, we said to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, “You need to have specialists in your employ”.  And, Madam Speaker, I can tell you right next door in Tower C stands a white collar division under the management of expert attorneys from the United Kingdom and 40 white collar forensic accountants and analysts, why are they now all special reserve police?  We learned the lesson from Piarco.  In the Piarco matter Bob Lindquist could not give the evidence, he had to lean in and go through a policeman, but, Madam Speaker, if you make the prosecutor or the lawyer a policeman, you skip past that hurdle, and they can therefore manage the evidence themselves.

Madam Speaker, not “coulda, woulda, shoulda” spin-the-wheel plan like Naparima, I am telling you what is in operation next door to this building.  [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, we jumped in the supporting officer structures by doing something—Naparima is making a joke about intelligence, Madam Speaker, intelligence is the underwriting of evidence, and Minister of National Security and the previous Minister of National Security both deserve a commendation under the hand of the Chairman of the National Security Council, the hon. Prime Minister, for managing intelligence efficiently.  Madam Speaker, what time do I end in full
time?

Madam Speaker: You have an additional 10 minutes after 4.55.30—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker:—so I do not know if you want to make the application now for the additional 10 minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: May I, please?

Madam Speaker: Yes. And therefore you have your—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Right. So I end in full time at 5.10.

Madam Speaker: 5.05.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: 5.05. Much obliged. I must hurry.

Madam Speaker, after you get to this position, you have got the prosecutors, you have defence lawyers, you have judges, you have court rules, you have buildings, where are you getting a witness from? Who is coming forward? Siparia was boldfaced enough in her intellectual contribution today, to tell this country we must protect whistle-blowers. Madam Speaker, Siparia led the charge where the statement was “informants are not permitted”—was it “snitches afe dead”, using the Jamaican expression? “Snitches afe dead” is what they said, Madam Speaker. They voted down the whistle-blower protection legislation, and as we stand now we have a Special Select Committee looking at the Evidence Bill. What is the Evidence Bill about?—anonymous witness evidence, using CCTV evidence, camera evidence as firsthand non-hearsay evidence. Why? Where are you getting a witness from? Why not use the technology, Madam Speaker, to have the facial recognition, the cameras working? But, Madam Speaker, we did not stop there.

Madam Speaker, you have to de-clog the environment, and I will talk about two things quickly there. You have 146,000 cases per year coming through the Magistracy, 146,000 cases; 104,000 of those cases are motor vehicle and road
traffic offences alone. We came to the Parliament and we passed law, red light camera enforcement, demerit systems. We converted offences into violations. Why is that system about to be launched next month? Why, pray tell, Madam Speaker? Because if you take from 146,000, 104,000 cases out of that, you are left with a massive reduction in the caseload at the Magistracy. But, Madam Speaker, we did not stop there, you have 29,000 preliminary enquiries per year in the Magistrates’ Court, how about if you got rid of the preliminary enquiries? One hundred and forty-six thousand minus 104,000, minus 29,000, but, Madam Speaker, we did not stop there. Forensic analysis says that 76 per cent of the workload that they engage in—76 per cent of the workload that they engage in is analysing plant-like substances under 60 grams.

There are other offences, selling rotten tomatoes, the decriminalization of laws that can be decriminalized, Madam Speaker, means we go from 43 magistrates in 13 courts looking at 146,000 cases, and we convert that by the law that we have passed and that we are operationalizing this year, we convert that into 12,000 cases; 43 magistrates looking at 12,000 cases in a fully computerized environment that has already started as at September this year. [Desk thumping] “Coulda, woulda, shoulda”, Madam Speaker.

Let me jump quickly, these are processes and legislative quickening. This is not theory, this is actuality purchased by named legislation, Cabinet Notes, Bills, payments, underwritten. Madam Speaker, after you get that wheel moving, the proper mechanism moving, you have got now to plug in your hard crimes. That is why we have brought the Anti-Gang Act; that is why we have brought the bail restrictions; that is why we have brought anti-terrorism; that is why we have brought sexual offences.

I could name the umpteen pieces of law that we have already enacted. But
after that, Madam Speaker, hear Naparima, Naparima says to us, “Dey eh talk about nothing to deal with white collar”, but, Madam Speaker, I just told you about the special prosecutors. I told you about the specialist court. The Criminal Division Bill gives you that specialist court, but, Madam Speaker, I do not know if Naparima was asleep for the entire time, the last four years. Madam Speaker, let me just try and ring a bell here, unexplained wealth, civil asset forfeiture, FATCA legislation, amendment to the Income Tax Act, the Global Forum package, the Proceeds of Crime, miscellaneous provisions amendments. Madam Speaker, I only now start to call them.

Madam Speaker, in that whole matrix of laws there is evidence to be found. We had a tax amnesty; in two-and-a-half months we procured $2.4 billion worth of payments when you would normally get $600 million. Why? “Just so” people decide to be generous, all of a sudden? Did it have anything to do with the upcoming launch of a revenue authority? Did it have anything to do with civil asset forfeiture, explain your wealth legislation? Did it have to do with the Attorney General’s offices management of the cases before the Tax Appeal Board which we won, [Desk thumping] which said to the oil and gas sector, there is a different team paying attention?

Did it have anything to do with the hon. Prime Minister leading the charge and convening the energy subcommittee of Cabinet, whilst the Member for Siparia never even sat in one, and going to the boardrooms of the oil and gas companies to say, “Aye, we paying attention to our business”? The question is what is our net take, not what the price of oil is and the price of gas is. How much are we getting for our sales? That is how you collect $2.4 billion in taxes in an amnesty, not by guess work and “plenty for 20”. Madam Speaker, when you move beyond the white collar arrangements we have a powerful Ministry in this country, it is called
the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The golden pot that this country has that nobody paid attention to, except the Minister of Planning when she sat there, and my learned friend who was sabotaged, the Member for St. Augustine, and I will tell you why. Madam Speaker, the evidence of crime, Siparia wants to know why the perception of corruption has fallen, as has gone in the wrong direction, when you start to put out in the public domain that you have $22.5 billion in suspicious action coming from the FIU, what do you expect them to do?—not to say whether in 2016 they are reporting plenty, 2017 they are reporting plenty? The first step to treatment and recovery is diagnosis, you know. You do not diagnose cancer, pretend you do not have it, tell them you have a headache and die. You go out and you say the good, the bad and the ugly, and therefore the perception of corruption must go in the wrong direction when you are revealing in a transparent way, the statistics.

So, Madam Speaker, let me tell you why St. Augustine was sabotaged by the UNC. Madam Speaker, there are three registries in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Civil Registry: births, deaths, marriages, et cetera; Companies Registry, which is all forms of incorporated and partnership arrangement; and the Land Registry. Where are you hiding money, land, companies, cash? How are you going to find it? If you are operating down at the Red House, every time the rain falls you are rushing for sandbags, you are shoring up the positions. Madam Speaker, first thing we did, we moved out of the Red House—sorry, we moved out of South Quay—I remember when we were at the Red House—moved straight up to the unoccupied building that was there. Under the Prime Minister’s direction you will move and occupy; Madam Speaker, I want to say now, one of the greatest accomplishments that the AG’s office performed in our tag team arrangements, Minister Young, Minister Hinds and myself, the Registrar General, we moved 11 million deeds,
200,000 company documents and three million records for births and death in one
month and reopened—one month. But we did not stop there, we digitized the
Registry. We replaced what was sabotaged under St. Augustine.

Madam Speaker, you ever hear about a Curtis Mathes television? “Yuh
know dem big box television in de ole days with ah big knob?” That is what our
computer system looked like down at the Registrar General; 12 daisy chain
Windows XP systems working in a link. No backup, no redundancy measure.
Madam Speaker, we have already launched the beta version of the property
business real estate solution in October this year. [Desk thumping] Madam
Speaker, we have already signed the contract for the replacement of the Companies
Registry. We are right now at the cusp of launching online payments for all the
Registrar General’s services, but the value in there is the documentary evidence.
Not the kind that Siparia misread where it is three parties and it is really four, we
are talking about actual records. Why? For unexplained wealth, for civil asset
forfeiture, for income tax, you need to have access to documentation.

So, Madam Speaker, when we come this year and we bring forward a
unitized digital number for every citizen, it is because we digitized every licence
plate, every driver’s licence, all births and deaths, all companies, Madam Speaker,
and we are now at the cusp of going public with our property business real estate
solution. Talk, “plenty for 20”, gallery, Naparima walk out; hogwash, Madam
Speaker, speculation on the part of the UNC. I am talking delivered measures by
this Government, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, that is why we have a non-profit organization law to treat
with that situation that we saw publicly recently, who opposed it, but, Madam
Speaker, what upset me today was to hear Siparia talk about, “Oh, we will innovate
the country”. Madam Speaker, does Siparia know that the Electronic Transactions
Act was passed in 2011?—2012, nothing; 2013, nothing; 2014, nothing; 2015, we passed the regs. The Electronic Transactions Regulations were passed in 2015—nothing.

We came to do electronic payments into and out of court. Who said no?—Siparia. Naparima stood up and said, “Oh, allyuh looking after de 1 per cent”, who was the 1 per cent shareholder, Jerry Hadeed, a past Member. Madam Speaker, why would I want to prejudice a man in proper business offering a service for the WePay structure? Because of that programme, because of that system, there is no more maintenance line payment, and $4 million in cash in the drawer, and on the back of that system iGovTT has now purchased the reward for electronic payments across Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] And when you get your ticket in the mail and you get your structures coming at you and you realize that in the comfort of your home in your pyjamas, or lack thereof, that you can actually pay your fines, fees and submissions online, remember the UNC said no, the PNM said yes. [Desk thumping] Remember they talked and we did.

Madam Speaker, I want to compliment a product, the Judiciary, and I take no credit for this one. The Judiciary, under the hand of Chief Justice Archie, Chief Justice Archie went to Nigeria, procured a piece of software for free, big news, Gerald Ramdeen then in the Senate, “Why is the Chief Justice travelling so much and what is going on”? Madam Speaker, that software returned to Trinidad and Tobago, it has now been developed in Trinidad and Tobago, bespoken by Trinidad and Tobago in-house IT in the Judiciary. It has been the backbone of something called, TT.jim. T-T-j-i-m, that is the name of it, it replaces TT JEMS; that is the judicial management software. That software allows us to file documents electronically, to receive court orders electronically, pay fees and structures electronically. That system is being put in the TTPS and DPP’s office, and I intend
to introduce a Bill into Parliament as soon as the budget is done, with the Cabinet’s approval for a final tweak to the abolition of preliminary enquiries as we treat with how we move indictments, because there is a delay in indictments. It takes about four years for an indictment to be offered sometimes. Madam Speaker, that single piece of software is now underwritten by the world wanting to have that software developed right here in Trinidad and Tobago and replicating across the Ministries.

[Desk thumping]

You see, Madam Speaker, I will say this, respectfully, Freudian slip coming out of the mouth of Pointe-a-Pierre when he offered the submission that the UNC would not support something because they finally understand the pieces of the puzzle coming together. Yes, Madam Speaker, we have had a strategy, but we do not trust wicked people, and when you reveal your strategy too soon and people run to the court to fight you down, threaten to go to the court where they are exposing themselves to wasted cost orders, as Siparia does, we like to keep our cards close to our chest, because I can tell you this, this Government will be the only Government that will have opened over 70 courts in four years. [Desk thumping] This is the only Government that would have delivered electronic payments and filings and innovation. This is the only Government that approached the plan, plant and machinery, people, processes, law. We operationalized all at the same time.

Madam Speaker, this has not happened by mistake, you know. So, Madam Speaker, we could give a very good account of ourselves. I have got five minutes—four. I turn, Madam Speaker, to the beautiful marvellous city of San Fernando. I am pleased to have a capable Member of Parliament, as my other side of San Fernando in the person of the hon. Minister of Tourism, the Member for San Fernando East. And, Madam Speaker, I would like to say to the hon. Prime
Minister, the Minister of Planning, the Minister of Works and Transport, the Minister of Finance, in particular, the Minister of Public Utilities, and Housing, Madam Speaker, we took this nebulous, the waterfront; for 40 years San Fernando spoke about the waterfront. Ask them what are the elements of the waterfront, they do not know. “Some reclamation of land somewhere down in the sea”, if you are lucky. Sadiq Baksh started it, Madam Speaker, no plans, no drawings, some earth in the ground.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you what we did, we took San Fernando and we said, “Let us create growth poles and anchors, let us identify this plan”, and very quickly put, Madam Speaker, we decided housing was a priority, employment was a priority, jobs and security, and right there along the waterfront stretch, the position that is referred to as the waterfront, going from Embacadere right down to the wharf proper, what do we have, from Roodal Cemetery? What do we have?—opposite the best water in the world, 14 acres of land occupied by a bus shelter, garage, oil, sludge, no employment, vagrants, people in insecure tenure, a car park that cannot be used, mudslide next to the point.

Madam Speaker, we have already identified, placed into UDeCOTT’s hands, 14 acres at the PTSC bus yard that is now nearly 95 per cent complete. They moved to OAS Construtora. We have identified lands at Embacadere opposite Roodal Cemetery, 231 homes there. Madam Speaker, that project was originally earmarked to the Chinese, better value-for-money arrangements can be had, and that is now moving instead into an open position. We took Plaza San Carlos, we have identified the informal settlement. We have already done the location of a fishing port at the Hatters pan yard. We have started the redevelopment at Skinner Park at $200 million. We have already given UDeCOTT the position of the car park facility at the San Fernando General Hospital, and the Anglican Church has
approached us for development of its site on Chancery Lane. Madam Speaker, in short, that project is now identifiable, the procurement cycles have gone ahead, and the Ministry of Works and Transport has now put itself in a position, all things being equal, that we can do our road development network. San Fernando is excited for the first time, *[Desk thumping]* and that combination of effort, led by the hon. Prime Minister, taking more structures into that position, breathe a sigh of relief for a city forgotten and punished by the UNC.

Madam Speaker, I wish I had another hour to tell you the rest, but regrettably I must end, and I thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Prakash Ramadhar (St. Augustine):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[Crosstalk]* “Yeah, man”, lawyer first, let the courts do what they have to do. Madam Speaker, let me just say, I generally like to listen to my learned friend from San Fernando West, but he lost me, and I am sure he lost many when he started by castigating unfairly the Leader of the Opposition, when certainly in her earlier parts of her remarks this morning, she referenced an issue of $4.4 billion-plus and she said US dollars, and I am certain my learned friend, as honourable as he is, must have left the Chamber. He might have been disturbed by the Member, the Minister of Finance or something, when in fact he did not hear the hon. Leader of the Opposition correct herself on the record of Hansard. *[Desk thumping]* And for those who may not have listened in, the contribution of my learned friend as he opened, would have sounded damning as they are wont to, on Members of the Opposition as if they gave untruths, as if they lie, and as everything unholy under the sun. But what is the truth, there was an error which was corrected, admitted by the Leader of the Opposition.

I asked on the other side, who on your side has never erred? Who on your side has
come forward and said, “We made a mistake”? That is one of the hallmarks of the PNM, they are wrong and they are strong, [*Desk thumping*] and they go down as if all that they do is good and noble. Unfortunately in this country, as divided as the politics is, as divided as our people have become, it is necessary sometimes to sift through a lot of the propaganda so that we get down to the essential truths. The Curtis Mathes computer or TV you spoke about, learned Attorney General, if you complimented my successor in your Ministry, well, we inherited that Curtis Mathes from her. But what is more disturbing is that that old building that we were occupying and we made tremendous use of—and the Member for Arouca will tell you that sometimes over 2,000 persons would visit that building to conduct their daily business. What we met when we arrived, and I could tell you this, and I remember it clearly because I had been told that when we were sworn in after then—we were at the Office of the Prime Minister and then we would go to our relevant Ministries, and that the Permanent Secretaries would generally have a little reception for you there. And as we drove into the back I saw an old tent with chairs thrown about, and I thought, oh my God, the party had—you know, we had run late and everything had been—

**Hon. Member:** “Buss.”

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** It “buss”, basically.

When I walked into the Ministry you got that smell of an old hospital, of rotting paper and so. That place was as dank and as dismal as you could ever imagine. And what that shed outside was for, was for the population who came there, the hundreds of them who were never properly accommodated. And it troubles me to have to go through all the details again, but just to put things into perspective, that Ministry would entertain persons from Cedros to Scarborough, from Toco to Guayaguayare because they did not have access to many of the

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functions in different offices throughout the length and breadth of this country, so we had to fix all of that. And to fast forward to let you know, and I am sure if Milady had the pleasure of visiting the Ministry after we had taken office within the first year or so, we were able to distribute documents in a matter of minutes and not of months and of years. That is a notorious fact in the country. And the reason I put this in the context is that we had to use this building, not because we did not want to go to the Ministry of Legal Affairs towers, you know, the hundreds of millions of dollars that the former Government had spent building those towers, you know what happened? When we took keys for that, we also took a list of 200 defects in the building; 200 defects that had to be repaired, had to be brought up to standard before anybody could even consider outfitting, before anybody could consider occupying.

Now, sometimes I wonder, you know, if we, when we are born, we believe that all that Trinidad and Tobago is today came about by our wish, by a fantasy, or if there had not been generations that had come before us and worked hard and had brought us to a stage and we moved to the next step. I know my friend from San Fernando West is not a guilty, not a greedy man; some may say otherwise but I will say, no. Sometimes you plant a seed, you have to nurture it, put it in the right ground, water it, ensure it gets proper sunlight and the plant slowly grows, ultimately to a point where it may start to bear fruit. Sometimes the fruit may be yet green and then you know the thing in this country with the “zaboca”, when you think it is a little too green, “de fella who ready to come and pick it eh fine so”. I would not accuse my learned friend from San Fernando West of being a predial larcenist. I will not do that, but to say, without reflection, that the millions of records that he was able to transfer from one building to the other, we had prepared them. They were there, right? [Desk thumping] He speaks of the millions of
documents that had been digitized. You know, shamelessly, I wondered what
happened, and I congratulate my learned friend, but what was the mindset of
administrations prior? When we walked into the Registry, I told you that rotting
smell we got, you know what it was? The smell of deeds rotting literally in the
vault.

We went in there and, you know, there is a root of title that you require at,
you know, around 20 years, and there were many older documents that we dared
not touch because as you touched them they fell apart. So we took a decision early
in the proceedings that we needed to ensure we secured those documents because
that might be the only document showing ownership in property. To that end it
was not a simple thing, it was not a matter of grabbing it and photocopying it,
specialized equipment to preserve the old and rotting paper needed to be acquired.
Expertise to do these things was necessary, and my friend well knows that we
required international assistance to do that, funding and equipment and a host of
things. And the Ministry, while we were there, had continued that progress right
up until my learned friend had the great honour of receiving all of the work that we
had done.

So it is not as if by the snap of his finger it happened, but I could understand
why he will want to believe that, because the nitty-gritty is what matters and the
devil is in the details. And all of the work that we had done then, I am grateful that
he was able to take some credit for it because I want the country to be better. But
we had done so much and it is really unfair to suggest that he met things in decay.
What I will also tell you is that we took a decision where we opened offices
throughout the length and breadth of this country; in every regional corporation we
took an office so that we will not have our citizens having the torture of leaving
Cedros to come to Port of Spain.

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5.15 p.m.

The first office we opened was in Point Fortin. We opened in Diego Martin. We opened in Arima. We opened in Sangre Grande. We opened in Penal. We opened in Chaguanas, [Desk thumping] all of the regional corporations. We are grateful to the regional corporations for having donated an office to us free of charge, and we used staff who were at the Ministry and located them there. We put Internet on computers so our population had easy and quick access.

What we also did is that we allowed—and I have to fast-track it, there was so much that had been done—the Registrar and her team went to different parts of this world in London, in New York, in Toronto and some of the other centres, and worked with the high commissions and embassies there so that citizens need not have to come back to Trinidad for certain documents. When they applied online, we were able to mail it out to them directly, free of charge for your first document.

There were times when interviews would have been required, for instance where there is a query on your identity or whatever. So we put Skyping in those places, so that they need not have come to Trinidad. Because one of the main problems that we had found was that many of our citizens had gone into America, as an example, and they had not yet received their papers—this is pre-Trump days of course—and sometimes their passport would have expired, and in America to cash your cheque you sometimes needed two forms of ID. If your passport is expired and you do not have a passport, you would not be able to cash your cheque, and sometimes to get that passport you have to come to Trinidad, but your passport expired. So what did we do? We took a very people-centred approach to this thing. Our foundation in Government, the reason I came and all of my colleagues who I worked with, was always about finding the problems of the people and fixing them, [Desk thumping] some of which were expensive and others
were not that much, like this example, but it meant a whole lot to hundreds and thousands of our citizens who could not come home, and simple things like that.

I could go through the rituals of telling you that one morning I received a call, and I am very proud actually about this simple thing. When persons were lined up in their dozens and sometimes in their hundreds from early in the morning, whether it was rainy or just beautiful weather, and we took a decision that whatever hour any of our citizens came to our offices, it would be opened and they would be allowed in. We created a whole suite, well-comforted with proper chairs and coffee and biscuit and water and so. So it was the people’s Ministry. What we did in San Fernando too was that we put all of the necessary services in that and it became a full-fledged Ministry. We did the same in Arima, and certainly we strengthened Tobago in our offices there.

But what happened, I do not know. I know my learned friend, as busy as he is as Attorney General—Leotaud Street, is that in San Fernando West, my friend?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Yes it is.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** We got disturbing reports from many of our citizens in this last year or two.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** We are moving.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** We are moving, finally. Because when we took office in 2010 we inherited Leotaud Street. It was congested. It was in a state of dismal disarray. If you thought Port of Spain was bad, it is far worst. Especially you find that often in things south of the Caroni Bridge where Government institutions are allowed to rot, and we took steps and we upgraded it dramatically because we were tied in to a lease. We were tied in and we could not have moved, we would have lost a lot of money, and we were hopeful then to have better buildings. I am happy to hear my learned friend has finally unleashed himself from that lease because that
building was wholly inadequate. I cannot remember when it was that they first took occupation of that place because there is no car park.

In fact, I looked at a video a little while ago of the hundreds of citizens who have to be out in a shed, just like we had up here, but there was no room to do better for them. I heard there was a rat infestation not long ago, and a host of horrific experiences that people have, where sometimes they return three, four days before they could get documents, because it is the one office south now that could help them. And hundreds would go, and of course the staff can accommodate only so many in one day, and you have to return day after day and you go through this thing like when long time you have to go to the American Embassy and people reaching there three, four o’clock just to get a space that day., Oh God, in this modern day!

So when we started the process of making applications on the computer—the laptop that we gave to our children was not just meant for the children, it was meant for the family and sometimes for a village. [Desk thumping] So there was an enveloping vision as to how we would have modernized the society to make accessible government services through computers. Many families could not think about buying books when we came in, but they were able to get their free computer and then had access to this world. All of the institutions we were able to put, at least as many as we could have we built—my friend likes to speak about building capacity, that is what we started in different Ministries. The single electronic window and a host of other things, so that wherever you are, whatever hour of the night you were able to do it you could go online and make applications, at least starting with the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and the vision was to move that forward.

In terms of electronic payment, my friend would tell you, as he is an
honourable man, the amount of work, not just the legislation, but the backbone to make that happen had gone in. But there was a resistance from one of our institutions, and I would not name it, that did not want electronic payment. A government institution, a constitutionally protected institution that did not want it, but we fought and we fought, and we were able to achieve movement along there. So my friend once again inherited for the work that we had done. We move forward.

In relation to—you know, my friend kept speaking about 400 billion spent and not a courtroom. I will deal with the court as a separate head. But let me just start by saying that there is now a very unhealthy comfort between this Government and the Judiciary. [Desk thumping] I am saying that. I stand by that statement because somebody has to say it. There is now a matter before the court, and I will not go into it, except that the Government through its Prime Minister, for whatever reason good or bad, chose not to, after the prodding of some of the finest and most decent and honourable people in this country, that there should be a proper investigation into our present Chief Justice under section 137. The Prime Minister, as is his remit, has decided that he will not trigger it and there is now a judicial proceeding to determine that.

Now, the reason I speak of the Judiciary is that that is one component of the awful rot that the People’s Partnership met in 2010. We had, Member for Chaguanas West, one of the first things we did was to lay pipelines into the heartland of Trinidad, and we did work in Tobago also in terms of water provision. Madam Speaker, 250,000 of our citizens got water for the first time, or at least reliable service for the first time under the People’s Partnership. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Indarsingh: Today is water for none.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Now we will talk about—water everywhere except in your
pipes. Madam Speaker, I do not know if you enjoy driving around this country, or if you do, when you do fly in, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo knows full well, because we took a decision that the people of Trinidad and Tobago must share in the wealth of this nation. We hear this thing about oil having gone to—Member for Oropouche, $150 was it? But for the first time this country saw a government that ensured that every community in this country was touched by its government, so that we had 200, Member for Caroni East, 200 grounds that were prepared, fixed, lit, with exercise equipment and a host of other, you know. We created spaces for the community to become communities again, walking tracks, as you reminded, pavilions. And you know what? In those good old days, only five years ago, you would have gone around this country and you would have seen the hundreds and thousands of citizens enjoying the community spaces.

Now, there is an almost a state of emergency curfew in this country. As soon as it starts to get dark the only thing that is out there are the lights. Maybe we will need some of the bulbs to ensure that when those lights go out, because it is poor maintenance, Minister of Public Utilities, maybe take some from the Minister of Finance and keep it, because I saw the cricket last night, “one set ah lights gone out, I get frighten and worried”. International embarrassment almost occurred down at the Tarouba stadium. Sorry, Brian Lara.

Mr. Hinds: So you were there?

Mr. P. Ramadhar: No I did not come. I did not go.

Mr. Hinds: So how you get frightened then? [Laughter]

Mr. P. Ramadhar: So that we have a situation where—

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, and sometimes we forget, as we on that. I am happy you opened your mouth, Laventille West.
Tarouba stadium, how much was the original cost, Oropouche?

Dr. Moonilal: 165.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: How much “it end” up to be?

Hon. Member: $1 billion.

Dr. Gopeesingh: $1.2 billion.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: From three-how much?

Hon. Member: 65.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: To one point how much?

Mr. Indarsingh: Billion.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And worse than that, when anything go wrong they blame the UNC.

Mr. Indarsingh: It was the tsunami shelter.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: The rains that came the day before, people were worried they were going to blame the flooding on the UNC again. [Laughter] Now if they are to blame, take the blame, “but oh gosh, man, let we be real a little bit, nah”.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Dat is Manning tsunami centre.”

Mr. P. Ramadhar: This morning the Leader of the Opposition, because there is so much to talk about, and very often we forget our history. Tobago, our beloved Sister Isle. [ Interruption] Yes, I love Tobago. Not only people who live and born and grow in Tobago love Tobago. I want to make that very clear. [Desk thumping] And this kind of proprietary insolence you have, that because you are there that nobody has a right to speak or love Tobago, forget about that. That is not correct.

Mr. Hinds: I know how much you love—

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Administration after administration start a hospital. How much was the original cost?
Mr. P. Ramadhar: Partnership, 800.

Madam Speaker: The Member I am recognizing is the Member for St. Augustine. Somehow or the other I am getting the impression that this is a question and answer between St. Augustine and Caroni East. Member for St. Augustine, you have my ear.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very much. The point I am making—so this demonizing of anything other than PNM has got to go. It has got to go. Whatever name you call that hospital in central, I born and grow up Freeport, I real happy that we have an institution that could meet the needs of the people of central and south. [Desk thumping] But it was well placed. Because you know why it was well placed? We had Point Lisas, that generator of wealth, but one of a dangerous environment with ammonia that could possibly leak, fires that could decimate the California community. The Member for Couva South is well aware that the community is literally border lining a nuclear bomb, almost. It got a little safer when ArcelorMittal left, when you all arrived, but the point being it was placed there with a burns unit. That was the thinking in that, and for children to have specialized a centre of excellence for them, paediatrics, but not just that. Of course it is not just a children’s hospital. We put beds for if anybody on the industrial estate should fall ill.

But if you go down there and you look across not far, what else do you see? The swimming academy, the Aquatic Centre, the cycling centre. So that when we...
speak about—yeah, we built all of that. As the Member for Couva South said, the only thing they put in that whole thing was the water in the pool.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And the ribbon.

**Dr. Moonilal:** We built the Ato Bolden Stadium.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** And I do not think any of us—did you get an invitation? No; so let us put the link on it, we have started to forget that the People’s Partnership Government did a lot for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] But it was part of a larger vision that the Leader of the Opposition referenced this morning. And the intent also was to have first class hotels close by, and create a centre where international sports teams or personalities would come here because we have warm weather throughout the year. So that persons can stay there, and if anything should happen the children’s hospital would also have had sports medicine, Member for St. Joseph. So that was part of that thinking.

When I hear the Member for Laventille West talking about, “dey want ah airport in central.” He did not know there was always an airport in central? [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** “De fella doh know about Camden.”

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Camden. He did not know. They do not know, and I do not blame you for your ignorance. What I blame you for is not trying to find out. When I was a child, I think the Americans used there sometime during the Second World War even. That is where the name came from I think. So let us have a little sense of history. And the thinking behind it is to put an airport. It was not just for luxury flights, you know. Not for the private jets alone so that like when LeBron wants to come to Trinidad to check out our facilities down in central, his private jet could land there. Helicopter takes him from there to the location at the Aquatic Centre and that stadia. That was the thinking behind it. But the Member for
Chaguanas East took it, not just there, he took it off, when he said from cutting cane to flying planes. [Desk thumping]

Do we have any idea of how much it costs to get a pilot’s licence in the United States? It is not cheap, and part of the vision of the People’s Partnership was to modernize the society, because we knew full well—full well—that we needed to re-establish a different economy because we knew oil and gas would come to an end one day. In the People’s Partnership we had persons who represented, who cared so much about the environment, and we figured Trinidad and Tobago cannot be hypocritical to be one of the largest producers with a carbon footprint almost unequalled per capita. We needed to change and fix that, but at the same time protect and create a new economy for our children.

So that they do not just go there to learn to fly. They go there so that they could be part of a universe that is uplifting, and instead of just flying out, they decide to learn to fly and to also put a drilling school so that we could export our technology. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, 100 years of oil experience, and who “doh” know it, who does not know it, we have some of the brightest, best minds in this world. But what is most difficult in the last couple of years, you know what? Instead of going to Camden to learn, they have flown out of Trinidad and Tobago, possibly never to return, [Desk thumping] and that is the heartbreak many of us feel. So money was spent on that.

Money was spent on roads where there were only dirt tracks. The demonizing of box drains led us to have those floods because you did not take care of the drainage when we had the floods of two years ago. My friend, the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Minister of Works and Transport sat in an interview. I agreed with a lot of what they said about, you know, we cannot build on river banks and so, but blame the
people indirectly for the floods in Bamboo 3—and I will leave that for another segment—when they were not to blame. We have global climate change upon us, and it is unprecedented levels of rainfall, but not unpredictable levels of rainfall. We cannot do those things that we used to do, and fix up the old river bank the way we used to because the quantity of water coming down is several times greater than it used to be.

Now, Madam Speaker, my friend spoke about the courts, and I wonder with all these new fancy streamlining and all this glitzy statements about registrars and about how many more judges and so, is this country better served by our system of justice? Which is the ultimate, that is what you check, that is what you test. Let me give you a little horror story that is so significant in its simplicity, but it demonstrates to us in a nutshell many of the things that are so wrong with this country.

One week ago—and this has nothing to do with the court case itself, but it has to do with the process and the administration—a gentleman was committed on a non-violent offence in the Magistrates’ Court in San Fernando. Bail was set by the magistrate properly, and apparently he did not quite expect the committal to go to the Assizes for trial. Unfortunately, he had a heart attack whilst in the precincts of the court holding bay, and he was taken immediately, and we thank and congratulate the police. They took him over to the San Fernando General Hospital, a building that was originally for an administrative centre. Not no waterfront issue, Member for San Fernando West, an administrative centre.

If you ever had the misfortune of visiting the San Fernando General Hospital, the old one, hopefully not as a patient and certainly hopefully not as a person visiting, you would have seen that it was horrible, and nobody wanted to be there. We took a decision, the People’s Partnership Government, to take that
administrative centre and make it into a First World, almost like a hotel, but you should visit it, because it is one of the finest institutions you would find anywhere.

Anyhow, they took this gentleman there for treatment. Whilst he was there, I am instructed, they saw symptoms of micro strokes. Minister of Health, pay attention to this one. We are told—Terrence, listen to this please—that the MRI machine is not working there. But hear what, this fella had the misfortune of having the heart attack after he is committed, but before the bail was processed. So he is in police custody. Since Friday till today there is 24/7 police presence to keep this man in police custody.

So the persons came to one of my juniors to see if we could assist. So I got involved in it only to learn that the bail papers had taken several days to be approved. This is the man’s sister who had taken his bail when he was first charged, had done everything. Got the WASA receipts and everything up-to-date, but the process, Attorney General, lasted at least two days. They were not ready to process the bail at that time, and therefore he went into the hospital under police guard without the bail being processed.

So I said well it is a simple fix. The family wants to take him out there to get the MRI and to get proper medical in some private institution. So I said no problem. I went down to the Registrar. He tells us, “Well, it is out of my hands. The papers, I have put it into an envelope. It is marked ‘Commissioner of Prisons’, I cannot touch it.” The Commissioner of Prisons is waiting for this man up at the prisons but he cannot be transported. And they are telling us that the only way he could be bailed is that he must go to the prison for that to be done.

Now, let me tell you how embarrassing this is as a lawyer of 30-odd years. All you needed was for that what they call the “committal warrant” and the approval documents for the bail to be brought before the Registrar or whomever.
there, and if that person says it is okay, you get a Justice of the Peace to the hospital and have the bail taken. But because it was addressed to the Commissioner of Prisons, the Registrar said they washed their hands from it. So we are caught in a catch-22, in a dilemma of the worse proportions. We cannot get the bail accessed because the man is in the hospital, and nobody wants to take responsibility.

Now the reason I raise this—and I am not blaming the Registrar, because they are now, as we are proud to say, qualified lawyers. In fact, I was surprised one of our Members of staff here is a Registrar, unfortunately, put in that position without experience and without the confidence to exercise her discretion. In the old days before this fancy thing about registrars and how many people in the position, the Clerk of the Peace would have simply called the police and said, “Bring back the documents here, and I will do what need to be done, if you bring the man before me.”

I today had to run away to go and see the Registrar in the court. I had to go and see the Chief Magistrate to try and fix this thing, and nobody wants to take responsibility. So it tells you, no matter how glitzy and glamorous it appears on the face of it, when you have functional failures like this, it tells you a whole lot about the Third World mentality that we now have.

So, Madam Speaker, there is so much more. In terms of the—were you not embarrassed too—you are a lawyer first, you are also Speaker—when we all saw a story in the papers last year of a High Court judge in San Fernando who said, “I am not going to put my hands in my pocket again to buy paper,” and adjourned a matter. So all this beautiful talk, and I do not blame the Attorney General, you know. I do not blame him. I blame those who are responsible for the Judiciary because any amount of money, Member for Laventille West, they ask for, your
Government gives to them. Any amount of money they asked of us, once you could justify it, we gave to them. And you are hiring how much, 380-something more people, and you are not buying paper for the court? How topsy-turvy is that? How ridiculous is that?

When I hear my friend speak about, they are painting a nice picture for this budget and everything, it is not a beautiful picture, it is a whitewash. It is a cover-up. [Desk thumping] You know what I really wanted to hear more than anything else in this budget debate? I wanted to hear— forgive me for being the stuck record, but I am on record being stuck on this— campaign and party finance reform, procurement legislation. Let me deal with procurement right away, because I keep hearing about corruption, corruption, corruption in the last Government. Well, whoever do wrong, “allyuh pay de price and go”, right, let the system work. But there is a perception. What they call it? Transparency International. What they said, 66 per cent or how much perception of corruption? The people know, they know what is going on.

Two years ago there was the breaking of the soil, turning of the sod to build a car park across the road. Now, I do not blame business people. They see opportunities and they put their money and they take risks, and they do what they have to do. In fact, the hon. Prime Minister himself was present at that turning of the sod. The reason I raise this, I believe in coincidence, but I always believe there is a reason for coincidence. This building we are in, we were told not long ago, a couple months back, that here would be converted into a court.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Civil court.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: When was that decision taken? When was that decision taken? Was it two years ago. Was it this year? I believe in the presumption of innocence, but I just ask questions. I remember a couple years back coming to this
Parliament itself, this elderly gentleman rushed off as fast as he could have and he was hit by a car, right across the road here. I jumped out my vehicle. This man was bleeding from his eyes, his nose and his mouth, and I comforted him. I did not believe that he would have made it and I told him it is going to be all right. Sometimes in those moments you need somebody to tell you it is going to be all right, even though nobody believes that it is. I am thinking, well boy, we really do need a walkover here.

When was a decision taken to put a walkover here, two years ago, one year ago? I am seeing the construction well-advanced, probably in time for when we move out of here and go to the Red House. I ask the question: Is there a connection in the timelines of the decision to have put a car park there? Is there a decision that is timeline equally to that to put a walkover in time for Government to take a policy decision to make here a court, to ensure that that car park will always be properly patronized? I ask questions because we have an election coming.

I gave up leadership of the CoP, one of the hardest things I ever had to do and I chose not to ask for donations. You see this thing about party finance, it is at the core of a lot of criticisms of corruption in the country, but it is as the Americans say, “baked into our system”. Because how can you run a campaign unless you have money? Where does that money come from? Not business.

We are not like the Obama era, or Bernie Sanders, where people give you a little $13 and $5 and make up your million. We hear 500 million for an election. That comes from somewhere, and he who pays the piper calls the tune. Therefore, whenever a contract is given out after an election, the people will always feel that there is favouritism in that and we never get value for money. That is why it was the People’s Partnership Government that took a decision that you may not be able
to eradicate corruption, but you must do all that you can to suppress it and deal with it. Member for Caroni Central, thank you for the work that you did in leading that Joint Select Committee. [Desk thumping]

5.45 p.m.

So if they want to say that the Partnership, UNC, whomever, was only about corruption, well why would we have put the dagger that you all spoke about into the heart of corruption—which is called “procurement”?

Is it true, Attorney General, that when you all came into office and I know you had nothing to do with this, because I am hearing today, something slipped out, eh, about advisors? You have a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but the Prime Minister is hiring an advisor on agriculture. I want to tell you, Mr. Rambharat, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is a good, strong, able fella. He may not be up to the job sometimes, [Laughter] we know that, but you hiring advisors? Who else is advising? Who else advised about the walkover? Who else advised about making here a court? Who else advised about cutting, turning sod to put—

Hon. Member: China.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: China. Right? So these are the things. So is it true that that committee that was supposed to do all the work, because the law is on the books, you know, but we needed the work done to populate the institution, to put the regulations and so, develop it and put it in place. Is it true, because I was told by a former Member of that committee that you all starved them out until they resigned, one by one by one, until they had no committee and you had to reformulate the committee—

Dr. Gopeesingh: For two years.

Mr. P. Ramadhar:—for two years.
Mr. P. Ramadhar:

We are in our fifth year, fifth budget and we do not have procurement legislation in our place in Trinidad and Tobago? We spent $400 billion, they say everything come up, but go down to the very university and see there is concrete on the ground. [Desk thumping] Go to the children’s hospital, go to all the stadia, you could see [Desk thumping] physical evidence of what the People’s Partnership did, and I am certain because of the system there will be corruption somewhere, but the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration under the People’s Partnership, where the People’s Partnership took a decision to get rid of corruption, and we did so by putting legislation in place. [Desk thumping]

And, Madam Speaker, party and campaign reform. You see, one without the other is far less useful, but together you create, you know—we heard about Mel Gibson and the “Gladiator” and everything else, those two things are the warriors of our future, they will protect our children to ensure that the hundreds of billions, almost a trillion dollars would have gone through this country from our oil and gas for generations that we should never have to worry about our children’s future today, but something went terribly wrong and we are the ones who started that process to fix it. Party finance reform is a must, it was promised by this Government, we did work. Member for Chaguanas West had moved a Motion here in this Parliament to get it onto the agenda.

When we went into Government we moved on it, we had a joint select committee that did so much work, but none of that work was used to progress this thing. We keep hearing “it coming, it coming, it coming”, but it “aint” reach. An election reach, moneys are going to spend. Right? I do not know where it is going to come from, but what I will tell you though, there is a grave suspicion in my heart that it is going to come from our children’s future. And the hypocrisy of

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many to talk the talk but never do the walk. Talk and no work on these crucial protectors, the vanguards of our future, until I see that, I am not convinced. All the beautiful courts you want to build and all the judges you want to put, justice will not be served on our children and on our people unless we deal with those things. [Desk thumping]

So we are dealing now every time we come—well, I should not say every time, but most times there are a couple on the other side who are always threatening colleagues on this side, “Police coming by yuh, they are going to lock you up”.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Lock up.”

Mr. P. Ramadhar: They are tipping off nonstop.

Mr. Indarsingh: Reading warrants. They read warrants.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: They are reading warrants. Eh? A casual conversation, I imagine, by one of our most hon. Members to our colleague, they want to turn that into a criminal act. Eh? So anything one side does is criminal and wrong and whatever the other side does is holy and proper? [Desk thumping] Why in a budget debate where we are today, the Leader of the Opposition is on her legs and you have to get a notice, we are getting a local government election?

When the hon. Prime Minister had said over and over and over that this budget that is coming is no election budget. He is a serious man, he cares about the future, like many of his colleagues I am sure, but why is it that during a budget debate you will announce a local government election, not to distract from—listen, whoever has an honest bit in their heart and their intellect will tell you that the delivery of the Leader of the Opposition today was spectacularly good. [Desk thumping] And for a change she did not absorb the insults, the barbs, the arrows with poison tips that were shot at her repeatedly. A woman of intense grace and
intense, what shall I say, forbearance, but today she dropped some wood on them. [Desk thumping] Deservedly, eh. And I say, well wait a minute, [Crosstalk] Dropping wood? Okay whatever. She dropped some good language on you. Right?

So to distract from all of that, because I want to tell you, what was delivered on the other side was no budget, you know, that was a whitewash. What you heard today was a budget. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Hinds: Sing for your supper, sing.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Me, I “doh” sing, I earn enough, as they say. So let me tell you—

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wrap up.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I would be most grateful, thank you.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I want to put on the record, if my friends think I need to sing for supper, right, once again he has deluded himself. I am not interested in the things he might be interested in. Right? He supplicates for his supper. [Desk thumping] So I understand now that my time is running out and it may very well be, Member for Laventille West, and I say so openly, it may very well be my last contribution to a budget. Right? I am unafraid of it, but I am not—

Mr. Indarsingh: His own too.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, he will do so in Opposition.

Mr. Indarsingh: They will be voted out.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: The long—you know, I generally enjoy my learned friend, but certainly not when we deal with matters of such importance. So we on the point— I want to speak about the constituency of St. Augustine. [Interruption] Khadijah. Yours too, you live right across the road.
Mr. Hinds: Oh no wonder why he is so jittery.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Some people are just, you know, that way. So I have been honoured to have been the representative for St. Augustine for the last nine going on 10 years, and some of the most beautiful, wonderful people you will find in St. Augustine, many of whom are unfortunate to have been born into poor circumstances to have inherited family homes who were even poorer than, and unfortunately, they are who they are where they are, simple people, hard-working people, honest people, and there seems now to be this idea that you blame the victims, you blame the victims.

That flood we had three weeks ago in Bamboo No. 3 in particular and Bamboo No. 1, Member for St. Joseph, I hope he speaks about that. You have a situation where, as I repeat, unprecedented but not unexpected rainfall came. St. Joseph River broke its banks in three locations, water came into the village, but suddenly you hear things about who threw stove, who threw car, whatever, everything; there was nothing like that. It was just the enormous volume of water, and we had warned the Ministry of Works and Transport beforehand, months before, that the embankment of all of our rivers—you know when we write, we do not just write for St. Augustine, but we send information to all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that do not just buttress the embankment to historic sizes and strength, you need to do much better, you must go higher; and there was flooding.

You know, I heard the Minister speak about there was no flooding in Greenvale or Oropune because of the work they had done, and I am so grateful for that, but when it happened in Bamboo, somehow or the other it turned out it is their fault.

The people of Oropune whenever it rains they are worried, beautiful
community, but because of poor design and construct and lack of maintenance, they are flooded out regularly. Yesterday there was water in the road throughout most of St. Augustine, luckily none went into the homes.

So let us get away from this idea that you could get away, you are a government and you have to take responsibility, for even if people do wrong things, you have a responsibility to fix that. And as we move forward with global climate change, I ask the question and I am happy the Minister of Public Utilities is here. WASA is under your portfolio? Yes. Honourably and happily so, when he took such great pleasure in this Parliament I remember, to say “they will prosecute the farmers for abstracting water”.

What were they doing? They were earning their livelihood, but that is insignificant to the more important thing that they were giving us food security. They were taking water out of God’s bounty from the river, they are using pumps, of course, I do not know if it would have been illegal if they used bucket instead, but the vastness of the work that they do required pumps, but they want to seize the people’s pump and charge them for it. That is your water? You want to charge them because the law says so. When those rivers overflow and go into the people’s homes, is that your water too? And it may sound ridiculous, but if you are taking responsibility to charge them when they take water, when your water comes in their place, you should be held accountable. [Desk thumping]

This is serious business. Could you not work with the farmers in the dry season and in the rainy season, find a system so there is—and I understand why sometimes they may want to charge, because they say they weaken the embankment. Oh good Lord, man! Could we not have a little system where they could put a little concrete something over so their hoses could go over, not to cut the embankment, but actually to strengthen it in those locations and work with then
and not them against them?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Why the Prime Minister’s advisor did not tell them that?

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Well maybe, well I hope he does, and I will not charge for that bit of advice.

Madam Speaker, what are we doing? We are hearing about the eradication of styrotex cups and little bottles and everything else which is really necessary. When every single year in the dry season we are told how low our water reserves are, that is bad enough but, Minister, we are told in the height of the rainy season that you have a terrible deficit. What are you doing about it? What plans do you have to redirect the floods so that we could put them into reservoirs whether existing reservoirs or new ones? Do not tell me about highway to Toco. Tell me about water to the Navet. [*Desk thumping*] Tell me about how we are going to create an environment so when it rains unprecedented levels you are able to capture that, so that when it comes that we have dry season drought we have a reserve of water. This is what the people of Trinidad and Tobago need.

Do not tell me about—how much per cent we gone off? 15 per cent? Eh? When they get caught with the pants down, they do the maths and realize, and as the Leader of the Opposition rightly said, you cannot be talking about CEPEP salaries that is less than the legal minimum wage. And when they do the maths because everybody say, well wait a minute, even with that increase you are lower than the minimum wage now, so you had to come up with a brilliant argument. And I am sure it was contributed to, that brilliance, by the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security. [*Crosstalk*] No. No. These are very intelligent men I have worked with, I admire their intellect, and I am sure would have come up with the idea, well you have to argue it that way, because on the face of it there was not issue that they were raising CEPEP salaries to above the minimum wage.
They spoke about moving CEPEP and URP salaries to 15 per cent, and when it is added up, it came to less than minimum wage, you had a legal conundrum, and my two friends, I am sure, sorted out that for them.

Why is it, because I keep hearing, say about election, but no, “We will not have an election budget, we are serious people, we are honourable people, we believe in the future, we do not play politics with the people”, but the first salary they will get is when?—December 1\textsuperscript{st}. When is the election?

\textbf{Hon. Member:} December 7\textsuperscript{th}.

\textbf{Mr. P. Ramadhar:} Oh my good Lord! Is that possible that there could be a coincidence there? Are we to believe that this is not an election budget as has been described by Hansel crumbs and so? It is nothing short of that because there is no substance in it apart from that and you believe \textit{[Desk thumping]} that you are going to be able to entice people to sell their vote for a $2.50 more power. Wow! What a contempt you have. But you know what? Sometimes it works, but it now the duty of every right-thinking citizen to tell you, no more. \textit{[Desk thumping]} We will not be fooled, we will not sell our future. Whatever the next election brings, it must bring a better governance to this country.

\textbf{Mr. Garcia:} Great is the PNM.

\textbf{Mr. P. Ramadhar:} Great is the PNM? You will continue to say that? Yeah? It is a great waste of time. \textit{[Desk thumping]} It is a great failure, and the present PNM is a disgrace to the legacy Dr. Eric Williams. \textit{[Desk thumping]} There is no philosophy underlying its movement into our future. The old PNM that many of us grew up with and respected, that has gone.

I want to tell you something, Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister when he speaks, I believe what he says and he believes what he says. Right? But there are advisors and others who really pull the strings who make the decisions and then
advise him what to do. And as a good leader, he will take that advice, but you need to know who your advisors are otherwise you will be led by the unknown, the masked silent persons who really have power in the society. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe that there is agreement that now will be a convenient time for the suspension. We will come back at 6.30 p.m.

6.00 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

6.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume after tea, I recognize the Minister of Public Utilities. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As always, it is indeed an honour to stand before this esteemed House and by extension before the people of Trinidad and Tobago in defence of the document which outlines our proposed expenditure and expected revenue for fiscal 2020.

As always, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a budget is really not just a list of figures, but it is the opportunity for the sitting Government to show to the general population the direction in which it intends to take the country and to highlight some of the achievements of what they have done and what they intend to do. But it also presents, and thank God for that, at some times and we saw it today, an opportunity for the Opposition to be able to outline some of their plans. And I say thanks for that, because you know, sometimes it is not always that it does that, and it gives us an opportunity for us to really see what are these plans that are always a little bit opaque.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, like my colleagues that have gone in the past, before I
get into the spirit of my contribution, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance [Desk thumping] the hon. Colm Imbert and our Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis [Desk thumping] for the work that they have done on this document and on those of previous years. Because of the sterling work of the Minister of Finance that he has done on adjusting our expenditure and laying the foundation for sustainable future growth, I must say and I think we all will admit, that we are in a much better place as a nation than we were when we took office in 2015.

And I want to add, when you listen, and I was in a presentation this morning with a number of illustrious speakers, and when you listen and you go back and you read all that people had predicted that where we would have been, I think they themselves are shocked to realize that we are nowhere there, and that we are actually in a good place compared to where we have come from. [Desk thumping]

Today, we are talking about projected GDP growth of 1.7 per cent for 2019/2020, and a projected fiscal deficit of only 3 per cent, and I could safely say that based on those figures that the ship of state is heading in the right direction. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, the Members of the other side will always like us not to remember the state under which we got when we came into office what it is that they actually left us. You know, when I heard the Leader of the Opposition, she spoke of a number of projects, a number of things that they left, but as usual and similar to her projections of where we are supposed to be going, you only get one side of the story.

What, of course, she did not remember or she just failed to also talk about, is the state of the economy and the things that she left. We are all aware and, I mean, if we just shed our minds back to 2014/2015 era, we could all remember the state
of the energy sector. We were aware of that. We knew that we were in an energy sector, the most important sector that we have, and during that time shutdowns in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate for critical things like gas was a norm, and we heard different excuses and excuses and excuses, only to realize that we were operating at a level where we were at 3.3 million standard cubic feet of gas, and we had contracts that required us to service those contracts at 4.3 million standard cubic feet of gas. So we were short in our ability to meet our contracts. That is what the leader, that is what we inherited and that is what we were called upon to deal with.

What was also left, of course, not mentioned, only half of the story, we all know we were left with an NGC that was close to bankrupt with over $16 billion of the NGC being taken away from them. We forgot about that. That is what we were also left with.

We were left after allowing this Government when they came into office in 2010, you had a Government that was operating in surplus between mortgaging the Green Fund, between mortgaging the business levy, we were left with a situation where the country was running on fumes with overdraft maxed out. [Desk thumping] That is what was also left.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Three days, remind them.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Three days. You know, she left, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were left with a lot of backpays, outstanding backpays that required to be settled. We were left with two ships that were coming down here that somebody went and say, “I want two of those”. And then when they came here there was no place nothing in place to pay for these ships. Remember those are the things that we were left with.

And then, of course, we were left with a country that had an appetite for $63
billion in expenditure, and that is the kind of budgets that were run. And we talk about election budgets, the reality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this Government left us with the last levels of expenditure, $63 billion at a time when everyone saw the writing was on the wall with regard to energy prices.

We all knew that no longer we were hearing about a $100 oil price, prices were coming down. We all knew that gas prices were coming down, every other country around the world was talking about recession and tightening their belts. Trinidad and Tobago, we did not want to hear the word. The Minister of Finance only acknowledged something, and the Governor of the Central Bank in 2015, that is the type of irresponsible spending, that is the type of irresponsible management that was also left for us to deal with.

So, you know, again you see that is what sometimes it gives, as I said, makes politicians or people have this view about politicians, because you get only one half of the story, one half of the story. So if you are saying what you have left, well then tell the truth and let everyone understand [Desk thumping] what it is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to achieve this sort of sustainable growth that the country needs at this time, a holistic perspective is necessary. And, again, I must commend the Minister of Finance and his team for crafting a budget that dealt with all segments of the economy.

And I heard someone talking, I think, it was the Minister for—not the Minister, the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, and again the person was talking about election, “an election budget”. You know, if the budget, I do not put these tags on things, and I am not going to put an election, but you know, if I have to accept that a budget that is presented that dealt with all segments of the society, a budget that dealt with the manufacturing association, that looked at the fact that there was over $4 billion in VAT refunds that we inherited and no plan whatsoever
to deal with it, a budget that dealt with that; a budget that also dealt with minimum wage, a budget that dealt with long-outstanding matters like dealing with indexing the pensions for pension plans for civil servants, a budget that dealt with giving daily-paid workers matters that had been outstanding for a very long time that is critical to this country. And if doing and putting those things in place meant that we needed—if people want to call those things “an election budget”, well, you know what?—so be it, so be it, because it was a good budget that dealt with all of the issues that needed to be dealt with once and for all. And you know what?—it did it in a responsible manner, it did it in a manner while still keeping the deficit at a responsible level, and it did not go about spending 63 and $64 billion.

So I have no problem in accepting a good budget dealing with the issues of the people that face Trinidad and Tobago, and if that is what is called “an election budget”, well, as I said, so be it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my contribution and I also want to take the opportunity before getting into the heart of my contribution today to also address some of the issues that I also heard the Leader of the Opposition spoke about when she gave an idea, gave the country an inkling of what is to come. And, you know, when those promises were being made, it reminded me of the second part of the statement that was the song that the Minister of Finance mentioned at the end of his presentation. And, you know, in that particular song it talked about “Get up…stand up for your rights”. It talked about:

“Preacher man, don’t tell me
Heaven is under the earth
I know you don’t know
What life is really worth.”

Hon. Member: Sing it.
Sen. the Hon. R. Le Hunte: “It’s not all that glitters is gold

   Half the story has never been told.

   So now you see the light…

   Stand up for your rights.”

So you are right, half the story was not told. So, yes, we heard today that a presentation by the Leader of the Opposition that really just took all the things that you could think about in a document, pulled them from here, there, everywhere, put it together on a nice document and read it out and say, this is what I want, a utopia, no regard to exactly how we are going to get it. All these things are there.

Now, listen to what it is. When you summarize what you are saying, you are saying, listen to me. All right? You never had a balanced budget before. When you had 58 and $59 billion in revenue, there was no need to balance the budget. We are hearing now that, yes of course, it is a good thing to say, because it is the in vogue thing to say and therefore I will say it. And I am going to balance the budget. All right? And therefore—then you talk about, I am going to balance it, but you are also saying that I am going to reduce taxes, reduce my revenue. Fine. You are also saying while you are doing and giving a convoluted way you want to deal with the foreign exchange which we all understand what will happen to the dollar when you start to talk about it, you are also saying that you are going to pay back all your bills.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is, when you put all of those things together and you start to dissect them, you know what you are saying? Let us be clear what you are saying. You are saying, and no problem you know, and I am glad that it is coming out because it gives the population the time to assess it and understand what are the implications. So you are saying, listen, let us move the dollar to 12:1.

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That is what you are saying. You are also saying, because you are also saying, let us take inflation from below 1 per cent to 10 per cent. You are also saying without—again, because you have educated people who could fact check and put the numbers behind these things, you are also saying, when you do this and reduce the revenue and have to pay the bills, you are also saying to 20 to 30,000 public servants, “Go home”, because you would not be able to pay them.  

[Desk thumping]

So, at the end of the day you have outlined your plans, and again because as you have said, and the song also went on, you know, he say”

“You could fool some people sometimes,
But you can’t fool all the people all the time,
So now”—you—“see the light,
…stand up for”—your—“rights.”

[Desk thumping] So, that is what you are saying. I think it is a lil bit disingenuous. It is disingenuous at the best—using the best of language that I could muster at this point in time, to only talk on one side and only say all the nice things, and then at the end of the day not letting the population understand the implications of what you are saying.

You also talked about the repo rate. We all know when you affect the repo rate you are sending up interest rates. What you are saying as a result will tell the people. So tell poor people who now could qualify for a mortgage at 2 per cent that now they have to pay 10 per cent, and therefore they will not qualify.  

[Desk thumping] So tell the people. So, I am glad—[ Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please! Again, Laventille West, right, you will need to be in your seat in order to—right, please? Right. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes, so tell the people
exactly once and for all what are the implications of what you are doing. And I am
glad that you have brought it out there, so we know that governance, although it
will not happen, but God forbid, we know what to expect that is coming down the
line, inflation of 10 per cent, devaluation, people going home. That is what you are
telegraphing to the country as your future; and I have no problem with that. But
what we on this side of the House say, we had those options and we made different
choices. My Minister of Finance decided to deal with the problems that we have
differently, and therefore we have taken a different path, *[Desk thumping]* a path
that has brought us here, which is far different from the path that your plan is going
to take us. *[Desk thumping]*

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me spend some time, because you are
right, I do not want to go on and on, I just felt that there were things that were said
there that we needed to deal with. I think there was also a point that I just want to
address before I—you talked about money being spent and therefore all the things
the people were able to benefit from. Well you know, I have the list, all right. I
have the list in front of me when you talked about those grounds, when the St.
Augustine MP spoke about the grounds, that people were able to enjoy. And the
reality is that, yes, when you look at the list in Naparima you had over 20 grounds
that people could have enjoyed, and in Siparia, and Caroni Central, and Couva.
Yes, you had those grounds, but when I went to La Brea I found six grounds; six
grounds. All right. So yes, when you went to Laventille you found seven grounds,
and when you went to other areas—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** One second. Again, Naparima, you continue to give the lil
outbursts. Please, you had your turn. Please! Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** And in the case of Diego Martin North/East, two
grounds, and San Fernando East, one ground; San Fernando West, zero grounds.

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[Interruption]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, the Member for St. Joseph, the Attorney General, please, you will have your turn. Member for St. Joseph, please! Proceed Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** So, at the end of the day, you know, that is the reality. That is the reality. And I want people to understand, you know, that when you are talking about money, of course if you have money, you know money is the root of all evil it is said in the *Bible*, but you know there are very few things that—there are very few things or limited amount of things that you could do without it. When you have an expenditure you have to understand you are coming from 63 billion, you know you have 100 million, 200 million, 300 million, 400 million. You reach 900 million, and when after you reach 900 million then you reach to one billion. Take that again and you go back again, 100 million, 200, you reach to two billion.

So, you are talking about lots and lots of millions of dollars between the type of money that you had to spend, we are now fighting with budgets of 50, 51, 52 billion. You spent 60 and $63 billion—[Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please! Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Sorry.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, I am not going to tolerate those outbursts across the Chamber; Standing Order 53 is clear. Please!

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** So again, I want us to put everything into context and let us be serious, let us not be disingenuous. Let us talk about, yes, you had a lot of money and you have spent a lot of money and therefore the circumstances under which the country is in is different, and stop making the population believe that, listen, that it is the same and somebody “doh” want to give you something. The reality is, you had lots of millions of dollars more to spend than we presently
But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, enough of that. Let me go into, again, one aspect of the budget, or two areas, that were spoken about in the budget and highlighted that I felt I need to bring to a lil bit more attention and to put it into perspective. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few months ago I was appointed the chairman of an inter-ministerial committee set up to work on the leadership of the credit union movement. We were mandated to craft a framework for the movement’s continued success and deeper involvement in the country’s development, because we recognized that the credit union movement was an important sector. Our work was completed and I would like to publicly, as I say, take this opportunity to acknowledge the other members of my committee who worked with me, my other ministerial colleagues, Minister West, Minister Gopee-Scoon, and of course my colleague here, Minister Hinds. Fantastic work done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a result of our joint efforts and the contribution of the leadership of the cooperative sector, this Government was able to do what other administrations failed to do for the past decade, what they failed to do for the past decade, that is, to initiate the development of a framework that would enable the Co-operative Credit Union Movement to remain competitive and relevant. When you read some of the comments from the credit union movement that is out there—I just came from a function with them this morning and some of the statements—they talked about the President of the CFF believes that the cooperative movement is finally, and he said, “I believe that the co-operative movement is finally being taken seriously.” This was in the papers this morning, the Guardian newspaper.

For years the credit union have been clamouring for enhanced regulation to an increase in the death benefit limits, and at last it is here. Finally, we are being taken seriously. Even, and I quote again from yesterday, Dr. Winfred James, I
mean, a man who speaks his mind and he speaks about the Government sometimes in not so much glowing terms. But, I will quote. He talked about:

“The 2020 budget has four measures”—for the—“benefit of the…(Co-operative Credit Union Movement), and while they do not exhaust the needs that we have, they promise to be far better than we have had since we began serious lobbying for change some 30 years ago. I rejoice over that fact!”

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you could see and as we have been doing in all the sectors, this administration is walking the talk. Instead of drafting a Bill and holding consultation after the fact as other administrations have done, this Government has been meeting with the stakeholders at every level to discuss the principles that would inform such a document. More importantly, we have not waited on the overarching credit union Bill to start the process as other people have been doing. We instead took a very pragmatic approach. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is we all know, yes, you want to fix something, but you have to fix the pillars, you have to fix the organization, you have to do what is right so the organization could be sustained, otherwise it would die.

The reality is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know that $5,000 a burial—to bury a dead, that is something that is not possible. That is an outdated part of the legislation, and therefore we went about fixing it while doing things simultaneously. Similarly, we cannot continue to hamstring these people-based organizations by not allowing them to better serve their members through the payment of utility bills. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not need to overhaul the whole entire piece of legislation to make these things happen. It is about being efficient and effective, and these are the qualities that differentiate this administration from those that happened in the past. [Desk thumping]
For those of you who have worked with the credit union movement, this is not easy work, but it is work that is necessary, because they are an important part of our society. And as we know, those of you, the Co-operative Credit Union Movement they fiercely protect the principles of democracy and control, as they should. And within this democratic movement there are several representative bodies that specialize in particular areas of interest, all geared towards the development of the movement. They vary in all their forms, but they all have one thing in common, and one thing after we sat and we spoke and we discussed all the issues over a few months, and we worked with them, one thing was common, one thing was clear, is that the present status quo cannot continue to exist.

Way back in 2013 in the mayor’s report, we have to pull that report out and see what they have been asking for, for years. For years they have asked for an independent authority. They have no problem being regulated, no problem at all. They recognize what they have is not working, they asked for an independent authority. That will now be enhanced to deal with the regulation, and therefore what they have been asking for was reasonable, and this Government has decided to put the systems in place and do the work that was required to ensure that we put now, though that people-centric organization, that important organization, that organization to which a number of qualified people in Trinidad and Tobago of working class owes their debt and gratitude to that organization for allowing them to go to university, and therefore we have decided because of their role, and because of their importance to do what is right, and fix the organization once and for all.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this organization and this movement represents over half a million accounts in the Co-operative Credit Union Movement, and as such this organization is a very critical organization, and we will continue, because
as you move along it is about a pendulum. It is a pendulum. Life is not a destination, it is a journey. As we move along the path we have decided what we could do now, immediately, and we have also decided that when we put certain things in place, what we are also prepared to do, and we have telegraphed it, clearly, what we are prepared to do so that the organization could start to plan and put thing in place. That is what a responsible government does, and that is what we have done for the credit union movement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another item, another area that was mentioned that I have not heard much conversations about, although I did hear the Minister—the Leader of the Opposition talk a lil bit, and I want to give you a lil idea and show you the difference between actually doing and just ole talk. You know, during the budget presentation, the Minister of Finance indicated that the Government is taking the lead to adopt and implement a sustainable energy road map for Trinidad and Tobago. So in Tobago, as we integrate energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy as pillars of a sustainable energy transition over the next four years of our time in office, and I want to repeat that, we are making a plan for the next four years of our time in office. [Desk thumping]

My task here today is simply to communicate clearly to the population exactly what actions this Government would be taking and how we would do it, as well as why and why we chose this path. And I will do that in two ways. I will put some flesh and some meat on some of the rationale and the initiatives that were mentioned by the hon. Minister of Finance. Of course, we have only dealt with one because you want to take this as a joke. But this is not a joke, this is a serious business, and therefore we have come here at this point because we took this business seriously, and we put an appropriate mechanism to come up with a strategic plan, with a policy document, and with an action plan to be able to guide
what we are doing. And we got feedback and input, not only from ourselves but we have put together a committee made up of people, representatives from the chamber, representatives from the Government sector, representatives from UWI, and we put a team together to help guide where we are going. We did not come up with this by “vaps”.

So, we spoke about energy audits. This Government recognized its responsibility to lead from in front and lead by example. [Desk thumping] We recognized that the majority of our buildings occupied by the Ministries and state agencies lacked protocol for controlling lights, air conditions and computer usage at night, and public holidays, and weekends. We now operate in a system whereby wearing sweaters to go to work is just part of our uniforms. That is what we do. Energy audits will therefore be conducted, and I quote:

…in all Government state-owned buildings to inform the implementation of technical retrofitting.

As mentioned during Minister Imbert’s presentation, this process will commence in Tower C in Port of Spain, but these audits will be conducted in Government buildings nationwide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this initiative is not only environmentally sound, but economically beneficial to the country as a whole. The projected benefits to be derived, and I want you to understand—what are we talking about here? We are talking just taking two buildings, you take two buildings, you take Tower C and the Ministry of Education building, at 10 per cent reduction in energy usage in those two buildings alone, will carry a present value of over $6.6 billion as the benefits that would be accrued, will go on in perpetuity. That is the type of money that you are talking about, benefits, present value of our perpetuity, because what you save you would continue to save going forward. That is what you are talking
about. That is what that initiative is all about. To add to this, and following consultation with industries, Government will encourage all high energy intensive users to perform energy audits to determine their levels greenhouse gas emissions and their levels of efficiency, specifically as it relates to the use of natural gas.

The Government does indeed, and we do have indeed a responsibility to supply natural gas to a high energy intensive users in order to meet the contractual obligations particularly in the downstream sector. However, we also believe that those receiving natural gas from the State have a moral responsibility to utilize these resources delivered to them in an efficient manner as possible. And therefore we are talking about encouraging energy audits in the State, leading in the State, and encouraging others to move towards energy audits.

Energy efficiency in the commercial sector: If change is to be longstanding it must also be holistic in nature. Government will therefore work with the private sector, inclusive of SMEs, to boost competitiveness and improve technological capabilities through the implementation of relatively low carbon energy efficiency systems.

Government efficiency in schools: Government is committed again as we talk about and roll out our plan, and as you hear, we mentioned them and we are going to give you some more details. We are committed to reducing the energy usage in over 800 government primary and secondary schools. However, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. [Desk thumping] To this end, 30 primary and 30 secondary schools have been selected to be place on Phase I of an energy audit and retrofitting exercise.

Having such programmes implemented throughout the nation’s schools is not only geared towards financial and energy savings, but is also geared towards ensuring that our nation’s youth have the opportunity to observe and study the
benefits of energy efficiency technology for themselves. To this end though, the Ministry of Education and the teachers training institutions’ efforts will be made to augment and enhance energy efficiency education. And in that regard, again recognizing the importance of getting the kids, and getting this into the school, the Ministry of Public Utilities, and the Ministry of Education, will be working with a programme specifically in the schools that will encourage our kids and our children to deal not only with energy efficiency, because it is a behavioural change. When we talk about energy consumption and energy efficiency, we are talking about a behavioural change, and therefore we are going to be going out to the schools with programmes that will encourage them to stop the waste, stop wasting water, stop wasting electricity, recycling, because you want to get behavioural change happening in Trinidad and Tobago, and you want to cement them. So those are the things that we are also doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been much talk and jokes and ridicule to my distress, and I must say to my disappointment, of talks about bulbs. Much of this discourse has revealed the surprising level of ignorance that we have at the highest level. [Desk thumping] Allow me to be clear on this matter, allow me to be clear on this matter. This Government is executing a plan that seeks to transition every household— [Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: This Government is executing a plan that seeks to transition every household in Trinidad and Tobago to a more energy efficient technology. It is a transition plan. You want people to change their behaviours because this is good for Trinidad and Tobago. In lieu of an outright and immediate ban on less efficient technologies like incandescent bulbs which could have been more disruptive to the population, this Government is providing a practical
assistance to every one of our 400,000 households. In light of this national benefit to be derived from lower electricity consumption through energy conservation habits and practices, Government will utilize a number of mechanisms to promote energy reduction in the residential sector, and I say it is part of a wider perspective and a number of initiatives that we propose to do to allow people to change their behaviour. One important component of this will be the implementation of a light bulb exchange programme that would allow every residential customer across the country to exchange a specific number of bulbs for LED alternatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this initiative, I want to say, when you look at this initiative, in coming up with this idea and in coming up, in doing this, and you are sure right. I am sure if our MP for Naparima goes and contacts some of his friends all over the UN, in Singapore, and all of those countries, you will recognize that they understand the need for this, and they have actually done it. We are now catching up, and they have actually done it. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please! Please Members!

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Right here in the Caribbean, Barbados is actually doing it at this point in time, and therefore this is a programme, when you look at the benefits to be derived by the individual, and the benefits to be derived by the country, I assure you that this programme has a positive net present value for the country. In addition, based on the calculations, and I want to also say that based on the calculations provided by T&TEC, residential owners using light bulbs, and I want to make this point to the nation so that you could understand, that at the end of the day you want to talk, these bulbs that you are giving out when you change your light bulbs, we are in effect, to the people whose bills are in the vicinity, which is the majority of the country, over 50 per cent of the country bills over a two-month are between 300 or less than 300. To those individuals, these bulbs, the
same thing that you are joking and laughing about, these bulbs will have the potential of reducing their bills to as much as 25 per cent. That is 25 per cent additional money that they will have in their hands. So when you laugh and make fun of it, you are saying to the person whose bills around that area that, aye man, 25 per cent is nothing. That is the type of waste that you want to encourage.

So, understand that this has tremendous benefit for people throughout the country, and it has a significant benefit, a significant benefit to people whose bills are in the vicinity of 250 to 300, $325 every two months. And I will dare say that over 50 per cent of our people are in that category. [ Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you would see, this is—[ Interruption]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, one second. Again, Members please. Right. The outburst across the Chamber would not be tolerated. As I am on my legs, Minister, you have an additional 10 minutes. You care to avail yourself?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed one time.

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**7.15 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is more than a bright idea or a giveaway programme. It is a clear signal of the direction that the country needs to go in, in terms of energy efficiency and it makes economic common sense.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Tell us the wattage.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also talked about exploring and again, listen and understand the type of thinking. You hear people talking about this, what are the futuristic? We mentioned—the Minister of Finance in his presentation talked about the development of a hydrogen economy. Yet beyond
the aforementioned progress, you know, what was clear is that that went over the heads of individuals, went over the heads. Well, let me tell you, all right, you just heard from the CEO of bp; the CEO of bp came and was talking about the hydrogen economy is the economy of the future. He just spoke again and he talked about the size of that economy in the United States, could be anywhere in the tune of US 130 to US $170 billion. When you have a lot of the countries around the world and again, my colleague from the—the ex-Ambassador to the UN, go and ask your colleagues in Germany, ask your colleagues in Australia, ask your colleagues in Japan, they are all looking towards developing the hydrogen economy. And therefore, we recognize the importance of that and therefore we recognize that Trinidad and Tobago, a lot of the natural gas that you take, the natural gas is used as a feedstock to break down into hydrogen. We are already part of that economy and therefore it is something that we need to explore and develop. So again, this shows a lot of foresight and thinking in that particular area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this business of energy conservation and energy efficiency, this is no joking matter. When you look at the records and the numbers, all right, this business has the potential of providing us with over $1.2 billion in energy savings; this business of energy conservation and energy efficiency has the potential of giving you over $200 million in additional taxes; this business of energy conservation and energy efficiency has the potential of providing over 4,000 jobs. So what you are talking about, again, the fun and the joke and the banter, we expect that you will at least lift the conversation in the country to recognize when something is a good thing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They cannot do that.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Right. But no, you want to ridicule and make fun and make jokes and we are not taking the country anywhere with that type of
I want to also spend some time in understanding why we choose to take this path. We recognized that climate change is a global problem and that our nation is one of the most carbon intensive economies in the world. On Friday the 20th of September, thousands of persons, and some in Trinidad, primarily comprising young people all over the globe, marched to demand that governments do more to combat climate change. I want to assure the population, and particularly the youths that are listening, that we recognize how serious this problem is and we have indeed decided to do more, hence in keeping with our commitment to the Paris Agreement, Government will support the implementation of climate mitigation and adaption strategies throughout the country.

Moreover, the energy conservation and energy efficiency plan that I have outlined today will lead to 6 million tonnes of reduction in CO₂ levels by 2024.

**Hon. Member:** One bulb?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Right. No, I did not talk about one bulb, I went through with a whole series of plans of a number of initiatives. We want our youth to know that we hear them loud and clear. There is no planet B, there is no planet B, we only have one planet and that is why we have to provide as a Government and we are doing it, we have to provide leadership that is required on this issue. It is why we are leading the country on a path to sustainable energy and it is why we are leading by example. This is not about politics, this is simply about—and this is not about adding lines to items of a budget. It is about our future, it is about our youth.

Energy conservation and energy efficiency also makes economic sense. The calculations of our technical staff is by the year 2024, Trinidad and Tobago would have accumulated the total energy cost savings of over $1 billion. By the same
year we would have also saved a total of 29 billion cubic feet of gas, worth over $773 million. These facts on their own have been sufficient to justify the actions we have been taking, but there are even more benefits to be enjoyed. We expect to earn a further $200 million in government taxes from these initiatives, yet even more importantly, as I said before, we are talking about creating close to 4,000 jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not only a good idea or even a bright idea. It is the direction that the country needs to take. It is a win-win, win scenario. Enhanced energy conservation and energy efficiency does not simply improve the environment, sustainability of our nation and secure the future of our children and of our youth, but it also makes economic sense. Aside from the obvious environmental benefits, our country stands to earn billions of dollars in the medium and long term from these initiatives. To add to these initiatives, an investment to energy conservation and energy efficiency, we will also create thousands of jobs. How much more time, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just around four minutes.

Sen The Hon. R. Le Hunte: This initiative therefore represents a win-win, a win for the environment, a win for the economy and a win for employment. Most importantly, it is a win for the young people as it serves to secure this future of this planet for them. I am proud to be a Member of this Government as we not only move into this direction, we are also moving to driving out and reducing the styrofoam and single-use plastics while also taking action as it relates to the use of plastic bottles. I am proud to be part of progress. I want to give the population every assurance that this is something that we take very seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have outlined some of the elements of our comprehensive sustainable energy plan that will enhance energy conservation, energy efficiency, and the
development of the renewable through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. As you can see, as I said before, this is really good for the country.

Our message to the population is simple and straightforward. The time has come for us to change how we use and consume energy. We need to conserve our resources, not only for our use, or for our exports but for the youths and the young people of this country. This Government in executing this plan is willing to lead by example and we begin this process, by reducing its own energy consumption and carbon footprint. We are not going to talk about doing it, we are not going to pass measures and not implement them. You know, I heard about what will happen and I heard a lot of plans by the Opposition Leader on this particular area. But you know what, in 2011 you came to the Parliament and you passed legislation. But this is what you do. You mamaguy, you passed tax incentives and you talked about it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Two more minutes, Member.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** And then you ran in government, you ran in government for four years afterwards and you know what you did, you implemented nothing, you implemented nothing, we are in the same place. [*Desk thumping*] But yet still you want to come now and want to talk again about what you want to do and what you plan to do when you do not—as the saying goes, you know, “you doh put on light”—in the what? Light in the day to what you could see, right. At the end of the day we all know, we all recognize what it is that you do. You talk about things and then when you had the opportunity you did nothing. No action was taken. We have chosen to take action, to talk less and act more.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member—

**Mr. Charles:** Amen.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:**—your time has been spent.
Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Thank you. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (Couva North): Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to contribute on this or be part of the budget debate 2019/2020. First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me congratulate the Member for Siparia [Desk thumping] on her response to the budget and as you know we have the Government on the ropes after that contribution. [Desk thumping] Because the Opposition Leader was able to lay out specifically the plans for Trinidad and Tobago moving forward. [Desk thumping]

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to respond and I understand that my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities has left the Chamber because he knew what he just said was all fluff, fluff, [Desk thumping] blue fluff. And I think that in this light bulb exchange they should give themselves firstly light bulbs before they go to the rest of the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me start by saying that I was very disappointed in the Minister of Public Utilities’ contribution this afternoon. What the Minister did was come to this Chamber to justify a $7 million light bulb contract [Desk thumping] as part of their plan and to use and to justify, use a whole 55 minutes to justify that particular project because the people of Trinidad and Tobago have seen right through their lies. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you really, are we really serious as a Government when you have your Minister of Finance saying that one of the best game changers or one of the best things that we can offer you for the new fiscal year is free LED light bulbs?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please, and that is why the Minister of Public Utilities came here this afternoon and he made reference to the young people and about energy conservation and environment, but I will show him where he went wrong.
Mr. Indarsingh: From the day he took his oath.

Ms. R. Ramdial: I will seek to educate him with respect to putting proper plans [Desk thumping] and policies for the environment moving forward. And our Opposition Leader did that this morning with our plan and I will reiterate. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see, what has happened here in this country over the past four years is that we have had a Government that has not performed in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] We have had a Government who has blamed the previous government and currently the Opposition for all that went wrong and did nothing in four years to enhance the quality of life for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Public Utilities said that this was not an election budget, but really, I think the criticisms and the opinions out there after the Minister of Finance read the budget said otherwise and, of course, we know that this is an election budget. And I am convinced that there is going to be a second part because this Minister of Finance is going to go down to the wire; this Government is going to go down to the wire next year and bring another budget that will of course show waste and mismanagement just to win an election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what kind of plan is it that you have your Minister of Public Utilities come here this afternoon to justify by saying they took different decisions and they are on a different path and the path that they took was one of, well, in my opinion, was one of mass retrenchment, increase in cost of living, high food prices, runaway crime, contraction of the economy and lack of funding to critical Ministries. [Desk thumping] That was the different direction that this Government took in four years. This is the answer. This is what the people voted for? Is this what the people voted for after four years? And I think they deserve better than a light bulb and $2.50 increase in the minimum wage. [Desk thumping]
I also want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Minister of Public Utilities was crying and he needs to stop the crying. And he came here, he came here to cry and to play victim and to appeal to our better senses as to not knock this light bulb programme; a waste of Parliament’s time. What did you tell us about the other initiatives within your Ministry? What did you tell us about WASA? What did you tell us about increasing the capacity of water conservation? What did tell us about—how are we going to deal with shortages of water during the dry season?

Hon. Member: “Geh a bulb.”

Ms. R. Ramdial: What did you tell us about your initiatives in T&TEC and otherwise?

Mr. Indarsingh: They are going to increase electricity.

Ms. R. Ramdial: What are you telling us?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva South, this is about the third time you continue to disturb the Sitting. Please, all right? I do not want to have to get up again. Proceed, Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that since day one the Prime Minister and all of his Ministers went up and down this country blaming the former PP Government for spending out the money. And, you know, the Minister of Public Utilities spoke about their side of the story and that how the Opposition Leader only came with one side and he was here to give the other side. But what I am about to say is the truth here.

The myth that this Government propagated since day one was that we “buss” the Treasury and we pledged the Green Fund and the URP fund. This is the facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was a net overdraft of TT $9 billion. [Desk thumping] This was built up as a result of low prices and, however, expenditure comes in

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evenly but revenue tends to bunch at the end of a quarter. Therefore, there was incoming cash flow at the end of that quarter. [Desk thumping] There were taxes to the tune of $6.5 billion that was going to come in; the IPO was $1.5 billion; TGU, $4 billion and the loan $1 billion, that amounted to $13 billion that this new incoming Government then would have benefited from. So it was a misrepresentation. There was no “buss” Treasury, nobody was broke, they have moneys. And that is why they are able to come today with this election budget and I will demonstrate also through the budget estimates how they intend to spend the money in this election year. But I will come to that a little later on and you will see, because the Minister of Public Utilities continues to cry about the lack of revenue and lack of money and they had to do what they had to do and this is what we have come to in this budget, this is the result of all of their four years of holding it together, this is what we have come to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I want to ask the Minister of Public Utilities or whoever is responding after me, in four years under your Government, you did not generate any revenues? So you come here today as the Minister of Public Utilities to say, excuse us, pardon us, we had no choice, we had no options, we had no money, but you know what, here is a $7 million light bulb programme that we are coming to pacify you with. [Laughter] I mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [Desk thumping] really, and I want to ask, you said you did not have any revenues and we ran the Treasury dry and all of that, so where did you get the moneys to mess up the sea bridge in terms of ending a contract with a previous operator that was running well for Tobago, messed it up, rented four vessels in four years and then you went to order two more down in Australia. Where are you getting the revenues for that if you had no money? [Desk thumping] Where are you getting the funding for that if you had no money or if you have no money? Again, I want
to ask, where are you getting the billions to pave roads? You have your Minister of Works and Transport out there, up and down the country, “we coming with a massive road paving project”; 2019, massive road paving. I mean, you cannot fool anybody. Where are you getting the moneys for this massive road paving project if, as your Minister of Public Utilities just said, that you had no moneys.

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

Hon. Member: “Cry-cry baby.”

Ms. R. Ramdial: He is a “cry-cry baby”, he needs to stop crying. [Laughter and desk thumping] He needs to stop crying. You know, and he realizes he is between a rock and a hard place with that $7 million bulb contract. So that is why he is here crying and asking for forgiveness. Where are you getting that $7 million? Who are you giving it to? Friends and financers and those who are going to help you in the elections? Where did you get the moneys to give the Attorney General’s relatives, millions in rental contracts? [Desk thumping] Where are you getting the money for that if you do not have money, where are you getting it? Three million dollars to purchase paintings. Where did you get the $45 million to host CARIFESTA?—$45 million and then you buy a $4,000 cake to celebrate. [Desk thumping] Where did you get that 45—you have no moneys. Your Minister of Public Utilities said you have no money and, please, listen to us. [Crosstalk]

So, Madam Speaker, welcome back. So that is the point I want to make. So the Minister of Public Utilities is telling this country we have no money, we had no money, but where are you getting the moneys and where did you get all of these billions over the past four years—

Hon. Member: “He run a sou-sou.”

Ms. R. Ramdial:—to implement these projects, where did you get them? Or how did you generate those revenues? So it is really superficial coming from the
Minister of Public Utilities, extremely superficial to come here this afternoon, waste Parliament’s time to justify a $7 million bulb contract. I am sorry to say it but that is what it was.

Now, in addition to that, millions of dollars every year wasted for Tobago Jazz Festival and other initiatives in Tobago that do not generate revenue for the country. So on one hand, Madam Speaker, you have the Minister of Public Utilities saying we have no money and on the other hand you have the Minister of Finance releasing funds for what they think are positive projects and projects that can generate revenue and help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And for years we have been saying that many of these projects that I just mentioned generate no revenues for Trinidad and Tobago and therefore there is a misplaced priority coming from the Government; misplaced priorities coming from the sitting Government and that is how I can describe it.

Madam Speaker, the reality as the Opposition Leader rightly said, the reality is not what the Government is seeing. The reality in Trinidad and Tobago is so different from what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is seeing. In addition to that, the Minister of Public Utilities spoke about the environment and conservation, climate change, reducing our carbon footprint. But I want to challenge the Minister of Public Utilities. I want to ask him to put his mouth where his money is and bring the Beverage Containers Bill to the Parliament. [Desk thumping] Lay the Beverage Containers Bill in the Parliament, [Crosstalk] because you know why, Madam Speaker, I was part of the former Government—

Madam Speaker: Okay. I am getting a little difficulty hearing the Member for—

Ms. R. Ramdial: Oh, hush, Port of Spain North.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “A-a.”

Madam Speaker: I am trying to protect “yuh”.

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Ms. R. Ramdial: Sorry. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So if Members could really observe Standing Order 53, particularly with respect to excessive crosstalk and being silent. Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you. [Desk thumping] So I will repeat what I just said, Madam Speaker. I want to challenge the Minister of Public Utilities to bring the Beverage Containers Bill to Parliament and lay it; bring good legislation to deal with the pollution issues and plastic pollution in Trinidad and Tobago. I dare him to bring that. Madam Speaker, if he had only brought that to the Parliament and Xed out this light bulb exchange programme they would have gotten a little more support from the population because of it. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I was part of the former Government when we brought that Beverage Containers Bill to the Senate. My line Minister was the Member for Chaguanas West. And we saw the games being played out, because for that Bill you need a special majority vote. And at the end of the day the then Opposition, which is now the Government, sabotaged us. They sabotaged the Beverage Containers Bill in the Senate. And therefore, they were susceptible then to the lobbyists and they are susceptible now to the lobbyists. [Desk thumping] That is why I challenge the Minister of Public Utilities to bring that Beverage Containers Bill and let us see what will happen after that.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, you know, people have been speaking since the Minister of Finance brought this initiative and spoke about this bulb initiative. And they are saying okay, so $7 million to a contractor to share free LED bulbs to people or exchange bulbs to people and all of that. Why do you not ban the incandescent bulbs and take off the duties of the LED bulbs so that households and persons can go and purchase them themselves and implement—do
a campaign like that. Give incentives. The Minister of Finance spoke about 100 per cent duty off solar panels, and solar water heating apparatus. Do the same for the LED bulbs and make it cheaper on the market. Do not have your Public Utilities Minister wasting $7 million for some friend or financier of the party so that they can make a lil—“eat ah lil” food on the side and you want to share bulbs for everybody and everybody—you are the laughing stock of this country.

Madam Speaker, I have never seen a Government so laughed at than this Government. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), in relation to that statement about the Minister and the bulbs and friends and family. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member for Couva South—

Mr. Indarsingh: What?

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, I am sorry, if you could just withdraw the statement with respect to friends and families and the contract.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Sure, will do, Madam.

Madam Speaker: You can find a better way to say that, and the Minister of Finance, I am sure you will get an opportunity to rebut or respond to every contribution that is being made. So I would ask you please, to wait until that proper time comes. Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me continue. Now, the Minister of Public Utilities—I withdraw the statement, Madam Speaker, I withdraw the statement and I move on.

The Minister of Public Utilities also spoke about 4,000 jobs being created because of his energy conservation plans. But again, he accused us of not giving details as to how we were going to create our 50,000 jobs but he did the same. Four thousand jobs you want to create out of these programmes and you are not
giving us the details. Hypocrisy, hypocrisy. [Desk thumping] Again, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities should not have contributed at this time if he knew he was coming to cry and to try to justify that $7 million bulb contract. So let us move on. That is the end of that.

Madam Speaker, so I move on to the budget estimates—first of all, before I go on to the budget estimates, let me speak a little bit about the Minister of Finance and his budget presentation for 2019/2020. Now, in addition to the figures and the state of the economy that the Minister of Finance—and I know that the Opposition Leader this morning dealt with that. But I want to say, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Finance [Crosstalk] proved in his budget that his offering was extremely lacking in terms of—

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, I know the Member for Naparima might be trying to engage you, but you all can do that outside. All right? Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ram dial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation, it lacked innovation, it lacked proper plans and policies, moving our country out of the economic morass that it is in at this time. There is contraction of the economy, businesses are closing down, people are complaining outside there, high food inflation, high prices, people cannot survive as it is right now. And the increase in the minimum wage will not make much of an impact. And the Opposition Leader was quite justified in asking that the minimum wage should have been increased to $20 per hour. [Desk thumping]

But, Madam Speaker, I want to say that our Minister of Finance is a DJ, [Laughter] because it was a song and dance last year, Frank Sinatra, he did it his way, and it was a song and dance this year with Bob Marley and whatever quotations that he spoke about, stand up, get up, fight for your rights and all of
that, whatever it is. But he is a professional DJ because at the end of the day it was a dramatic show of nothing. \[Desk thumping\] A dramatic show of nothing and the people out there were not fooled and they are not going to be fooled. This is a Minister of Finance who in his first year or second year of Government as the Minister of Finance said, “they eh riot yet”. Second year. Second year as Minister of Finance said, “they eh riot yet”. But I want to tell him that for the general elections they will politically riot against you, politically riot. \[Desk thumping\] So he can continue being the DJ, and he can have a song and dance, and dance his way out of Government together with the rest of them.

7.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, let me move on the budget estimates and the offerings. Now tourism is extremely important, and as the Opposition Leader spoke about our plans moving forward with respect to tourism and I really would not go into detail into that, but just to also highlight that the budget estimates for 2020 with respect to the Ministry of Tourism, they have gotten little or nothing in terms of implementing programmes, or policies, or projects that will see, or that result in, an increase of visitors coming to Trinidad and Tobago, and for four years we have had a steady decline of visitors coming to Trinidad and Tobago. It has proven at the end of the day that whatever strategy was implemented by this Government failed, failed miserably, and I understand that we are moving away from the term “diversification” and saying “transformation”.

So they failed to transform the tourism sector into a viable one after four years. The evidence shows. So let me just get into the budget estimates. So for 2020 the budget estimate for the Ministry of Tourism is $63 million, an increase in recurrent expenditure by $30 million. However, when you examine the budget estimates carefully you would see that the increase in $30 million goes to the
specific Votes, for example, Contract Employment, Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and Official Overseas Travel. So the $30 million is within these three Votes—the increase—Contract Employment, Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and Official Overseas Travel.

The Trinidad Tourism Company Limited, which has been mired in controversy over the past six months or so, they got an increase of $2 million and I would want the Ministry of Tourism to explain what this $2 million increase, this paltry $2 million, is going to do in terms of moving our tourism product forward. So here we are, 2019, four years after, and we have been speaking tourism, I mean ad nauseam. Outside, inside of Parliament, everybody has a strategy, everybody has an idea, and we have seen that their strategies have failed.

But, Madam Speaker, when you look at budget estimates, however, for Tobago, with respect to tourism, you are seeing a different story that is shown through the allocations. So the allocations for tourism in—so for culture it is $.5 million for Tobago, recreation and culture $13.5 million, and what has happened is that under the development programme for tourism they have gotten $23.8 million, an increase of $10 million for Tobago tourism. However, I have noticed a new trend in the budget estimates, and I think all my colleagues have, there is something call now reactivated projects. So this would have been projects that would have been stalled or shelved and are being reactivated. So under the tourism thrust for Tobago, there are projects that have been reactivated to the tune of $9.2 million and it is identified. So we will have to see where that goes next year after these moneys have been invested in these reactivated projects.

Now in addition to that, Madam Speaker, here are other budget estimates that have gone to Tobago and the development of Tobago, which I have no problem with, but at the end of the day if you are moving to promote Trinidad and
Tobago as a viable tourism product you need to give the same set of allocations or similar allocations to that of Trinidad and the Ministry of Tourism. So I need an explanation, Madam Speaker, as to what the Minister of Tourism is going to do with his paltry increase of $30 million where we see it is going into contract employment and nothing really to enhance our tourism product, and then when we look at Tobago we are seeing much more allocated. So please, I need some clarification with respect to that for the person who speaks after me.

Now in addition to that, Madam Speaker, we have seen that under the development project for 2020 a total of $232 million for Tobago. Economic infrastructure, $106 million; agri-forestry and fishing, $26.4 million; $1.5 million for the upgrade of fishing; for land management services, $17.7 million; access roads alone, $15 million; research and development, $6.7 million; fuel and energy, $.5 million; other economic services, $43 million and that includes that of drainage and irrigation for $9.5 million, and as I said before, tourism for $23 million, and that is how it goes with respect to allocation.

Transport and Communication: Roads and bridges, $36 million, and you have a number of reactivated projects. Social infrastructure, $96.4 million, with $32.8 million going to education and $7.35 million in reactivated and new projects. Under health, $22.3 million; housing and settlement, $14 million; recreation and culture, $13.5 million; sport, $13 million, and culture $.5—and that is how it is split—social and community services, $13.7 million. So that is, in a nutshell, the allocations for both the Ministry of Tourism here in Trinidad, and that of the THA for Tobago.

Now, Madam Speaker, I have no problems with these allocation, just question that needs to be answered, but at the end of day what are we getting here in Trinidad? What are we getting here in Trinidad? One can deduce or conclude
that it is therefore an election budget when you see what is happening to the allocations [Desk thumping] being given to Tobago and that of Trinidad. Trinidad and the respective Ministries within here are getting little or nothing. There have been reductions. A lot of reductions in different areas, and where you have increases it is for contract employment and otherwise. So you wonder what is going on. I understand that the Government is a little scared these days because Tobago is moving away from the PNM-led THA and moving to other viable alternatives in Tobago. So I wish them well and I tell them go strong.

Madam Speaker, as I continue, let me also say that I was very proud again of our Opposition Leader in terms of the plan [Desk thumping] being put forward to move this nation forward, and we saw the failures in the tourism sector. After four years, we saw the failure in Tobago with respect to their tourism thrust in terms of their marketing strategies failing terribly. Now, you are hearing little bits of information coming out from the THA about marketing on social media, using social media—the preferred marketing tool, something that we have been saying for the four years—you are now hearing about new operators and engaging operators for some of the hotels in Tobago to make it viable again. This is now happening. Why is this now happening? Why is this now happening? And that is why the people of this country cannot trust this Government because they came in 2015 with a barrage of promises. They came in with a barrage of promises and plans to fix Trinidad and Tobago.

They misrepresented a lot of things coming in—misrepresented—and that is why today, four years later, we have seen no real development in Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, the Opposition Leader is right to put her plan forward for the next five years. She made mention of the tourism thrust that we would initiate—and firstly I just want to say that these plans were well thought out, it was

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well researched. It is based on facts, on data gathering, on meetings throughout Trinidad and Tobago with stakeholders—and I want to thank these stakeholders today. I want to thank them for coming forward, coming together, to give and to lend their ideas and innovation to make Trinidad and Tobago a better country.

So for tourism, as the Leader said, for Tobago, for example, the introduction of a duty free port. Madam Speaker, if you look at all the other islands within our Caricom region you would see that they have a very active, vibrant and prosperous duty free port. Barbados, for example, you have the chain of Cave Shepherd, and tourists going there are able to shop at ease and that generates a lot of revenue for the economies of Barbados, Jamaica and other countries, and it is a very, very good plan to put there. When we were in our incarnation, as the former government, that was part of the plan for Tobago. Sadly, we got a lot of opposition for it and we did not get the cooperation we wanted to implement these programmes and these plans.

To establish a proper rescue and rebuild loan programme for Tobago hoteliers: For four years, Madam Speaker, we heard the Tobago hoteliers crying and complaining—like our Minister of Public Utilities a little earlier on—and asking for help for their hotels to improve, to help them. Some of them went into foreclosure, some of them into receivership, and they asked the Prime Minister directly, via the Tobago’s Chamber of Commerce, via the Tobago hoteliers association, for help for their hotels. Was any given? Was any help given? We are not aware, and nobody knows whether help was given or not to help the tourism sector and to help Tobago’s tourism. So—and that is an absence of not having a proper plan to assist these persons.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, we will develop north-east Tobago as an ecotourism destination—and the Opposition Leader spoke about that—and the
wealth in terms of the ecosystem we have there and that part of the island that can be developed; develop a Tobago creative arts street; training for hoteliers, for hotel staff; in-service training for students and to invest in Tobago restaurants making it premium and maintaining local content. The Opposition Leader was also very much informed and well researched to say that these initiatives will create 4,000 jobs for the people of Tobago [Desk thumping] and it will also obtain a revenue of foreign exchange at US $500 million.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are other issues and we all know about it. There are other issues with respect to the sea bridge and the air bridge that need to be fixed to make Tobago a viable tourist destination, and it is no joke. My colleagues, myself included, I do not think there is any one of us in this House who has not been stranded at some point in time at Piarco International Airport trying to get a flight to go across to Tobago, or having to deal with delays into the hours sometimes, and it is something that needs to be fixed. Four years after coming into Government we heard them talk about it, but we have seen no action in terms of fixing the situation and it remains the same. The Minister of Public Utilities said that we were guilty of having Trinidad and Tobago remain the same, but I want to say that it is not we but it is them. They got a chance in 2015 to prove themselves and they have failed miserably.

Madam Speaker, let me also say that with respect to the environment and I spoke about it a little bit earlier when I challenged the Minister of Public Utilities to bring the Beverage Containers Bill, but I also know that there are other initiatives that we need to deal with to clean up Trinidad and Tobago. And again, very quickly, a network of waste collection.

Now, I know that we have the iCare Programme that was initiated by the former Partnership Government. It started under us. [Desk thumping] It was an
initiative of the People’s Partnership Government that the Minister of Planning continued with. It is a very, very good project and it seems to be working, but we need to do more than that. Because when you have collection centres and it ends there, what is the next step? I want to say that the Government should, or the new government coming in, the new UNC government coming into power, will consider and will look to put plans in place to construct a recycling plant in Trinidad and Tobago, and you just have to look at India and the model of India. They have generated billions in revenue out of their recycling industry, and that is the trend that we need to follow as a small island developing state.

I am also very proud of our plan to ban all single-use plastics and Styrofoam products by 2025. The Minister of Finance now started talking about that in this budget, and I must commend the Parliament for its initiative in reducing in the use of single-use plastics. And therefore, Madam Speaker, we also need to promote market incentives for recyclable and reusable materials—we have paper, plastic, metals, rubber and organics. In addition to that, we need to provide incentives to encourage small businesses to enter the recycling industry, and we also need to implement a national recycling education awareness programme.

Our plan also is to establish an industrial recycling park, and with these initiatives, as the Opposition Leader said, 7,000 new jobs would be created. So it is not just about implementing projects and programmes to give away stuff and there is no return. There must be an element of revenue generation if we are to transform and move away from our oil and gas sectors. Now, four years into their tenure and I remember when they now got into power they came to this Parliament and they told us that they were saddled with bills, bills that we did not pay. That was one of their crying points over the past four years, saddled with bills, therefore we have no money for anything else because we have billions owed to contractors

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who are taking us to court.

Madam Speaker, I want to say that the situation is no different today, that this Government has also accrued a bill to their own contractors with no end in sight. So they have not settled previous contractors. I remember when we came in as a new government in 2010, we had a $5 billion bill to settle with contractors from the previous Manning government and we did that. We did not cry about it, we did not complain, we did not justify anything, come here and say you know we do not have money and this and that. We found a way to pay the contractors.

[Desk thumping]

Today, what we have is a Government that is saddled with previous bills from contractors, and bills from their own contractors over the four years of their tenure in different areas, and I want to say—

Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Madam Speaker: Your original time ends at 8.11 p.m., and you will be entitled to 10 more minutes.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: So do you wish at this stage to—

Ms. R. Ramdial: Yes. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So it means you will stop at 8.21 p.m.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, let me move away a little bit, because as Members of Parliament we have a duty of care to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and sometimes people seek us out. They seek us out for assistance, they seek us out for help, and I want to say today that I have never been more disappointed, or in any Minister, than the Minister of Health. I want to categorically make that clear. And in the latest Nigel Henry poll, as I can remember—[Interruption].

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Dr. Moonilal: He was last.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Exactly—the Ministry of Health and the Minister of Health was rated as one of those Ministries and Minister in terms of leadership that declined—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: The worse.

Ms. R. Ramdial: The worse—and then I remember two weeks after the Minister of Health took out a full page ad trying to justify and explain why he was last. But I want to help the country this evening by demonstrating why he was last, and as I have been saying it before the Ministry of Health and the Minister of Health again misplaced priorities. I want to make that clear. There are misplaced priorities within that Ministry. We have a lack of critical supplies, medical supplies, at many of our hospitals.

We have suppliers being owed money to the tune of millions. Millions I tell you. I want to say that the Minister of Health has no shame because some of those suppliers are within his own constituency and they are owed millions of dollars, and then they will be called to provide something and then be given a runaround and not be paid. I want to say that for critical medical supplies that put the lives of our citizens at risk, these suppliers have not been paid and they are on the verge of taking the Ministry of Health to court to get their moneys. They are on the verge of taking the Ministry to court. We have a company being owed $7 million for medical—not a company, companies being owed $7 million and more for medical, food and laboratory supplies. Medical, food and laboratory supplies. I want us to be cognizant of these items that contractors are owed money for.

In addition to that, when I say “misplaced priorities”, there is this programme within the Ministry of Health; it is a wellness programme for children which we commend. It is a good initiative, but why is it you are not utilizing the
public officers within the Ministry to do these jobs for this particular programme—why are you not utilizing the public officers—but you rather hire people on contract and pay additional sums of moneys in the form of salary to these persons? Why are we doing this when you complain that there are no resources? Why are we doing this? So short-term employment, we have a number of persons hired on short-term employment to the tune of millions of dollars over a period of time when you have public officers, health care providers within the Ministry and within the hospitals who can provide the same services, and I need to ask. I need to say to the Minister of Public Utilities, talk to your Minister of Health and see if you could get some money from that Ministry, because apparently it seems as though the moneys are being utilized for the wrong things.

In addition, we have had appeals coming from inside, externally. We have had the programme with the heart surgeries, heart care is it if I am not mistaken, owed moneys to the tune of $26 million and have not been paid to date. Why is this happening?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** It has been paid.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** Why is this—okay, the Minister has corrected me.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** And I have the email here to prove it.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** All right, great. Well that is good. That is good to hear. Probably the Minister knew I was coming here this evening to speak about it. In addition to that, you have a biomedical company owed millions of dollars for equipment, and these providers are coming to the Minister of Health asking for their moneys.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** They have been paid.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** They have been paid. Okay. I will hold you to that. Everybody has been paid. We will hear about it.
Madam Speaker, we have outstanding medical purchase orders for many companies to the tune of $7 million to $10 million and they have not been paid also.

**Hon. Member:** They have been paid.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** They have been paid? Minister, have they been paid? All of them?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Most of them.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** [Laughter] All right. So I made my point, Madam Speaker. I have made my point. So you cannot have a government coming to the Parliament to—[Interruption]

**Madam Speaker:** One minute. Are you giving the Minister an opportunity to speak?

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So Minister, I guess you will respond in—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** No problem.

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Ms. R. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So here we are at this juncture, four years after, and they have found themselves in more or less the same problem, but do you know what is different? We dealt with it better. [Desk thumping] We did it better, and I want to say that no amount of superficial explanations, like the tantrum we saw from the Minister of Public Utilities, is going to work. No sort of tantrum and crying is going to make us forgive you for that.

I want to quickly move on to my constituency, Madam Speaker, a plethora of issues in my constituency, and this evening I have been given the approval from corporate Couva to mention them here this evening. Corporate Couva businessmen from within the central region have been assisting Couva North with
repair works to roads, [Desk thumping] to drains, patching potholes, in particular the Price Club Supermarket, and I want to publicly say thanks to the Price Club Supermarket for doing yeoman service within the constituency of Couva North.

And I want to go very quickly and also say that the Minister of Works and Transport came to the Parliament not too long ago when I asked a question about how many natural watercourses were desilted and cleaned for the upcoming rain season—and let me say that my constituency experienced some terrible floods in the last heavy rainfall we had. He identified the river courses, but what he failed to say was that it was only a certain number of metres that were cleaned and the river mouths were not desilted. So you are cleaning a certain length of the river higher up and you are not desilting the river mouths, so what do you expect to happen? Massive flooding within the constituency of Couva North—massive flooding.

Yesterday, we saw the Minister of Finance stranded at his building [Desk thumping] and we saw a yellow boat coming to rescue him. Flooding is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently; needs to be addressed urgently. So within the constituency of Couva North we have that perennial flooding problem and we have our constituents trying the best. We have corporate Couva and corporate Chaguanaus coming on board, and I said before I want to commend them for doing a job, but I also want to say it is an indictment on the Government and the Minister of Works and Transport. [Desk thumping] They have failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have had a history and a pattern of misleading our mainstream media and then we have the insults to go with it. We have the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West talking about building natural ponds.

So I want to ask what about Port of Spain; what about other areas? Building natural ponds, what does that mean? So do you have an alternative? So you come with your insults, but you do not have an alternative plan. What is your plan? Are
you going to relocate the persons or these persons that build the natural ponds? What are you going to do? What is the plan of the Government to deal with flooding? I will give them some pointers. We need retention ponds dug as of yesterday. We need retention ponds in critical areas so that it can harness and check the surface flow of water \textit{[Desk thumping]} during heavy periods of rainfall. That is what we need. That is one strategy.

The other strategy, there is a study lying on the desk of the Minister of Works and Transport done by Royal Haskoning. That study is extremely comprehensive and easy to understand even for the Minister of Work and Transport. There are a number of solutions and recommendations that were given to deal with the flooding problem, but you know what is lacking from this Government? Political will to get it done. That is what is lacking. I said earlier they were susceptible to lobbyists in Opposition, and they continue to be susceptible to lobbyists in Government. \textit{[Desk thumping]} As a nation, no $7 million bulb project is going to get us anywhere fast in dealing with these serious problems, because at the end of the day the burden falls back on the Government. The poor Minister of Social Development and Family Services, flood grant relief cheques—relief—it is a burden placed on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services at the end of the day that can be alerted, and that financing, and those funds, can be used to remedy and to prevent such instances of extreme flooding.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, in my constituency, you have the plight of the fishermen. I have been liaising with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and the Minister of National Security, with respect to the bill, the fishing bill that they spoke about, and very soon we will send our submissions and we will see how best that is implemented within the bill. But it is a serious situation with
the fishermen, and it was an eye opener not too long ago when we realized also that again misplaced priority played a serious role.

We saw that there was a lack of fuel for the coast guard, a lack of fuel for the air guard, a lack of fuel in terms of relief efforts for these fishermen and we need to fix that. We need to do better. I was examining the budget estimates and during Standing Finance Committee I have some questions to ask with respect to that. We have heard the Commissioner of Police complain publicly about lack of funding. He complained about lack of funding, and therefore, I want to urge that the Government shift and place their priorities in the correct place.

Madam Speaker, let me also say that within the constituency of Couva North, works through local government and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, through the reginal corporations, have been sorely lacking. The Couva/Tabaquete/Talparo Regional Corporation and the Chaguanas borough has been starved for funds, and I speak on behalf of my colleagues when I say that in their areas also their regional corporations have been starved for funds.

8.15 p.m.

So you cannot come here today and say the former Government had the Treasury empty. What did you do to generate revenue for four years [Desk thumping] so that we can see some sort of allocations to these important Ministries where we can make the lives of our citizens better? What have you done? Beside taxes, what else have you done to transform our economy? And that is why you will not be forgiven by the population and they will punish you come 2020 and we will have a new Government across there come 2020.

Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Madam Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me as I contribute to this, my fourth budget debate. At the
very start, allow me to thank God for allowing me to see another year in this place
and allow me to thank my constituents for giving me the opportunity to serve them
in the constituency of San Fernando East.

Mr. Indarsingh: What about the Prime Minister?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, as you listen to Couva South, he wants me to
thank the Prime Minister and I do want to thank the Prime Minister as well for his
leadership and giving me and this country a chance to return to the good footing
that it was accustomed to prior to 2010 to 2015. I too would like to join with
Members on this side and the majority of the national community in commending
the Minister of Finance for delivering a methodical, a practical and a well-reasoned
Budget Statement that touched the majority, if not all the persons in this society.
And more than that, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of San
Fernando East, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for his stewardship
of the Ministry and of the country’s finances over the last four years [Desk thumping]
as the Minister, through his stewardship, played a significant role in turning around
this economy from what we found in 2015. And of course, I would also like to
thank the Minister of Planning and Development for the planning and policy work
that went into these past three budgets, [Desk thumping] including this one.

Madam Speaker, let me immediately go to the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: What?

Hon. R. Mitchell: I am so sorry, the Member for Couva North. The Member for
Couva North, speaking after the Minister of Public Utilities, issued a challenge to
the Government; a challenge to bring the recycling Bill, [Interruption] the
Beverage Containers Bill and accused us of killing the Beverage Containers Bill
when we were in Opposition because we wanted to protect our financiers. The
Member for Couva North is very familiar with the estimates but perhaps she is not

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familiar with the *Hansard*. Madam Speaker, let me take you to the *Hansard*, the Beverage Containers Bill, 2012, and I will refer the Member for Couva North to Sen. Rolph Balgobin, and I quote, Madam Speaker:

“One of the things that I do not want you to tell me, one of the things…I do not want anybody to tell me, is ‘Trust me’. Do not tell me ‘Trust me’ on the regulations. Do not tell that. I have a difficulty with that and I will tell you why.”

Madam Speaker, he went on to say:

“I had been in the Hyatt two years ago, two and a half years ago and so on…”

**Mr. Young:** What date is that?

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** This is Tuesday, November 27, 2012, during the debate in the Senate on the Beverage Containers Bill. The UNC had made up the largest part of the coalition in the People’s Partnership Government and I go on at 4.30:

“I had been in the Hyatt two years ago, two and a half years ago and so on, and what I saw there was a heady and exhilarated celebration by Members of Government. I am happy for them. You have won; you have won a hard-fought campaign and you are entitled to celebrate and so you celebrate. But, I ran into someone I know and I said, ‘Well, what is this thing about?’ And they said, ‘Well, we are here and we are going to be having a good time.’ I said, ‘Okay, well, good, have a good time! You start to spend the people money already.’ They said, ‘No, one of our supporters is here.’ So I said, ‘One of your supporters?’ ‘Yes’, and ‘dey calling for stuff, invite me over to drink and—well I doh drink so ah couldn not go.’ So what I was told then was that this guy was big in recycling and he wants to…”

And there was an interruption. He goes on:
“But I was told that this man, on several occasions—not on one—being there, seeing these things, seeing this sort of festive atmosphere—I am very glad; I like for people to be happy.”

Sen. Balgobin goes on:

“But then ‘I hear, ‘Well, yuh know, de man is coming to build a recycling plant here in Trinidad and Tobago’. I said, ‘Well, good for us, yuh know, foreign direct investment; non-energy FDI; this is excellent!’ Then I heard, well, you know, the rules and the laws and so on do not permit for it so that has to be crafted. Well, I stopped one time. ‘I say eh.’ Two and a half years later, here we are. So I asked myself this question: ‘Who is this fella name Vijay Nahata?’

No, no, I am not—who is this guy? Does he have any role in this? Is he going to set up here? What is he doing here? I want to know. I would like to know because I am not going to vote for something to create an industry for a man. No, I am not doing that! If it is not that, then I will fully support it, but I have been—...Well, too, I have seen the fella; I have seen the whole thing. ‘Yuh know, de guy, he ent ah ghost.’ He is real; he is palpable in form. Not like in Macbeth, you know, you see ‘ah ghost and you say, ‘Is this ah ghost or ah’—it is not like that. The guy is real, involved in the recycling business.

So, I am curious about that because he certainly appeared to think that he had an interest in this thing. It may not be that anybody—certainly not the hon. Minister—would be seeking to advance his interest, but I think he may think ‘he have ah interest’. I do not know.”

Madam Speaker, very shortly after, the Member for Chaguanas West, who had nothing to do with it at all, completely embarrassed, wound up the debate
immediately and that is how the Bill collapsed in the Senate. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker—[Interruption and crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you had your opportunity to make your contribution and Oropouche East, I am certain you are going to take your opportunity so I will ask you to do not be premature and spoil it. Please, thanks. Member for San Fernando East.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So the Member for Couva North, a junior Member at that time, might want to ask her senior Members of the United National Congress what really happened, who is Vijay Nahata and why he came and why the Bill collapsed.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva South also spoke about—[Crosstalk] North, North. You look down so I am confusing myself. The Member for Couva North also spoke about high food prices. Madam Speaker, let me quote from page 71 of the *Review of the Economy*, spoke about high food prices over the last four years. Empty rhetoric. Under the subheading “Inflation” January to December 2018. In 2018, headline inflation which measures the rate of change in the all items retail price index reached its lowest level since 1964, [Desk thumping] slowing to .9 per cent from 1.9 per cent in 2017. The Member for Couva North should be applauding the Minister of Finance and should be applauding this Government for reducing headline inflation. [Desk thumping] But I do not know if the Member for Couva North knows what headline inflation is.

Madam Speaker, the Member was also harping on a $7 million contract for bulbs and I know it is really that the Member is harping on contracts because they on that side, they have a thing with contracts. [Crosstalk] But I would ask the hon. Member to focus on the US $1.4 million per day in natural gas that will be saved [Desk thumping] and to me, Madam Speaker, that is good economics.
The hon. Member for Couva North also spoke again about the Tobago Jazz Festival and that $12 million is a waste of money. Madam Speaker, $12 million between the years 2010 to 2015 was really just “ah box drain” contract but she is harping on $12 million. [Laughter and desk thumping] It proves that the Member for Couva North simply does not understand festival economics or tourism and Madam Speaker, today, I will extend an invitation for the Member for Couva North, the Member can be my guest next year at the Tobago Jazz Festival where I will teach her a thing or two about festival economics and tourism. [Desk thumping and laughter] [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker—[Continuous crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: I think the general atmosphere inside of here is showing me that some of you all may really need to go and visit the water cooler. So that anybody who feels the need to satisfy their thirst, they are invited to go to the water cooler, full up their tumblers and come back and resume the order that is required in here. Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, thank you. The Member spoke about the state of the rooms in Tobago at the Tobago hotels but perhaps the Member is not aware that it was this Government from 2015 that extended the room upgrade programme to the people of Tobago for the very first time.

Madam Speaker, since we are on tourism, the Leader of the Opposition also spoke about very lofty plans for tourism in Tobago. All of a sudden, Members of the UNC suddenly care about tourism in Tobago. They did not care when the Leader of the Opposition as well as the Member for Couva North raised their voices and chastised the hotel chain, Sandals and chase them away from Tobago. They did not care then. They did not care about the stimulus to the economy. They did not care about the job creation that Sandals would have brought to the
people of Tobago, but suddenly they care now.

Suddenly, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia now knows about these niche areas for Tobago: sea and sand, weddings, dive, eco. Madam Speaker, since 2016, we did a roadmap exercise that identified those niche areas. I will encourage the Member for Couva North as well as the Member for Siparia to visit the site, visittobago.gov.tt, a brilliant and beautiful new destination website for the marketing of the island of Tobago. And when you visit that website that has been up for quite some time, it identifies the same things, the same niche areas. The Member for Couva North is not inventing anything. In fact, the Member for Couva North could be accused of plagiarism here today. [Crosstalk] Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, the difficulty is that you have already spoken but I assure you, instead of the running commentary, if you share some of your notes with one of your colleagues who is yet to speak, we would benefit much more. Thank you. Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The elders in San Fernando East, they will always say eh, we will know them by their past behaviour and we will know them by their past actions. So now they want to do this great amount, they want to turn around the tourism industry but they failed to do it between 2010 and 2015. Between 2010 and 2015, there were four Ministers of Tourism, four separate TDC boards, all with different policies, all with different plans, all with different programmes.

Madam Speaker, during that time, they were very profligate in their marketing budgets.

Mr. Hinds: Nice word, nice word.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Profligate, without the measurement of any return on
investment for the marketing budget. They spent tens of millions of dollars on overseas marketing reps, wasteful and in return, arrivals remained flat.

Madam Speaker, one of the main reasons identified for the failure of tourism during the years 2010 to 2015, the TDC and the Minister of Tourism at that time or the Ministers of Tourism at that time could not work with stakeholders and certainly could not work with the THA and as a consequence, tourism suffered in the island of Tobago. But we will know them by their past behaviour and we will know them by their past actions and no amount of repeating the statement “the new UNC, the new UNC”, they are just the old UNC. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia also spoke about agriculture and the Member spent quite some time trying to convince the population that they will transform the agricultural sector. Again, we will know them by their past behaviour and by their past actions. During 2010 to 2015, they did nothing to positively impact the agricultural sector. What they are most known for between those years, 2010 to 2015, was when the Member for Oropouche East bulldozed the agricultural lands in Pineapple Smith in D’Abadie and in Egypt in Chaguanas and in Chaguaramas. Let me just quote for you. May 6th, Stabroek News:

“Evicted farmers converge on Kamla’s car, boo Moonilal during protest”

Quoting the Trinidad Express:

“Farmers, irate over the bulldozed farmlands and crops, as well as the ‘arrogance’ of Housing Minister Dr Roodal Moonilal, created a mob scene outside the Port of Spain offices of the…(HDC) yesterday, calling on the Prime Minister to intervene in their situation.

Though the farmers are scheduled to meet with Moonilal later today, they booed as Moonilal got into the Prime Minister’s waiting vehicle.”

And, Madam Speaker, that is what they are most known for in the agricultural
sector during 2010 and 2015 but they expect the population to now believe that they will do something to turn around the agricultural sector. Never happen. And of course, the second most prominent thing that they are known for is that the Minister of Agriculture caused his Ministry to buy a Porsche Cayenne for his personal use. [Crosstalk] That is what they are best known for. “And run over ah man foot.” [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, but enough about them, I want to get into some of the budget initiatives. And, Madam Speaker, as Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, I want to say that one of the most impactful initiatives proposed by the Minister of Finance in his 2020 budget is the proposal to create national day care centres to offer day care services to qualifying parents. This initiative proposes an opportunity to change a culture and to change the circumstances, to change the disadvantage that a number of single parents, fathers as well, but a number of single parents, particularly mothers, experience in this country.

From as far back as 2016, Madam Speaker, a constituent visited my constituency office to speak about some community issues and one of the issues that he mentioned, one that was very dear to his heart, was—he existed in the hospitality sector, he ran a restaurant and bar. One of the problems he identified was he had an extremely high turnover of staff, especially in the evening shift and he was not concerned so much about the turnover of staff for his business, he was concerned the reason why there was a high turnover of staff particularly among his female employees because they all shared similar personal circumstances.

The reason, Madam Speaker, was because the single mothers, young single mothers, simply did not have that support system. They did not have someone who they could have responsibly left their young children to for care or in terms of accessing babysitting services, those services were simply too cost prohibitive.
And what eventually happened, the single mother employee would have left the business in order to stay home with the child and not having a source of income, they would approach the Ministry of Social Development to enter into the State’s social safety net.

Madam Speaker, there is another issue here that there is the absence of fathers in these situations and there is the issue of the ineffective court system in applications for maintenance, but that is separate. We can deal with that separately. This initiative, Madam Speaker, has the potential to break a very, very vicious cycle in society because that same young single parent enters into the State’s social safety net until the child gets to an age, often a young age, where they could be left alone at home and where that child left alone at home is a female, her daughter, that child, it is highly probable that that child would also give birth to a child at a very young age. So this has the opportunity to break that vicious cycle. [Desk thumping] It presents an equalizing opportunity to positively effect single mothers of limited education and job marketability. Single mothers with no support system can now participate in the world of work to earn an income or they can use the time to further their education and to further their training.

And this is not new. In Jamaica, in an attempt to boost early childhood education, the Government established 126 day care centres across the island. Two of the facilities will be established in each constituency to assist working parents who have difficulty in securing accommodation for their children age three years and under. So, Madam Speaker, I am especially proud of that initiative. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the other initiative: the elimination of paper forms for Immigration and Customs. And the Minister announced the removal of Immigration and Customs forms to create a paperless environment so as to keep
with international best practice and to benefit from the efficiencies and cost benefits that arise with technology. This initiative will improve the efficiencies for both the Immigration Division and the Customs Division and the lines at the Immigration, Madam Speaker, we can look forward to being much less lengthy and we can now look forward to a greater ease of entry and significant wins for our airport operations.

But, Madam Speaker, it also impacts the tourism industry because for far too long, in the tourism industry, we have been hamstrung by the untimely receipt of data from the CSO; the data that is collected through these immigration forms. The Immigration Division, what has to happen is that they must manually receive and process each form from each passenger entering into the country and the information contained on the paper forms, I mean, of course, is subject to challenges with the storage of the paper as well as human error. It also presents an opportunity where we can modify the type of data that is captured.

Madam Speaker, at present, the data does not allow us to capture the province or city where he comes from and that poses a challenge for decision-makers and policy planners in the tourism industry. The data does not also easily allow us to identify the final destination for visitors. So, Member for Couva North will get up and will say that arrivals are low in Tobago. But what the Member is really talking about is direct flights coming into Tobago, not taking into consideration that persons come into Trinidad first because there is greater airlift in Trinidad and then go on to Tobago. [Crosstalk and laughter]

Madam Speaker, the data also does not distinguish easily citizens who are residents aboard or dual citizens travelling on a Trinidad and Tobago passport, so it will recognize you as a returning citizen when, in fact, you are really a visitor, and Madam Speaker, other jurisdictions in the Caribbean, they already do that. They

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have quite an array of data sets that they capture on these forms. Well, many of
them have gone to kiosk. And they are better able to make faster and better
decisions as it relates to the tourism industry. They are able to measure festivals
for example.

Madam Speaker, the software will also allow us instead of having young
OJTs or young interns processing the data, the software will do that for us in very
quick time. So this, Madam Speaker, is a very welcomed improvement, not just
for those in charge of border control but for those in charge of the tourism sector
and I commend the Minister of Finance for this initiative.

Madam Speaker, I am also very happy for the increase in the minimum
wage, the increase for CEPEP employees, for URP workers, but especially the
CEPEP employees and the CEPEP contractors who go above and beyond in
communities across Trinidad and Tobago [Desk thumping] to ensure that those
communities are kept clean and are kept well-maintained. I am especially proud of
those CEPEP contractors and employees in San Fernando East as they continue to
San Fernando East well-maintained, a clean environment and they continue to
make all of us proud with the love and passion that they show for their own
community.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned something else as
it comes to mind with CEPEP. She questioned with the new increase in salaries
and the allocation to CEPEP, whether we would be able to discharge the
responsibilities having regard to the appropriation. But I would remind the Leader
of the Opposition that between the years 2010 to 2015, the Member for Oropouche
East invented something called CEPEP coastal and for CEPEP coastal, there were
five contractors and those contractors took home, five altogether, $1 million per
month—
Hon. Member: What?

Hon. R. Mitchell: One million dollars per month, duplicating, of course, the efforts of the regional corporations in these areas. But we have removed that from this incarnation of CEPEP.

8.45 p.m.

And Madam Speaker, of course, we also removed the complement of truckers. They are now doing their waste removal in-house and in partnership with the regional corporations. So, in explanation to the Member for Siparia, that is a reason why the allocation may look a lot less. But it is not a lot less. It is not cutting people out. It is just being more efficient with the money that we have, which is the hallmark of this Government.

Madam Speaker, let me now move to tourism. And like the other industries, and like the economy as a whole, the tourism industry had to be turned around. We had to end the inefficiencies that obtained from the TDC and elsewhere, and we had to put new institutional arrangements in place. We had to restructure the institutional arrangements that governed the tourism industry. And you are aware, Madam Speaker, that we dissolved the TDC and in its place we created two separate marketing companies; one in Tobago under the THA to market and manage the destination that is Tobago and that is distinct and separate from the destination features that is Trinidad; and in Trinidad we had Tourism Trinidad Limited that falls under the Ministry of Tourism. Both companies continue to get up to speed and continue to strive to turn around the tourism industry with respect to visitor arrivals, visitor spend, and tourism’s overall contribution to GDP.

So, Madam Speaker, the tourism sector, in terms of how it performed from January to June 2019, internationally, tourism arrivals experienced growth at an average rate of 4 per cent. Regionally, tourism arrivals are estimated to grow
between 4 and 6 per cent. Domestic, in 2019, between the months January to August, Trinidad and Tobago recorded 267,656 stopover arrivals as at August 2019, which represents, Madam Speaker, a 2.5 increase in arrivals when compared to tourism stopover arrivals as at the same date in August 2018.

If we disaggregate, Trinidad recorded 252,088 tourism stopover arrivals. That represents a 1.8 per cent increase. And Tobago recorded, and these are persons, of course, entering Tobago by direct flights, international direct flights, Tobago recorded 15,568 stopover arrivals as at August 2019, which represents an increase of 15.2 per cent, with an additional 2,057 tourists coming to the destination when compared in August 2018, to 13,511.

And, Madam Speaker, this increase in Tobago is directly as a result of the increased marketing initiatives done by the THA and the Tobago tourism industry, and as well as the new Sunwing flights that operate during the winter months. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, we are at an upward trend, contrary to what the Member for Couva North says, doom and gloom.

Madam Speaker, in terms of cruise, the 2017/2018 cruise season, Trinidad and Tobago and in particular Tobago, had a bumper cruise season, a bumper cruise season, and that is directly as a result of the hurricane season earlier in 2017 that devastated a number of the other ports. So, we experienced an increase in cruise calls, because the other ports were unavailable.

But, Madam Speaker, in 2018/2019, as those ports previously devastated returned to normal, the arrival figures have returned to where they were previously. Trinidad and Tobago recorded 94,804 cruise passenger arrivals. Trinidad reports an increase of 11 per cent over the previous season on account, of course, of the new MSC Preziosa calling at our shores.

Madam Speaker, we continue at the Ministry of Tourism, along with the
ports and along with stakeholders, we continue to meet the challenge that we face here because of our geographical location. Trinidad and Tobago is the most south in the Caribbean and is the furthest away of the Caribbean islands from the home ports in San Juan/Puerto Rico and Miami. The cruise operators/the cruise liners simply tell you that it is uneconomical, it is too far. But, we continue to entice them. We continue to distinguish ourselves as a different port offering a different set of experiences.

And, Madam Speaker, I would pay a special commendation to Mr. Charles Carvalho who is a stakeholder and who continues to go above and beyond [Desk thumping] to market Trinidad and Tobago, even when it seems the port or even the Ministry is slow to do so, especially over the last two years. So I pay commendation to Mr. Charles Carvalho.

Madam Speaker, we heard a lot about the breakdown of the sea bridge and of the air bridge. Madam Speaker, I can report, the sea bridge is back to normal and has normalized. With the introduction of the new leased fast ferry, for the period January to August, passengers travelling on the sea bridge were up 65 per cent at 360,724 passengers travelling between Trinidad and Tobago. Five hundred and fifty-five round trips were undertaken between the islands. And Madam Speaker, the total seat capacity was 528,162 seats, and at present there is excess capacity on the sea bridge of 32 per cent, Madam Speaker. So, operations at the sea bridge have normalized and will become even more robust next year when we receive delivery of the brand spanking new fast ferry [Desk thumping] that has been ordered to operate on the sea bridge.

Madam Speaker, on the air bridge, for the period January to August, 695,000 passengers travelled on the air bridge. There was a total seat capacity of 728,086 seats. Madam Speaker, there were 11,000 flights between the islands, and at
present there is excess seat capacity of 11 per cent on the air bridge.

But, Madam Speaker, the main point, two main points, one, that the sea bridge and the air bridge operations have normalized and going forward can only become more robust. And the second point is, with the excess capacity, I will urge the tourism stakeholders/operators/hoteliers in Tobago to do all that they can to continue to market their domestic tourism product to the Trinidadian market to get them over. The THA and the Tobago Tourism Agency, they have been doing what they can and they have done several sales calls, sales missions to Trinidad, to get Trinidad back over to Tobago and I would urge the hoteliers not just to leave it up to the THA, not just to leave it up to the Tobago Tourism Agency, but to also put forward their own marketing efforts to meet this excess capacity on the sea and air bridge.

Carnival, Madam Speaker. As you are aware, carnival is our number one product here in Trinidad. It is our world-renowned festival and it continues to be standout, notwithstanding being so far south from our main source markets. Madam Speaker, in 2019, we recorded 35,560 visitors to Trinidad and Tobago for the carnival season, and the carnival season is measured by the 19 days prior to Carnival Monday. And this figure, Madam Speaker, represents a 5 per cent increase over the corresponding year. And I will take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to commend and congratulate the Chairman of the NCC, not just for recognizing that the People's National Movement is the better party, but also for all the work that he has done in ensuring that Carnival 2019 was one of the best carnivals ever. Madam Speaker, I enjoyed myself. [Desk thumping] I really enjoyed myself. Madam Speaker, if you saw me for J'ouvert, you would not believe.

Mr. Young: And it was a safe carnival too.
Hon. R. Mitchell: And it was a safe carnival. I have to commend the Member for Port of Spain North, safe carnival. [Desk thumping] But, of course, Madam Speaker, I cannot forget the Member for St. Ann's East and I commend her, and I commend [Desk thumping] her for stepping up and managing over the NCC and all of the carnival bodies, the stakeholders, who can become very difficult at times; very difficult at times. I commend her for managing them and for ensuring that we had one of the best carnivals ever, extremely enjoyable. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, for 2020, Tourism Trinidad Limited will continue to work with the NCC and with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to ensure that we improve ourselves for Carnival 2020.

Madam Speaker, I turn to the source markets. Between January to July 2019, arrivals from our traditional core source markets increased over the corresponding period of 2018. From the United States, we had an increase of 6 per cent visitors. From Canada, we had an increase of 5 per cent. From South America, we had an increase of 9.2 per cent, and from Germany, we had an increase of 8.3 per cent. Madam Speaker, you can see where the trends are going.

In our non-core markets we have also had some increases: South Korea, 42 per cent; Mexico 47.8 per cent from 2018; Portugal, 37.9 per cent; Switzerland, 22.7 per cent; and Poland, 22.6 per cent. And Madam Speaker, up to 80 per cent of the visitors from our non-core markets identified that the reason that they are coming here was for business and work related, which means that we are right on track in identifying in Trinidad, that our business tourism, or what is called in the industry as MICE tourism, meetings, conferences, exhibitions, we are right on track. [Desk thumping]

Visitor spend, Madam Speaker; for the period January to June 2019, visitor spend increased by 12.6 per cent when compared to the same period in 2018. The
average visitor expenditure was estimated at $9,180.65. This is Trinidad and Tobago dollars for an average stay of 14 days. And this is according to the CSO's bi-monthly survey of departing visitors, up 12.6 per cent.

Visitor spend for Carnival; in 2019, visitors surveyed over the 10 days following Carnival Tuesday, revealed that the average spend over the Carnival period was approximately $12,000 per person, and the total visitor spend during the carnival period is estimated, Madam Speaker, at close to TT $400 million.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Who gave you that data?

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** The CSO. They always do it. Madam Speaker, hotel room accommodation taxes; Government imposes a 10 per cent tax on hotel accommodation to be collected from guests at hotels that number six or more rooms. The tax is paid directly by the hotel guest to the hotel on the cost of the room and the hotel collects this tax and remits it to the revenue division. Of course, revenues collected from this tax go into the Consolidated Fund where it is used to service Trinidad and Tobago, that is, to repair roads, construct infrastructure, and to make affordable the delivery of water and power to individual and corporate citizens across the country, including hotels. In 2019, Madam Speaker, hotels reported revenue on room sales of approximately $546 million from the rental of rooms alone, and approximately $54,000,500 remitted—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for San Fernando East, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up your contribution. You going to avail yourself if it?

[Assent indicated]

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, you may proceed.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Yes, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, in 2019, the hotels reported revenue of approximately $545 million from the rental of rooms alone,

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approximately $54,500,000 was remitted to the Government in taxes and this $544 million in hotel room sales is up from $515 million in 2018, Madam Speaker, again to identify the upward trend in the tourism sector.

Madam Speaker, with respect to Tobago's improvements, there has been significant progress over the past two years by the Division of Tourism led by the Tourism Secretary, Councillor Nadine Phillips, and the Tobago Tourism Agency.

In 2018, Madam Speaker, the new Tobago Agency successfully rebranded Tobago with an attractive destination logo and tag line: Tobago Beyond - Unspoilt, Untouched, Undiscovered. And notwithstanding those on the other side and their attempts to scandalize Tobago's rebranding as plagiarism, the destination marketing campaign undertaken, Madam Speaker, by the Tobago Tourism Agency, has been shortlisted in the International Travel and Tourism Awards 2019 for the “Best National Tourism Board Campaign” and the “Best Destination Campaign” categories, Madam Speaker, notwithstanding their attempts to scandalize Tobago's efforts at marketing the destination. Madam Speaker, they have been very aggressive in marketing to its core markets internationally and in rolling out its new destination branding.

Madam Speaker, I spoke already about the unfortunate news, the unfortunate withdrawal of Sandals from the Tobago economy. Madam Speaker, Tobago missed out on having a five star hotel and a very powerful marketing powerhouse on the island of Tobago. They missed out on the increased airlift, the increased number of arrivals. I mean, they always talk about arrivals are down, arrivals are down.

Madam Speaker, those on other side and their operatives continue to attack the Sandals chain, and in protection of their brand identity, they decided to withdraw from Tobago. And I gave the example, Madam Speaker, in speaking on
the Sandals withdrawal, of the financial benefits and what the financial benefits could have meant for Tobago, and I used the example of a taxi driver. Madam Speaker, with increased airlift, imagine that a taxi driver doing 10 trips per day at $100 per trip, could make a thousand dollars per day. And if they work 28 days for the month, that taxi driver, Madam Speaker, can go home with $28,000 worth of revenue. That is what Sandals could have meant for Tobago, 28,000. Madam Speaker, that taxi driver cannot even qualify for an HDC house. He would be over the limit. But, Madam Speaker, they work and they “mash it up” and Sandals departed.

But Madam Speaker, that did not stop us. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, over the past year, had been evaluating its tendering process for an operator for the Magdalena. A consultant was hired and the selected preferred bidder was Apple Leisure Group. I hope “dey doh go and chase away Apple now, yuh know”. Do not go and chase away Apple now, you know. Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, the selection of Apple Leisure was very carefully done. Because, the Apple Leisure Group is a virtually integrated group, that is to say, Madam Speaker, it owns or operates a number of companies in the tourism value chain. To break it down further, Madam Speaker, the Apple Leisure Group owns from the travel agencies to the tour package operators and the tour packaging companies. They own airlift or have access to airlift, and they also own the hotels. So, once Apple Leisure puts one of their brands on the Magdalena, as it will be newly rebranded, they will control where the passengers come from, the airlift, they arrive here and they will control the packaging. And that is extremely important because airlift is important to the occupancy rates in the hotel rooms in Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, we wish Apple Leisure Group the very best and we look forward to them [Desk thumping] to improve the state of tourism on the island.
of Tobago, because we care about Tobago. We "doh" come here and pretend to care about Tobago, about you would make Tobago East an eco—I mean, Tobago already has an eco niche.

**Ms. Ramdial:** We care about that—

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** We care about Tobago, you "doh" care. You never went Jazz Festival.  [Desk thumping]

**Ms. Cudjoe:** Never went Tobago Heritage Festival.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North never went on the glass bottom boat, “yuh know”.  [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, Turtle Beach Hotel, some more news for Tobago, Madam Speaker, more good news for Tobago. Sunwing is in the process of taking over the management of the Turtle Beach Rex Resort and at present we are entertaining an application, Madam Speaker, for concessions for the total refurbishment of that hotel. The Sunwing Group is also vertically integrated. They also own the travel agencies. They own the tour operators. They own the airlift, and we have already seen the positive impact of Sunwing in the island of Tobago, in terms of the increased airlift during the winter months. We also wish Sunwing the very best and we also look forward to Sunwing positively impacting the tourism sector on Tobago.

Madam Speaker, with the little time I have left, let me just say that I am extremely grateful to be the representative for San Fernando East. It is with love and passion that I serve my neighbours, my friends, and my fellow constituents in the constituency of San Fernando East. Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for that opportunity to serve. I am grateful to the Prime Minister, for giving me the opportunity to serve in his Cabinet.  [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, and before I take my seat, I will say that the people of San
Fernando East, the people of San Fernando, we are very happy that Patriotic was selected as the preferred operator for the refinery. [Desk thumping] And, Madam Speaker, we applaud Mr. Ancel Roget. We applaud the OWTU. We wish him the very best. We are rooting for him, because we believe that the refinery, operating as it should, would return some economic life to the people of San Fernando, so that we will take our place as the beautiful and brilliant second city that we are, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for the opportunity to say that. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Lackram Bodoe (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join in this debate on the 2019/2020 Appropriation Bill. As I begin, I want to commend the contribution by the Leader of the Opposition. [Desk thumping] A brilliant response to the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance, and it really is a document, when you look at this document, the “National Economic Transformation Master Plan 2020 to 2025”, delivered masterfully and brings hope to Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to congratulate my other colleagues on this side who have spoken in the debate; again excellent contributions by the Members for St. Augustine, Naparima and Couva North.

Madam Speaker, before I get into the meat of my contribution, I just want to address a few points by the Member for San Fernando East. Madam Speaker, the contribution by the Member for San Fernando East seemed to have lacked any enthusiasm. The Member did not seem to believe [Desk thumping] in what he was saying. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. L. Bodoe: And, Madam, when I heard his plan I felt more convinced that we have to commend the tourism plans that the Leader of the Opposition presented.
[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to comment and I—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e), as in egg.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you so much for the assistance, Member for Oropouche East. But to all of us, you know, I know it is late but we are accustomed to this. We know we have a way to go, so if Members will just compose themselves so we can hear the Member for Fyzabad and support him in his contribution. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am sure, my friend, the Member for San Fernando East, takes it in the spirit in which I said that, in the spirit of the House.

But, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to make a few comments on what the Member said and I take the issue of the day care units. I think it is very important, but I just want to ensure that when these units are implemented, that we are very careful that we regulate and we supervise and we put proper support systems in place, because we see what can happen sometimes with some of these day care units, and especially as we are looking to include children; we are looking after children.

I take note of the fact that we are speaking to single mothers, but I also want to mention to the Government that there are also single fathers and, perhaps, they could be included in this measure. It is just something that they may want to consider.

The issue of data capture in the tourism industry and the fact that we are still behind in Trinidad and Tobago, as compared to the other Caribbean nations, raises some concerns which, hopefully, the Government is going to address. But it speaks to the issue of where we are, in terms of information communication.
technology and our data capture systems.

I was a little bit concerned when the Member admitted that the increase in the cruise calls to Tobago and to Trinidad and Tobago was due to natural disasters in other destinations. I take your point, Minister, but I think it tells us that really and truly we have to increase our marketing thrust with regard to how we market tourism and attract, on our own, without the need for that kind of intervention. [Desk thumping] So we have not scandalized the marketing of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, and I just want to mention, Madam Speaker, that that is not the case.

So, Madam Speaker, for your guidance and for those members of the public who are following this debate, my contribution today will be anchored upon the role of public administration in the delivery of goods and services to citizens via the funds approved when this Appropriation Bill is passed.

9.15 p.m.

And, Madam Speaker, I intend to use examples from various sectors in my contribution to illustrate the challenges that our country faces in implementing and executing projects and to demonstrate this Government’s failure to deal with some of the issues. The Ministry of Public Administration has a pivotal role in ensuring that governments deliver on their promises, whether it is building schools, community centres or pavilions, delivering timely and quality health care, improving public buildings or providing social support to needy citizens.

As a reminder, Madam Speaker, when we speak of the public sector we include civil servants, teachers and members of the protective service. I will focus mainly on the civil service, since it is an important cadre of workers and they play a very pivotal role in implementing government’s policies and plans via the various Government Ministries and agencies.

Madam Speaker, a common complaint from the public is that the customer
service is poor at government offices, with long waiting times and less than courteous treatment. And Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West, in his presentation earlier, towards the end of his presentation, did make an important point, and I took note, when he was asking the people of Trinidad and Tobago to get going on the business of productivity. And I think it is something that we need to address in the public service and in terms of how we implement policies and plans.

So, Madam Speaker, citizens complain that they still cannot submit their passport or driver’s licence applications online, and they would like to be able to pay a lot more of their bills online. Admittedly, while there have been some improvement over the years, many are frustrated by the snail’s pace at which improvements are taking place. So, Madam Speaker, one can ask. Is it a question of not enough bodies to do the work regarding the vacancies in the public sector? Or is it a question of the inefficient use of resources? Or is it a question of ineffective processes, Madam Speaker? So I take it from these three angles. I believe that these questions need to be confronted and answered in a more definitive way as we seek to approve over $50 billion in expenditure, for the upcoming financial year.

As I prepared for this, my fifth budget contribution in this honourable House, I reflected upon the challenges faced on a daily basis by my fellow citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. I have no doubt in my mind that a large number of citizens are worse off today than they were just four years ago—[Desk thumping]—when the People’s Partnership demitted office. Some would want you to believe that this is because of different economic circumstances and whilst this may be a factor, it is also a fact that the country has gotten less, for the over $200 billion spent to date by this administration.
Madam Speaker, citizens come to my constituency office on a daily basis seeking help because they cannot feed their families. They cannot get basic drugs in the health centres and hospitals. They are asked when they seek medical care at the public health institutions to do blood tests, ultrasounds, scans, CT scans, and MRIs privately and they have no money to do so. They are waiting forever for life saving treatments such as coronary artery stenting, cardiac surgery—I will come back and speak about that. They feel threatened by increasing crime in their communities, their highly qualified children are unemployed or under-employed, they or their children have lost their jobs.

Madam Speaker, the constituents of Fyzabad are amongst the hundreds of thousands of citizens in this country who are facing despair, disappointment and disillusionment on a daily basis under this PNM administration.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Dr. L. Bodoe: Madam Speaker, the question on my mind, and on those of the thousands of citizens of which I speak is this. Why are we in such a bad place despite the fact that within the last four years, we in this Parliament have approved over $200 billion for use by this Government? Has this money really improved the lives of the ordinary man and woman on the street? And has the country gotten value for money?

Madam Speaker, in case they may have forgotten, I want to remind this Government that the money allocated in this Parliament is supposed to improve the lives of citizens, not make their lives worse. So the question really, is there any explanation for why we are where we are today? For the past four years this Government has been coming to this Parliament with many grand plans seeking funding and getting the necessary approval. But, yet they have been unable to translate their plans into outcomes that bring tangible benefits to citizens of
Trinidad and Tobago. One can say that it appears that this administration seems hamstrung in their ability to execute, to implement, to deliver, to convert the budgetary allocation in the goods and services for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, let me give you an example from the health sector, I will start with that as an example first. Just Wednesday of this week, a colleague of mine who is working in the San Fernando General Hospital vented his frustration to me in a conversation, stating that 40 patients were waiting for more than three months for a simple procedure called a colposcopy. The Member for St. Joseph will know what I am speaking about. This is a simple procedure, Madam Speaker, when a woman does a pap smear and gets a suspicious result, it is a test that is required to confirm whether she needs to worry or not to worry. While she is waiting, of course, it creates a tremendous amount of anxiety. And the reason why the colposcopy for these 40 patients could not be done and the waiting list had backed up for three months was because the item that was missing, not the machine, not the doctor. But it was a simple item called a ball cautery electrode, it is a very simple item. It is not difficult to locate, it is not expensive, in fact, Madam Speaker, it might cost less than $10. And those responsible for procuring this simple item for the doctors to use have been unable to do for three months.

Madam Speaker, whilst this is happening at the South-West Regional Health Authority, the NCRHA is busy wasting money on colour advertisements in the newspaper boasting about their Pap smear drive. So, in San Fernando you have patients with an abnormal Pap smear awaiting a procedure and yet you have another regional health authority that is wasting money on coloured advertisements telling the population that they are doing what they are supposed to do anyhow. So what an irony.

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Now, Madam Speaker, I do not expect the Minister of Health to go and buy this item himself, and therefore, I cannot blame him for this. What I expect him to do, however, is to appoint a competent board of directors who can oversee and ensure the effective management of the regional health authorities. Madam Speaker, health care delivery needs close oversight by boards and management and active collaboration with doctors and nurses and other health care workers to ensure timely, effective and safe outcomes for patients.

Madam Speaker, I am told that on Monday, the SWRHA will have at its helm, at its head, the fourth CEO in four years. So, Madam Speaker, how did the SWRHA arrive at this point? Four CEOs in four years. First, they fire the incumbent for some frivolous reason. Secondly, they hire a senior manager to take a job that that person never wanted, very competent employee, employee was there when I was Chairman of the SWRHA, very dedicated, competent, knows the business of the Authority well but was never interested in the position. So surprise, surprise, that person did not stay long on the job.

Madam Speaker, the third appointment is even more hilarious. A person with no particular expertise in running a major health care organization resigns as a director of the SWRHA board one day and the next day he takes up the job as CEO. Amazing, how amazing, Madam Speaker. And now they have just completed another interview process that is expected to throw up the fourth CEO for the organization; he is a medical colleague of mine, I wish him well—

Dr. Moonilal: Albert.

Dr. L. Bodoе:—but. No. But, Madam Speaker, I do not know if at this late hour how much he will be able to do for the South-West RHA. As I speak and before I leave the SWRHA, Minister, I just wanted to ask whether you are aware that a newly employed manager in the SWRHA Human Resource Department has been

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asked to resign following an audit which revealed that the person submitted false qualifications. Amazing. So I ask whether the Minister is aware of that and whether he might be able to shed some light on that. And that another manager occupying a senior position may face the same fate when the audit on that employee’s qualification is completed.

So, Madam Speaker, it comes as no surprise that the services provided by the SWRHA have deteriorated in such a short time. This SWRHA board, Member for St. Joseph, is so busy hiring and firing CEOs that they have no time to focus on policy making and overseeing management. [Desk thumping] They are spending all their time in the interview room and none in the emergency room, Madam Speaker, where they can observe and learn so as to provide better leadership for their organization.

This is a board, Madam Speaker, and the Minister is aware of this. This is a board that for the last four years has been trying to repair the roof over the labour ward in San Fernando. A contract which was awarded way back in 2015. So no wonder the organization is in turmoil unable to carry out its mandate, taking health care back to the days of long waiting times in casualty, shortage of drugs and supplies and bed shortages.

I will return to the disaster that is currently the Accident and Emergency Department at San Fernando General Hospital, but before I leave SWRHA I just want to ask the Minister to tell the public whether chemotherapy services at the Oncology Unit in San Fernando are soon to be suspended? Because this is information that has been hinted in a recent memo from the head of surgery to the medical director and concerns have been expressed about that. And I raise that matter, Madam Speaker, simply because to say that the Oncology Unit at San Fernando was created and developed in 2012 by the former Minister of Health, my
colleague, the Member for San Juan/Barataria, and this is really to avoid having patients from south and the southern regions having to travel to St. James for chemotherapy. So Minister, I urge you to intervene in this matter to ensure that these oncology patients in the south are not put at any disadvantage as compared to patients in other regions of the country. Madam Speaker, I use this scenario in the health sector to make the point that the wrong people at the helm can impact negatively on any good service that you are mandated to deliver.

Madam Speaker, in preparation for this debate I reviewed the budget contributions of three previous Ministers of Public Administration under this regime. The Member for San Fernando East was counting the number of Ministers of Tourism under our watch, I just want to point out to the Member that they have had—[Interruption]—they have actually had five. It is difficult to know who is the Minister at any point in time. But they have had five. So they are competing with the SWRHA, Madam Speaker, in terms of rotation of appointments. But be that as it may, I just want to say, I want to quote here what the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo has to say in his 2016 Budget contribution, then Minister of Public Administration. And let me quote, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

I wish to make reference to a billboard that was erected in my constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo sometime in 2013 on De Freitas Boulevard in Phase 5, La Horquetta. This billboard has been advertising the construction of a pavilion and a recreations ground and is still standing today. You can see on this billboard that the project was started in May 2013 by the Rural Development Company under the Ministry of Local Government. Madam Speaker—I am still quoting here—in 2013 the economic situation was far more favourable than it is now money was not then a problem the project was scheduled to be completed in four phases by September 2013 as stated
I am still quoting; the Minister is saying:

By the time I assumed the Public Administration and Communications portfolio some three years later in 2016 this project was still on going. Madam Speaker, we are now in October 2016, I am happy to report that the project should be completed in just over three weeks after the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government was able to marshal resources for its completion.

At the time the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, then Public Administration Minister went on to say and I quote again:

This project epitomizes everything that is wrong with public administration in Trinidad and Tobago. We struggle to get simple things done.

The Minister also went on to say:

“We cannot turn this country around unless we remove the inefficiencies that are some much a part of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago.”

So, Madam Speaker, after those pronouncements. I would have expected this administration to operate in a different manner based on the Minister’s pronouncements.

So, Madam Speaker, I ask how do we explain the following, because we are saying here we have an example of a Minister who met a project, took three years to complete, agreed that it was wrong and is saying that, you know, things should be done differently. So, Madam Speaker, how do we explain that the Siparia Union Presbyterian School which was 52 per cent completed in September 2015 is still unfinished today? Why is the Siparia East Secondary School which was 48 per cent completed, still incomplete today, four years later?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Ramai Trace.
Dr. L. Bodoe: Ramai Trace, the Member for Oropouche East is reminding me. Why is the Early Childhood Care and Education Centre at Debe Avenue in Avocat not providing much needed preschool education for our children despite being, you know, I cannot believe this. Despite being 100 per cent complete while external work is 98 per cent complete in 2015. So 100 per cent complete and this preschool remains covered by bush, covered by bush.

You know what is even more amazing, Madam Speaker, in the budget the Minister of Finance comes out and boasts and I quote him:

“We have elevated early childhood care…”—education.

No wonder, Madam Speaker, that some of my constituents who live in the area and are eagerly awaiting the opening of this facility are now confused. The words of this Government do not match their actions, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

These constituents have told me that they think this preschool is not being open because of spite. I will not say that, Madam Speaker, I will not accuse this Government of governance by spite. In fact, Madam Speaker, I will not accuse this Government of governance at all. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, what is obvious and consistent about their attempts to governance is the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of their delivery mechanisms.

How does it make sense and how it can de value for the taxpayers’ dollar to leave buildings that were 90 per cent complete when you met them in 2015 and still not finish them. How does that make sense, how can that be value for money? I am certain that the Minister of Education will proffer some creative explanation to the suffering students and parents who may listen out of courtesy, but I assure him that they will not buy those empty promises. I can certainly understand, though, Madam Speaker, why they believe that they are being discriminated against because there is no other reasonable explanation for this action. It just does
not make sense.

Madam Speaker, let me give another example of how process has fallen flat on its face in the education sector and I speak of the students of the Fyzabad Anglican Secondary School. I know the Member for Moruga/Tableland is intimately involved in this project and I am saying this because I am saying that governments are unable, you know, to execute to deal with it to come up with solutions. This school has been affected by the demolition of a building, but the fact of the matter is that there are two vacant buildings that can be utilized for the students. Those buildings have not been used and as a result of that, the Form 1 and Form 2 students are only able to attend school for two days a week. Madam Speaker, it affects the students. And, you know, I think that governments have a responsibility to do whatever is necessary to ensure, you know, that the problem is corrected.

I understand—[Interruption]—you will have your time I am sure, Member. But I understand that the Member did visit, he was in Fyzabad this week, Member. He did not go to the Fyzabad Anglican School, but he went to the Avocat Vedic School, a primary school that both myself and my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, attended. And it is a school that is really something, would have done very well; they had nine students in the top 200, I believe Minister that is the reason you would have gone. And I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the parents, the students, the staff and the principal on this achievement and especially significant because this next month the school is going to celebrate its 60th year of existence.

Madam Speaker, as I move on I will use another example of a project, and this is a different sector that is literally drowning in inertia and red tape. And I speak of the broken floodgates and the river at St. John’s Trace and I have to ask
the question again: Why are the floodgates at St. John’s Trace yet to be repaired? Is it a matter of implementation? Are we having an issue here? Because on numerous occasions in this Parliament the question has been raised, the Minister has given the assurance that it is being dealt with, contracts have been issued, but yet as we approach the rainy season, the flood season, residents there are very worried and we cannot see any work being done. And again, I raise this example because it shows a disconnect between the allocation of funds in this Parliament and the actual implementation of projects. Again, I do not expect the Minister to do it himself, but one has to wonder who in the chain of implementation is dropping the ball.

Madam Speaker, allow me to use another example of a project that is literally isolating a village. I speak of a landslide which occurred in Murray Trace, Siparia in June of 2017, just over two years now. It is making the road impassable for hundreds of residents on a daily basis. The problem with this is that what has happened now is that these residents, instead of taking ten minutes for an ill resident to reach the Siparia District Health Facility, it is now a 45-minute journey. Instead of taking five minutes for a fire tender from the Siparia Fire Station to reach the community, it now takes 30 minutes.

I make these two points because “yuh house catch fire, yuh sick”, you want to be able to access the health facility or you want the fire tender to get to your house as quickly as possible. And because of this landslide, these journeys, these times have now increased, you know, to unacceptable levels. So, you know, at a recent meeting with the residents of Murray Trace they claim that the Government is spiting them. I will not say that, I will not say that this is Government by spite, Madam Speaker, I will not say that. But the question again remains that: Why is this not being fixed? I do not believe that the Minister of Local Government and
Rural Development will spite Fyzabad. But I am wondering now whether it is an issue of the Ministry not receiving appropriate funds or whether it is a lack of implementation, you know, in that Ministry.

So, Madam Speaker, in my introduction I mentioned the issues. I spoke about whether it is that we do not have enough bodies to do the work in the civil service in the public service because these are the implementing arms of Government. So is it because of unfilled vacancies in the civil service? Well, Madam Speaker, let us see what this Government has done to address this issue. So, I want to refer to the Member for San Fernando East, then Minister of Public Administration, in his budget contribution in September 2015. This is what the Member for San Fernando East had to say then as Minister of Public Administration, and I quote:

“Madam Speaker, based on the latest figures available to us, the incontrovertible fact is that at the end of December 2013 approximately 44 per cent of the available positions in the public service were vacant…of the 30,552 establishment positions 46 per cent or 13,709 were vacant, and of the 14,194 contract positions 41 per cent or 5,863 were vacant.”

The Minister goes on to say:

“Madam Speaker, what these figures demonstrate is that the public service has been operating on approximately half of its human resource capacity…”

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East as the first Minister of Public Administration under this regime correctly identified the staffing challenge of the public service. The hon. Member went on to say and I quote again:

“One of the critical objectives of the Ministry of Public Administration over the next few years”—he is saying this in 2015, Minister—“will be the improvement of the staffing situation in the public service.”
So this is what the Member for San Fernando East promised us.

So, Madam Speaker, the question is, where are we in 2019 with regard to vacancies in the public service? Well if you allow me, Madam Speaker, to refer to a document which came to this House in response to a question from the Standing Finance Committee, the last Standing Finance Committee and this is a response from the Service Commissions and the question was, provide the current number of vacancies in the public service. And the response was that as at June 30, 2018, the data collected revealed the following information. Number of established officers, 31,875. Number of vacant offices without bodies 8,708. Number of vacant offices with bodies, 7,803. Total number of vacant offices 16,511, out of 30,000. So we have remained, Madam Speaker, at about 50 per cent vacancies. So we are not much better off in 2019 than we were in 2015.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, allow me to refer to communication from the Personnel Department to this Parliament, again out of questions arising in the Standing Finance Committee last year. And this response comes under the hand of the Chief Personnel Officer. And I quote:

The staff establishment of the Personnel Department comprises 186 positions of which 111 are vacant.

Let me repeat that, Madam Speaker.

The staff establishment of the Personnel Department comprises 186 positions of which 111 are vacant.

So, Madam Speaker, the Personnel Department, a department that is instrumental in negotiating terms and conditions that will allow recruitment of additional staff is itself understaffed. A frequent challenge encountered by Ministries and agencies is late or untimely release of funds. It is one matter to appropriate funds here in this Parliament but whether the Minister of Finance
releases the funds and when he releases it is a different matter. As we know the late release of funds can have an adverse impact on the implementation of goods and services, projects and so on, by Ministries.

So in this regard, Madam Speaker, I want to draw to the attention of this House the Eighteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee. Madam Speaker, and this report which I am sure, Madam Speaker, as Chairman of the committee, you would be familiar with, looked at the release of funds for various Ministries and agencies in 2018. And I just want to highlight a few points and if you would allow me to quote from this report, Madam Speaker?

The first statistic refers to the recurrent expenditure and I look at page 13 of the report and it is a pie chart. It is a pie chart and what it shows, it looks at the figure from March, up to March 2019. So, I am sure Members would be familiar with the work and the purpose of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, but for the benefit of the public, I just want to say that what this committee does as opposed to the Public Accounts Committee; is that this committee examines the current expenditure for the appropriated funds. So it really gives you a real-time picture of what is happening in terms of how the funds are appropriated.

So the statistics here, looking at recurrent expenditure up to March of 2019 and its shows that the provision released was 38 per cent and the provision remaining was 62 per cent. So, Madam Speaker, at the middle of the year you are getting the picture that the release is not as the Ministries and agencies would like it to be.

If we look at after 10 months which would be the end of July 2019, again we are seeing that the provision release is 67 per cent after 10 months. So it means that 10 months into the financial year you have only gotten 67 per cent. These are just,
you know, gross figures.

9.45 p.m.

And when one looks at the PSIP with regard to—and this is broken up into the economic infrastructure and the social infrastructure and, again, the picture here is quite similar, after 6 months, 37 per cent released, after 10 months 47 per cent released. And this is a bit worrisome, because when you have the projects in these books that talk about the projects that you are going to do in the PSIP in economic and social infrastructure, then it makes you wonder, you know, how much really can be achieved when the release of funding is not forthcoming. And the figures for social infrastructure are very similar, 30 per cent after six months and 33 per cent after 10 months. That is the overall picture.

But, Madam Speaker, I wanted to focus with respect to the Personnel Department, because we spoke about the vacancies and, therefore, you want to look at whether the Personnel Department is being constrained by poor release of funds, and the allocation for 2019 was $41 million. I am just giving a proximate figure, a gross figure. The release at March of 2019 was only 13.2 million and the release at July 2019 was 23.7 million, and the final release at the end of September 2019 was 30.4 million. So the Personnel Department ended up with 10 million short of the allocation. But, more than that, it meant that for the first six months that they were very constrained. They were very cash strapped. With respect to the Service Commissions, again, it shows a similar picture of a 2019 allocation of 76.3 million, the release at March 2019, 37.7 million, at July 60.6 million. So, again, we are seeing a similar picture here, Madam Speaker.

So the question that really has to be asked is, what impact this late release of funds would have had on the operations of these two critical agencies? And, again, we come back to what is happening as to why these Ministries and agencies are not
able to implement Government plans and projects in a timely manner.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the release for the Ministry of Public Administration it is even more frightening, if these figures are correct, as I am sure, they must be, Madam Speaker, because these were figures that were sent in response to an enquiry from the Parliament, and after six months the Ministry of Public Administration, a release of 757.9 million, the allocation. After six months, the Ministry of Public Administration would have only received 95.9 million. A very, very frightening statistic. It means that for the first six months this Ministry would not have had the funding to do what it was supposed to do. The release at July 2019, the total release there would have gone up to 544.7 million. But, again, you are seeing when that amount of money is released in such a short space of time, the question is whether it can be utilized, unless it is to pay outstanding bills.

So, Madam Speaker, when one reviews the PSIP document that accompanies this Budget Statement, the implementation gap in some sectors is even more glaring. And I just looked at the PSIP for 2019, and I just quote a few here just to give an idea. Under the PSIP for 2019, the court facilities allocation was 40.1 million, the actual expenditure was only 8.4 million. Public buildings allocation was 144.8 million, actual expenditure was 29.4 million. So, again, we see a big gap between allocation and actual release of funds and, of course, that is going to hamper the delivery of these goods and services.

I took the opportunity to look at the PSIP for 2020, again, I see under public buildings allocation 137.9 million. There was one item which caught my mind, and that item was the new forensic laboratory and the question I ask is, how much will be spent on this forensic lab in this financial year, because I know it is something that remains important in the fight against crime. And, you know, we have been hearing about a new forensic lab being built and so on. The question is
whether the Government will release enough funding to deal with this.

And I see an allocation of 40 million for medical equipment upgrade. And, Madam Speaker, I just want to ask and throw out and maybe the Minister of Health can answer this when he is responding, and I see an allocation here to deal with VR surgery dialysis. Minister, the VR surgery equipment, I am not sure if you are aware, there was equipment that was left at southwest RHA.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** We are using it.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** That is excellent. I am glad to hear that. And there is also, in the allocation, Minister, there is the mention of two cardiac cath labs: one at San Fernando General Hospital and one in the Couva Hospital. I just wanted for the population’s benefit to know whether the cath lab at San Fernando is still going to be constructed, because I see money is being allocated. [Crosstalk] Okay, so I take that as a yes. Because as you know, Minister, the issue of cardiac disease—

**Madam Speaker:** Direct your conversation this way. Thank you.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as you know, the issue of heart disease, cardiac disease, is a big issue in Trinidad and Tobago. Well, the plans were there, Madam Speaker. So, I just make these points, Madam Speaker. And I just wanted to, through you, Madam Speaker, for the Minister to clarify, because I see under “Special Programmes” treatment of adult cardiac disease 2018, 19.9 million was spent; 2019, the same figure was spent, 19.9 million. But I see an allocation for 2020 of 30 million, and my question is really whether this additional increase of 10 million is so that additional patients will be treated for cardiac procedures or whether it is just to pay off outstanding bills and, perhaps, the Minister may want to answer that in his response. [Crosstalk] Yeah, sure.

So, Madam Speaker, I mentioned that I would have gone through the
contributions of the three previous Ministers of Public Administration, and I just want to refer to the Member for Port of Spain South as Minister of Public Administration, when she spoke in this House last year. The Member spoke of the issue of public service modernization and the role of that Ministry in the roll out of information, communication technology for public service and individuals. And, Madam Speaker, this issue of modernization of the public service has been with us for a long time; both the issue of working conditions for public servants and the customer service delivered to citizens remain matters of concern.

Madam Speaker, last year, this House was informed of a new division in the Ministry of Public Administration called the Modernization and Service Improvement Division. However, when I examined the allocation for the Ministry of Public Administration in the books, I found the following and I just flagged it. Perhaps the Government will want to respond, whether in fact I would have interpreted the information correctly. But I see that there is only one post on the establishment for this division that is, that of Director of Planning and Research. There is no allocation under personnel expenditure for any position in this division, and that the goods and services expenditure for this division in 2019 was 2.8 million, and in 2020 the allocation is 4 million. So, we are speaking of public service/public sector modernization, and the question in my mind is whether those allocations are sufficient, whether there is enough staffing to go to modernize the public service.

The issue of information, communication technology also came up, and one of the things that I would have noticed, Madam Speaker, is that last year, with regard to ICT and the allocation to the NICT, would be that although there was an allocation of 151.4 million, again, the revised estimate was 81.4 million. So, Madam Speaker, we know that information and communication technology is
driving the world and, therefore, you know, when you see that the expenditure in this area is lagging behind—the allocation—you begin to wonder what is happening.

So, Madam Speaker, I wanted to refer to the Minister of Finance Budget Statement and on page 7 of that statement, the hon. Minister would have, again, mentioned the Government’s vision for the public service, and I just picked two of these items, and it speaks to:

“Reversing non-progressive values, attitudes and behaviours such as low productivity and poor work ethos”

And the other one is:

“Ensuring effective and efficient public service delivery and implementation of development interventions and measurement of results”

And the question really in my mind, Madam Speaker, is that whether the allocation—whether the actions that are intended by these allocations in this budget are really going to achieve those goals, whether this is just pie in the sky.

When one looks again at the Ministry of Public Administration allocation for 2020 for this financial year, initially, it looked as if there was a big increase, because when we look at the expenditure for—and this is for the Ministry of Public Administration—2018 there was 870 million; 2019, 757 million—sorry 2019 revised estimate—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up. Please proceed.

Dr. L. Bodo: So, I was speaking of the allocation for the Ministry of Public Administration, and I looked at the pattern for 2018, 2019, and then there is an estimate for 2020 of 1.192 billion. So I thought maybe the allocation was increased, but when I examined the figures—and maybe we can look at this in
Standing Finance—a big chunk of this really is for the UDeCOTT payments to deal with the outfitting of the Government Campus.

So my question, Madam Speaker, is that—and, again, I quote from the Budget Statement when the Minister quoted Winston Churchill and said:

“Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

And my question, Madam Speaker, is whether this Government has wasted a good crisis by not doing enough to effect the modernization of the public service. And is the question really that I asked and that is the question that, perhaps, citizens will be asking.

And we come back to some of the measures that could be done to modernize and improve efficiency and productivity, and we ask the question again about flexitime. We ask the question about hot desking. We ask about performance measurement and, of course, we have always spoken about how you measure performance in the public service, and I note that there is a new item on public sector performance management systems, a million dollar allocation. It is the start of something. It seems to be a little bit late but, you know, hopefully it will take us somewhere, Madam Speaker.

So, I would just use the remaining few minutes just to speak about constituency matters, Madam Speaker. I was very disappointed this evening to hear the hon. Minister of Public Utilities come into the Parliament, speak for 45 minutes and not address anything about the water shortage and the water woes in the country, Madam Speaker. So not a word on WASA, and I really want to make a plug because the commonest complaint I get as a Member of Parliament for Fyzabad is residents and constituents called on a daily basis because they cannot get water, and I am trusting that the Minister would make a sustained effort to fix the chronic water shortages in Trinidad.
I heard in the budget document as well the national tourism plan being discussed, proposed by the Minister, and I just want to draw attention to the fact that Fyzabad lends itself to be an excellent tourist destination—it is the home of the labour movement. There is a historic mud house in the constituency. We have the South Oropouche wetlands and, therefore, it is something that needs to be considered in terms of us going forward there.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not expect that this budget will bring any measureable improvement to people’s lives or sustainable development for communities. I could have predicted that a local government was coming, Madam Speaker, because there is a lot of frenzied activity and road paving and so on in the constituency of Fyzabad. We are grateful for that, Madam Speaker, but I just want—and box drains. [Crosstalk] But I will make you comfortable. It is one of the electoral districts held by the PNM. So rest at ease. It is in your area. But, Madam Speaker, my concern is that in the rush and the frenzy to do these projects, sometimes they are not being done properly, and I raise that point simply because last week in a walkabout, you know, residents were complaining. They are happy to have the project, but they just want to make sure it is done properly in terms of the building of the drains and making sure the water flows in the right direction and so on.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close, and I say this with the greatest of respect, Madam Speaker, I pointed early in my contribution to the issue of ineffective resources and inefficient utilization of resource. I want to point to one of greatest tragedies that has ever befallen the citizens of this country. I said I would return to the issue of overcrowding at the San Fernando General Hospital. One of the reasons for this, Madam Speaker—there are many reasons, but one of the reasons is the fact that 400 beds are now out of the system, because of the rebuilding of the
central block at the Port of Spain Hospital—the Minister will have a lot to say about that—and more patients from other regions are coming to the San Fernando Hospital. That is a fact, Madam Speaker.

I know this for a fact, because colleagues and so on tell me what is happening. No problem with that. The irony though is that these patients are driving past a brand new hospital at Couva with 230 brand new empty beds to come to San Fernando General Hospital to wait two and three days for a bed, Madam Speaker. I just make that point. So the question—I say this in the context of ineffective processes and inefficient utilization of resources but, Madam Speaker, I say that the people of Trinidad and Tobago may have a different name for this tragedy when the true story is told. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

**Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine (D’Abadie/O’Meara):** Good evening, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to be given this opportunity to contribute to this budget debate today as the Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara. Firstly, I want to thank the Prime Minister, the hon. Prime Minister, for his leadership of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago over the last four years of good governance, and over the next six years and beyond [Desk thumping] as we look forward to this beloved country in stability, strength and growth. I want to thank the Minister of Finance and his team for a well-designed budget for 2020, and for his personal delivery on budget day. [Desk thumping] I want to thank the Minister of Planning and Development [Desk thumping] for her contribution to the preparation of the budget 2020, and I also want to thank her as the Leader of Government Business for giving me this opportunity to make an early contribution to this debate. [Desk thumping]

I am the Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara. I am one of the few
Members of Parliament on this side without a portfolio so, as a result, I am involved in a number of committees—number of the JSC committees, member of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and in the Office of the Prime Minister, a member of the Reports Review Committee. These committees, normally when they meet it takes about half day. So my time is taken up in the committees, and unlike a lot of my colleagues, I have more time to spend with my constituents in my constituency of D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Before I get into my contribution, I would like to respond to one of the “pie in the sky” decisions given by the Member for Siparia in her contribution this morning, and those on the other side have a habit of interfering in the military when they do not understand the ramifications of what they are doing. After decades of taking the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to the next level, which involved the purchase of platforms that would help us in terms of security in the southern Caribbean, in terms of our borders, they cancelled the OPVs and caused all sorts of problems for us today.

Now, the Member for Siparia is mentioning changing the retirement age of the defence force without understanding why members of the defence force retire early. You normally join the defence force between the ages of 18 to 23, and you serve 22 years and you become pensionable. So by the age of 45, you are entitled to a pension. But the retirement of a soldier/sailor is based on rank and age. If after 22 years you are still a Corporal or a Private, is time for you to leave the defence force. In the defence force, you do not have people with 50, 45 years as Constables, as in the police service or Corporals running down bandits—45 you are an old man. So you leave at 45. If it is that you are promoted beyond the rank of Corporal or in the case of officers, beyond the rank of Captain, you go to 47.
You are given two additional years. So Sergeants go to the age of 47, Majors go to the age of 47. And if you go beyond 47—today you are 50—you have to be promoted to a Lieutenant Colonel in the officer or a Staff Sergeant PO or CPO in the coast guard. So 50 is the age that you have to be a Warrant Officer or 50 is the age you have to be a Colonel.

If you go to the rank of full Colonel or Brigadier or Major General, then you go to 55. So you all do not understand what you are interfering in, in bringing part of your budget contribution that you are going to change the retirement age of members of the defence force. [Desk thumping] Do not interfere in things you do not know about, consult first. Speak with people who know. [Desk thumping]

Early retirement benefits the soldier/sailor and it also benefits the State. It allows someone to have an additional career. In the defence force, we have or the defence force has a programme called resettlement programme, and when you are within nine years of your retirement date—so that is if you are a Corporal that will be 45, nine years before then if it is a Major, you see it goes up until if you are going to 50, by the time you reach 41, you are allowed to go on training for two years to retool you for civilian life, because we know you are retiring early. So a lot of soldiers take that opportunity and go and do OSH and then they go into that area. Some of them are able to go and get their degree in universities and go into the teaching profession, et cetera. Some of them go into security. At retirement you also get a gratuity. Sometimes it is the first time in the life of a soldier/sailor that they get a lump sum of money. And because batches work together, they can pool their resources and buy maxis and go into the business of driving maxis. Some of them go and do training in terms of refrigeration and air condition and set up their own businesses. Some go into family businesses, et cetera. So, the soldier benefits from early retirement.

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The State also benefits because you have outside there a number of trained people who are disciplined—driving maxi-taxis, doing taxis, doing refrigeration repairs, doing mechanics, fixing vehicles, et cetera. The State benefits, the individual benefits, but here comes the People’s Partnership interfering in the military once more with things that they do not understand [Desk thumping] all because they believe they can score some Brownie points.

Because of early retirement, we now have His Excellency, Brig. Gen. Tony Phillips-Spencer who is the Ambassador to Washington, early retirement. The head of the ODPM, presently, Major Gen. Rodney Smart, early retirement.

**Maj. Gen. Dillon:** Member of Parliament.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Of course, Member of Parliament, [Desk thumping] both myself and my colleague, early retirement, early retirement. Colonel Lyle Alexander, in charge of Port Authority, Chairman of Port Authority, early retirement; so too is Colonel Neil Bennet, Chairman of VMCOTT, early retirement. Why do you all want to interfere with that process [Desk thumping] and deny the country the services of experienced and disciplined professionals who can go into different areas, simply because you feel you are scoring Brownie points by saying you want to extend the age of soldiers. So you want to have a 45 year-old Private or Corporal in the bush as we say, Northern Range, walking with a rifle to fall down from a heart attack. That is for young—decision by vaps. That is for young people to see about.

So I am hoping that the goodly Member for Siparia would rethink and consult with us. I am willing to sit with you on the other side and help you not to make the mistakes that you make with the OPV. [Crosstalk] And instead of having vessels that can go out into the Atlantic and deal with the drug trade and the drug dealers, et cetera, you want to have coastal vessels so that anybody can stay in
Cedros and see the coast guard vessel leaving port and say it is travelling at 20 or 50 knots, it is going to reach so and so and so and so time; hampering border protection, hampering how we protect ourselves.

I am the Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara, a constituency along the East-West Corridor between La Horquetta/Arouca, and part of the royal chartered borough, Borough of Arima and the Tunapuna/ Piarco Regional Corporation. It has a mixed population—some gated communities, some squatter communities. We have a huge HDC development in Malabar, and there are a number of private homes, et cetera, throughout D’Abadie/O’Meara. My constituents come to see me, and the majority of them come for housing, the majority, 70 per cent. When I look at the list of those coming to see me on a regular basis, they come to see me for housing, and I have developed a two-phased process in trying to assist them in gaining housing.

The first phase, when they come for the interview, the initial interview, I tell them to give information, and I provide them with a letter to HDC on their behalf from the Member of Parliament—you visited such and such a date and I gave you a letter to go to HDC and HDC normally reply with a generic letter saying that they have 180,000 recipients and you are part of the list and so forth. But then I bring them back for an interview with a panel in my constituency comprising of members from my constituency, and in trying to help them understand the process of getting a house from HDC, I tell them it is not a quick thing.

It is not going to happen overnight. It is a process to go through. And I do this because a lot of them do not qualify for the housing. So, you know, I tell them, first of all, you have to be employed. You cannot get into the HDC housing and you are not employed. Some of them say that they are employed privately. So then I explain to them that you have to have proper bank records, you have to make
sure your money passes through. So, a lot of them do not send their money through the banks. So I set them up to send their money through the banks so the banks will have—because for HDC you have to have bank records. I tell them that, you know, you need to have job letters, you need to have a police certificate of character, you need to have money. You need to have money if you are applying for an HDC house. I am sorry. You must have some form of income. We have to put money for a search to see if you own any property. Right?

10.15 p.m.

I give them a disclaimer, I say that how, “I can try and help you but I do not have the final say so do not come outside my office to protest and say the MP promise yuh to geh house, and so forth, and yuh ent geh ah house”. So I give them a disclaimer, I say I used out. [Laughter] I also advise them, you know, to go and get a TTMF statement because that tells you how much you are qualified for because a lot of them do not understand that HDC’s different housing estates have different prices, and based on, you know, what you are qualified for, it means that you can acquire a certain kind of housing. So I try to assist them as best as I can and they appreciate it, and so that if they are lucky to get a package from HDC they are prepared in advance, they know what they have to do to go about getting an HDC house.

So I am thankful to the Government and the Minister of Finance in this year’s budget for the measures put in place in terms of HDC housing, “Putting People First: Nurturing Our Greatest Asset”. Six thousand houses, the Prime Minister on Thursday at the Radisson spoke, next year with a possibility of 3,000 houses each year after. And I say again, unfortunately, to those on the other side, we intend to be in Government for the next five years and beyond—[Desk thumping]—and beyond and beyond. And, of course, the Finance Minister has
also mentioned the fact that we would be introducing Government bonds, and in
the advice I give to my constituents, I say, “Look, when the bonds come out buy
some bonds”, because all of them come and tell me they are waiting 25 years and
“me doh even know”. I say, “And how much have you saved?” “Saved?” I say,
“Yes, if you are waiting 25 years to get a house from HDC, how much have you
been putting aside yearly?” And they do not have anything, except a desire to own
a house.

They touch my heart, I must say, when they come and tell you the problems,
you know, “Rent is dead money”, “Once yuh pay de rent it gone”, and so forth, as
the case may be. So I try to guide them, “Look nah, yuh ha to start to save. If yuh
want to get ah house yuh ha to put aside something and the bonds is a good
opportunity in which you can put aside some money to gain accommodation and to
look after your family.” The other issue that they come to me for is employment
and, you know, again, I have to tell them that, “I am not an employment agency,
however, there are certain areas that contact us for employment, MTS”, you know,
the security, one area. Of course, there is employment with CEPEP and URP, but
people come to me with master’s degree, two and three degrees, first degrees and
they are unable to get employment. There are a number of them, I was surprised to
see quite a number of people with masters and degrees in D’Abadie/O’Meara, who
worked in the oil sector and of course they lost their jobs and now they come
seeking employment. So it is not just at the lower end of the scale you will see that
comes for employment.

So I am thankful for the Government’s initiative to raise the minimum wage.
A lot of my constituents would be happy for the increase in the minimum wage,
but also in terms of CEPEP and URP, the 15 per cent increase in salaries, not only
for the CEPEP workers but also for the contractors as well. And my contractors in

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D’Abadie/O’Meara have done yeoman service. [Desk thumping] People would not realize that last year when the flooding took place in Greenvale, D’Abadie/O’Meara is just south of Greenvale, and the flooding, although everybody rushed to Greenvale and no one paid attention to what transpired in D’Abadie/O’Meara. And we had Ascot Gardens, one of our communities, that was totally flooded and the residents got together.

I must be thankful for the response from the disaster unit from the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, in particular Councillors Judy Garner and Keenan Gibson, and the CEPEP workers. It was the CEPEP workers who came into the community when the flood water receded and cleaned out the houses, cleaned out the roads, et cetera. So they provide yeoman service and I am glad to see that they are getting an increase in their wages, both for them and the contractors. [Desk thumping]

You all may not know but in 2005 I was the Chief of Defence Staff when Hurricane Ivan hit Grenada and we responded to Grenada in terms of the defence force, but there was also a response from CEPEP who went to Grenada and assisted as well. So CEPEP has not only been functioning within Trinidad and Tobago but they have functioned outside Trinidad and Tobago as well to assist our Caribbean neighbours, and they work. They are hard-working. I must agree with the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that CEPEP workers are hard workers and they deserve the increase, and hopefully, as the economy grows, there should be more—the Minister of Finance should have the ability to be able to assist these low paid workers, a bigger increase, as time goes by.

Before I go on I must also thank the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for their response [Desk thumping] to the residents of Ascot Gardens in terms of the relief that came after the flooding took place. So do not
focus only on Greenvale and the flooding that took place last year, Ascot Gardens and areas of D’Abadie/O’Meara also suffered flooding. I have farmers who lost everything in the La Compensation Estate, and I must thank now the Minister of Works and Transport for the work he did. Again, you cannot just clear Greenvale, he had to continue along the Caroni River which passes through D’Abadie/O’Meara; the clearing of the river. And I must admit, I had to report to the Commissioner of Police and also to the Minister of Works and Transport when people began stealing the embankment in La Compensation. They would arrive in the night with backhoes and trucks and take away the dirt. That obviously would create flooding problems during this rainy season. So I must thank the Minister of Works and Transport, and the Drainage Division in particular, for the assistance we got after the disaster that took place last year.

In the area of sports, and that is one area that we interact with the young people in our community, I must say that there is an area in D’Abadie/O’Meara called India Ground. It is called India Ground because of the people who settled there in our past history. As a matter of fact, the word “Malabar” comes from “the Malabars” from India who came and settled there in D’Abadie/O’Meara, and because the people in that area is of Indian descent it was called India Ground. Anil Roberts who was the former Member of Parliament, began work in India Ground with the intention of turning it into a sporting complex—

Hon. Member: A hub.


India Ground was the place all sporting activities took place in Malabar before the creation of the Larry Gomes Stadium, but the Larry Gomes Stadium is just for athletics and for soccer mainly. But India Ground, the sporting events were interrupted by Anil Roberts by what he was doing. But in discussions with
the Minister of Planning and Development and with the Prime Minister, I am happy to announce that a new community swimming pool would be built this year \textit{[Desk thumping]} in India Ground, and it is in the budget. So I am looking forward for the construction of the swimming facility in India Ground as a first phase, and we are also looking for an indoor sporting complex to be built there in the future, in the years and beyond. \textit{[Crosstalk]} Yeah, we are following the model from Laventille, \textit{[Desk thumping]} and Morvant, and Maloney, as we continue to develop sporting facilities for our constituents.

And again, in going through the budget for the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, I see that the intention of the Government to refurbish and do some work on Larry Gomes Stadium, which is a centre that needs some repairs. In terms of the lighting, I know they are looking after—the Minister of Public Utilities is looking after the lighting because the lights at the Larry Gomes Stadium presently are not working and as a result we cannot have pro-league and the other leagues at night in the Larry Gomes Stadium.

\textbf{Hon. Member:} “Dey must be blow.”

\textbf{Mr. Hinds:} LED. LED

\textbf{Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:} Old bulbs. Yeah, old bulbs. You need to change old bulbs after a while. You need to change the old bulbs. So we expect to get the lighting back in the Larry Gomes Stadium. We expect to get our swimming pool and indoor sporting facility at India Ground. \textit{[Interruption]} Well, I am not just looking for 2020, I am looking for beyond; I keep mentioning “and beyond”. \textit{[Desk thumping]} Yeah, we “go” build in phases, and beyond.

In Carapo, again, Carapo is an area that is known for cricket and they had at Centeno Ground they had night cricket growing up. My good “friend”, Anil Roberts, again intervened—
Mr. Hinds: Your friend?

Hon. Member: Inverted commas.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Inverted commas—intervened and took down all the pylons. They can no longer play cricket at night, but the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government decided that he would agree to the fact that a pavilion is to be built on Centeno Ground in Carapo, [Desk thumping] and the lights would be put back up so we can bring back night cricket into that community, part of assisting the—it is a cricket community. Different areas, obviously you are aware, focus on different things; the Larry Gomes is soccer athletics; Carapo, is cricket, and soon-to-be swimming in Malabar as well. So I want to thank the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for the decision to build the stadium in Carapo. I want to thank the Minister of Planning and Development for building the swimming facilities in Malabar.

So this budget that the Minister of Finance presented on Monday, you know, sent goose pimples all over me for the different things that would come to the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. As the Minister—I do not know if he is here—the Minister of Public Utilities spoke about the light bulb, he said do not focus on the light bulb, all the goodies that came out in the budget, the light bulb is a small matter but it will save us a lot of low cost energy and it would end up increasing the foreign exchange, [Desk thumping] because we would not be using that natural gas that we can utilize otherwise.

Hon. Member: Hundreds of millions of dollars.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Hundreds of millions of dollars it will save us.

So I would like to thank the Minister of Finance once again for an excellent budget presentation. I will like to thank the Minister of Planning and Development for listening to a miserable MP who is always behind her to build or do something
in D’Abadie/O’Meara, and the Minister of Works and Transport for the work, especially the drainage work that took place in the Caroni River area, and river basin area, also the Mausica River.  [Desk thumping] I want to thank him for the work because I have to agree with the Minister of Works and Transport, we must clean our water resources during the dry season so that when the rain comes the water would have a free flow through our areas. And I want to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs because the money in the budget was put in the budget through the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for the building of the swimming pools.

I would like to appeal once again to those on the other side, if you are dealing with the military, discuss with people who know.

Mr. Paray: As soon as we get into Government we will do it.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: That is the problem, you got into Government the last time and you cancelled the OPVs. [Crosstalk] That is the problem, when you get into Government you just get carried away. [Crosstalk] So, I am glad for this opportunity to contribute. Again, to the Leader of Government Business, thank you for giving me this opportunity on the first day of the budget debate, as, you know, an MP without portfolio to be able to contribute.

Hon. Member: A brilliant MP.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you very much for your confidence, [Desk thumping] and with that I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (Cumuto/Manzanilla): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I rise to contribute to this budget debate, please allow me the opportunity to firstly commend the hon. Member of Parliament for Siparia, our Opposition Leader, the distinguished Leader of the

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Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [Desk thumping] for her most pointed, critical, comprehensive, edifying response to this final budget debate of this PNM administration under the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West. Madam Speaker, if I dare say so, the Opposition Leader’s response was so brilliant that is scared the Prime Minister into calling the local elections today. Really, we heard actually a budget debate that brought before the population ideas, solutions, and a way forward out of the depressed state that this Government has brought our nation to.

Before I begin my contribution I really have to refute some points made by the Members on the other side, and I will start with the Member for San Fernando East. The Member for San Fernando East, I congratulated him on giving a very well-delivered goodbye speech in spite of the fact that his contribution lacked substance. [Desk thumping] But, you know, the Minister indicated that under tourism that the Ministers on our side had actually refused to meet with the THA, and I want to indicate to the Member that that is furthest from the truth. I do remember, on a weekly basis, that the Minister of Tourism, at the time Minister Cadiz, would, every week, attend meetings in Tobago. He met with stakeholders in Tobago because that is where he felt he should have met them, not in Trinidad; met the stakeholders in Tobago, met hoteliers, as well as other stakeholders, and, in particular, with the THA, and at the time it was Chief Secretary Mr. Orville London. And those conversations always brought about meaningful discussions and results, so much so that the plan going forward brought about a comprehensive tourism master plan for Tobago. So I want to refute that contribution that the Minister of Tourism brought this afternoon.

Mr. Mitchell: That is in a report.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: You know, and this marketing strategy also included an
air bridge and sea bridge that was in fact functional, not the disseminated sea bridge and air bridge that exist under this PNM Government.

Also, if I may comment on San Fernando West, San Fernando West started his contribution by stating that he knew the difference between truth and fiction, and I was wondering if the Minister knew that “emailgate” was fiction, you know, if he could understand the difference between what was truth and fiction. And then the Minister indicated that the budget response of our political leader was political desperation. And I wonder if the Member recognized that his Prime Minister, and by extension his Government, acted in political desperation today by announcing the date for local elections. So just to clarify those points from the discussions this morning.

I heard the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, as well as San Fernando East spoke after the day care centres, and I know that the political leader had indicated her points of view, and I want to just speak a little bit on what the stakeholders have indicated, and I am going to be reading from various discussions that would have been aired publicly. There was an indication, especially from the Single Fathers Association, and we do have a Single Fathers Association, who spoke about the day cares not addressing the single fathers, and I think that if the Government had consulted with the stakeholders they would have recognized that a number of single homes include fathers and they too need the assistance.

So when you single out a particular group and you do not understand where it is that you have other persons may be falling through the cracks, you end up missing persons, and this is again an issue that we always have with the Government, they never consult with the stakeholders. They never look to ask the stakeholders what they have in their mind, in their hearts, what it is they are experiencing so that they can bring policy to represent what it is that they see
So you have activist Hazel Brown speaking on this same matter of the daycare and she stressed:

“…that if insufficient planning is done into the quality of the childcare provided by this initiative, it could pose a threat to the health of the children.”

And the Minister of Finance did not indicate as usual, did not indicate how this plan would roll out, it did not indicate what will happen, it did not indicate if there would be a cost, what you have identified. I am hoping that during the course of the debate, probably, the Minister of Tobago East would indicate that, but in light of what is happening currently there is very little confidence that the Government can offer to us or even the population at large that they can in fact implement a system such as this successfully.

In continuing from the article:

“In a telephone interview with Guardian Media yesterday, Brown said that ‘the care of the children under five-years-old is the most critical area of development and requires very special kinds of skills.’

‘Introducing these services without ensuring there are people who have the skills to adequately take care of the provision of those services has the potential of seriously damaging children,’ she cautioned.

She also said that these daycares must be placed in areas that are easily accessible to single mothers.

‘If you are providing childcare services in areas that I can’t reach easily by public transport, then I’m no better off,’ she said.”

And, you know, the reason why I am indicating this is because the Minister indicated that, you know, we have PTSC buses that would be coming, that are
accessible to the differently abled, well, I do not know if the Minister knows that we do have the ELDAMO bus which was launched under the PP administration. [Desk thumping] And the ELDAMO buses actually go to the homes of the persons who have a disability and take them up and carry them to wherever they need to go and carry them back home, whereas the PTSC buses do not do that. The person would have to be at a bus stop to be able to access these buses that the Minister is referring to, and therefore I do not think that the Minister has really understood what it is he said. And, you know, I do not think that the Minister has indicated, understood that, you know, when you are dealing with persons who are differently abled you will sometimes have to meet them at where they are, and we did that. We did that under the People’s Partnership.

We created the ELDAMO bus and we facilitated having persons who are unable to access the public transport to be able to reach where they are going because they have needs as well, and sometimes they may not have families who can transport them to wherever it is they need to go and therefore the State has taken up the responsibility of ensuring that this minority group is in fact taken care of. And, you know, the reason why I am bringing that up, Madam Speaker, is that the Government always speaks about everything that they do with such passion, passion, and passion and compassion are two very different things. You see, on this side of the House we have not only passion but compassion, but on the other side, Madam Speaker, we have a lot of passion, for instance, we have a lot of passion that has been said, you know, “I will meet you out on the pavement”; that is done with passion, obviously not compassion. You know, you would have persons who would say with passion—[Member steups] You know, when you have to pick up a house. [Laughter]

Madam Speaker: Now, there was a very long loud sound which could only be
the sucking of one’s teeth—[Crosstalk]  Now, I cannot believe that the person on their legs would have sucked their teeth at themselves, so, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, that is totally abhorrent and will not be tolerated. So I will ask you just to get up and excuse because the same compassion that you are speaking about, which I really, really relish about compassion, I think your behaviour signalled something else. Okay? So I would ask you to just get up and apologize. We are all tired so we might slip in our behaviour, and I will take it as that. So I am giving you an opportunity to just apologize and continue with your tone of compassion, please.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Madam Speaker, I apologize for trying to explain that the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East “steupsed” at someone who came to the Member for assistance for a house.  *[Desk thumping]*

**Madam Speaker:** Just now, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, when I ask somebody to apologize, I want it to be unqualified. All right? It was your act. It was your act, okay? So sometimes we have to take ownership. Okay?

**Mr. Hinds:** Just say, “I withdraw the ‘chups’”.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** I just did that. So, the Member for San Fernando East—

**Madam Speaker:** No, no, no, as far as I am concerned you have not. That is why I said that when I ask somebody to apologize, it must be unqualified. So, please, I invite you again to withdraw it.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** I withdraw. Can I make any other complaints about San Fernando East?

**Hon. Member:** Of course.

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. So the Member for San Fernando East has
also, with passion, indicated that, you know, so much things have been done but in fact there is not anything that has been materialized from tourism, whereas on the PP administration we have implemented measures that brought about relief to the hoteliers in Tobago, as well as in Trinidad. So their passion remains passion. On our side we have passion and compassion. [Desk thumping]

We have—I dare say, we are witnessing a new level of poverty under this PNM administration never before seen in this country, and that is why, as I mentioned earlier on this budget, this holds very little or no hope for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You know, Madam Speaker, the honourable political leader indicated in her budget response that we provided food cards and grants for single mothers, children with special needs, disability grants, et cetera, all similarly designed to increase the purchasing power of the average family and to improve the standard of living for all citizens, which this Rowley regime dismantled, this well-thought-out system, depriving needy families of critical support; that is compassion for you, you know.

10.45 p.m.

Whereas we on this side understand this, Madam Speaker, this cannot be refuted, because this is how a social safety net operates. A social safety net speaks about the well-being of the entire society. And so social welfare is not the same as the standard of living, but it is more concerned with the quality of life. That includes factors such as the quality of the environment, level of crime, extent of drug abuse, availability of essential social services, as well as religious and spiritual aspects of life. This Government does not realize that.

So as a result of it, with all the passion they have cut 18,000 food cards and have placed a lot of families in a very serious situation of neglect, whether it is nutritional, emotional, mental and otherwise. Whereas according to what a social
safety net indicates, you have a number of social grants that would be able to assist the person.

Now, Madam Speaker, when we were in government a number of persons would have been on social grants, one of them might have been public assistance, but the public assistance sometimes would not be enough because of the fact of the level of income. They may not have any income, so you are saying to this person of a family of four—I am giving an example of a family of four—would have $1,800, $1,650 and then you would supplement it with a food card. But you know, a lot of these persons fell through the cracks. So the Prime Minister had asked for a management system to come into place to help with this person who comes into the system, to be really given an opportunity to have a better quality of life. That is what we sought to do, create a better quality of life for all citizens. It is the main reason why the Prime Minister would have created the Ministry called the “Ministry of the People”, which in the budget response indicated that once back in government we will create a Ministry of the People. Because what does it do?

Let me tell you what the biometric card, in fact, accomplishes. It goes in line with the institute for a national digital identification programme, because at the end of the day when someone comes into a programme it is not to leave them in the state that they came in, but actually to help make their lives better. So that when they come out of the system they can, in fact, be socially improved, and they would be able to contribute to the economy of the country. That is where the political leader—I am saying “Prime Minister”, that is in anticipation—has indicated where there will be a turnaround in our economy, a turnaround in the quality of lives of our citizens. So as a result of it you would find that when persons come into the system they would be assessed. Not only they would be assessed, but the entire family would be assessed to understand what are their
needs, what are their skills, what they can contribute. So at the end of the day you give yourself a timeline, because you have to be able to have measurables and deliverables.

So you give yourself two years for someone, and of course it could be reviewed, but two years for someone to come into the system to be able to learn a skill, to be given abilities. Also we had a grant that assisted with helping you with a business. So that you can in fact become self-sufficient, and you could have a business that you can actually cater to the needs in your community. So at the end of the day, with the management system you are able to have your whole life assessed.

In addition to that, with the food card which would have been biometrically accessed, that is with your fingerprint, it meant that the life certificate that the Minister said we will eventually do away with, that would have been done away with almost immediately, because with this here for you to be able to shop you needed your fingerprint. It means that your assets would be protected. No one can steal your card, no one can steal your grant because of the fact that you have to be present for your purchase, unless you have someone who is proxy. So as a result of it you would have be able to provide proof of life because of the fact that you were shopping.

But in addition to that, with the system in place we ensured that you had proper nutrition, your nutritional needs were met. Right now that cannot be done. That data cannot be collected, because under the biometric system and the system that we had before, the Government came and changed and dismantled everything, you were able to purchase with this card and the groceries were mandated to only cash for the necessities, basic food items.

With that being removed and you have a direct deposit system, it means now

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you cannot determine what anyone purchases. They could buy anything with it, and whatever you purchase may not necessarily be anything to do with your health requirements. So we are mandated to prepare regular reports for the UN, and we would be unable to do that because we will not have the data because of the fact that they have dismantled the systems that we had in place. These systems really would have told us whether the citizens that we were in fact providing these grants to were receiving what was necessary. We were able to have measurables and deliverables on hand through data collection.

But you know, Madam Speaker, this Government really is not interested in collecting data. They speak about collecting data, but they are not interested in collecting data, because data—as the Member for Fyzabad indicated, there are stubborn facts, as well as the Member for Naparima—there are stubborn facts that you cannot hide, you cannot disregard them. But if you do not have data then you could say anything you want. You could come and indicate that you collected so much money in taxes, and you did how many things and how do you prove it? Data is there to prove what it is we are saying.

So this is the reason why we had the biometric card in place. It also provided—if someone who is receiving a grant had to be removed from where they are living because of an illness, that they became incapacitated for any reason and decided to be relocated to where their daughter lives, say from Sangre Grande to go to Fyzabad, what happens is that your file has to be moved, and oftentimes your file is lost. What happens in a case like this is that as long as you have been removed from one location to another, out of the region that you are accustomed reporting to, it means that your grant will be stopped, and until your file is received by the other area of location you will not be able to access any grant, which has happened many cases and has caused a number of persons to be very stressed.
The biometric system was, in fact, going to allow that wherever, any part of the country, you could be in Mayaro, you could be in Toco, you could be in Cedros, once you are able to reach to a regional office, because of the biometric system you would be able, anyone would be able to access your file.

Another aspect of the biometric system it allows also for your social worker who attends to you, if for some reason she is on vacation, sick, left the job, your file will not be hindered because of the absence of this particular social worker who would be assigned to you. With the biometric system it means that anyone can assess you and attend to you, because you are into the system which allows for anybody to work with you, to bring you out of the system much more qualified than you would have come in, in a better frame of mind, with a disposition that you feel transformed. Because at the end of the day, what we did in the Ministry was to transform lives because that is what the Ministry was geared towards, transforming lives.

We do not know what is happening now in the Ministry. We do not see lives being transformed. As a matter of fact with the number of persons who have lost their jobs, persons are unable to access any of the grants. Because of the fact that persons are unable to access grants, Madam Speaker, you have a number of persons that have slipped through the cracks. A number of persons, especially the middle class, who have lost their jobs. And because they have worked hard and have put together their homes and so forth, they are assessed on what is in their homes, which is unfortunate. Although they are in a position of poverty, because they have a home maybe with the amenities, they are now denied public assistance because of what the Ministry does with their means test. So you have persons who need the help, but failing the means test, are not being able to access any grants, and this is unfortunate.
You know, when the political leader spoke about financing strategy, and about the successful implementation of our national economic master plan, it hinges among other factors, and she said that in our capacity to mobilize financial resources from both domestic and external sources, as well as our ability to use those resources effectively and efficiently, she continued by saying, therefore we have considered that the main aspects of bringing about our economic transformation plan must be centred around: time, people and money.

If you hear any of my debates, budget after budget, I ask two questions, it is this: How does this what you are speaking about redound down to the persons really benefiting? How does it affect them? [Desk thumping] How does it impact the lives of the persons? I ask the question and it is always a big “steups”. I will not do it, but it is always a big “steups”. I do not understand why it would be because the reason why you would bring policies, the reason why you would bring a budget is because it must impact lives. It must impact the greatest resource that anybody could ever have, and that is the human resource. But because there is no answer, there is no measurable, there are no delivers, it means therefore there is always this complaint, you know you are asking nonsense. But we are not asking nonsense. If you wanted to come up with a bright idea I think it would have been that as opposed to the bulb.

So it is important to understand that is why we on this side I would say we have the passion, but we also have the compassion which the other side lacks tremendously. It would be difficult for them to take a page from our book because pages are usually ripped out and thrown away.

Another thing our political leader indicated in her budget debate, she spoke about implementing our plan. She indicated that the clarity on the roles of the different actors and stakeholders is paramount for effective implementation of our
economic master plan. She continued, the Member:

“The private sector will play the driving role in implementation of the plan, undertaking the most of actual investments and projects that have been identified to bring about the...”—over the 2020/2025 period.

“For the most part, a new UNC government will play a facilitative role ensuring that proper physical infrastructure is in place, macroeconomic stability is maintained, quality human capital is built, and the rules of the game are set...”—and enforced.

She comes down and says:

We recognize that the key challenges to implementation of our master plan would largely stem from institutional capacities required to ensure good governance, accountability and enforcement of legal and regulatory framework.

You know one thing that I must say, Madam Speaker, is that under the astute leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar under the PP Government, is that we constantly and continually have stakeholder engagement. Even though we are in Opposition for the time being, even for our contributions here, it is not based on what it is we think, it is not based on what it is we feel. It is based on pre-budget consultations that we held with stakeholders throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The reason why we do that is because we understand that we play that role of facilitation; we do that. That is what the Government does. That was how we were so effective in government, and this is why the Government of the day is so ineffective. We implement our plans. We walk the walk, and we did the talk. The Government can only talk, and this is why they live up to their name: Promises Never Materialize. [Desk thumping]

UNREVISED
So, Madam Speaker, this is what we did when we had the issue of the socially displaced. The socially displaced—[Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order! Member.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The socially displaced was and continues to be a very serious problem. It is even worse under this Government simply because there are a number of persons who have been displaced job wise. While we were in government we met with stakeholders, namely Living Water, who brought together a number of civil societies, who brought together businessmen, brought together legal representation that they felt would have been needed, and they brought a solution to the matter of the socially displaced.

It was through a foundation called Chapman which is based in Miami. It was after having discussions with Living Water and visiting the facility, it was suggested that this facility be adopted here in Trinidad and Tobago, of course with customizing to suit our situation. But it required legislation. It required changes to our legislation, simply because of the fact that persons cannot be removed off of the streets without their consent. So as a result of it, it meant that we needed to have greater collaboration with the stakeholders as well as with our legislative agenda. So as a result of it we had a plan going forward for it, which is in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, which I do not know why it is they are not interested in taking up, because of the fact that it is a plan that civil society is willing to embrace and to work with.

I want to address something here. I do not know where the matter is, but I do not want to say much on it except to say that because I requested during my tenure as Minister of the People, that you have measurables and deliverables, and we have an effective monitoring and evaluation process in place, there were certain
things that came up. I would like to indicate that under my tenure the issue that is in the papers now, they were not continued under me simply because of the fact that we could not measure. We could not measure any of the measurables and deliverables.

I want to say something. Madam Speaker, I want to say something, and I am going to say it.

Hon. Members: Say it! Say it!

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: You know, two weeks ago I was in my office, and a gentleman came to my office. I did not really observe his attire. I started to speak with him, and I said, “How can I help you?” He said, “MP, I would like to get a recommendation for a job,” and I said, “Okay.” So I went through the file, and I said, “But son, depending on your age or whatever it is I would call when it is done or whatever it is.” I said, “Son, you do not have a résumé. Do you have a résumé at home?” He says, “No.” I said, “Well hear what, my office will assist you. If you come and you could sit with them, they will prepare a résumé for you.” So I am looking through his file, and I said, “But you do not have a telephone. You will go for an interview and then there will be no one to contact you.”

Madam Speaker: Members, it is late and I am having difficulty in hearing the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. I have heard a lot about compassion, so I will ask for you all to be compassionate at this time. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I am asking the gentleman, “But you do not have a telephone number, how would the potential employer contact you if you do not have a phone?” So he says, “Well, I do not have a phone.” I said, “Well you will have to give me a number. So is it that you have a family, a relative or a family
member that you can give me their contact number?” He says, “No.” I said, “Do you have a neighbour that you can give me a contact number?” He said, “No.” So I was, you know, a little bit concerned, how you would want to go for an interview and not get—you know. So when I looked at it and, Madam Speaker, I do not know what it is. I have to say probably it was the Holy Spirit, you know, [Laughter and desk thumping] because I looked at him—

Madam Speaker: Just one minute. That kind of outburst—that kind of outburst does not fit the decorum of this House. I ask Members to really exercise some control. I keep reminding you all that the water coolers are there for a good reason. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, please continue.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am so happy that we could recognize and the nation at large can see the lack of compassion. But I do not know, as I said I really believe it was the Holy Spirit, because I asked the gentleman, I said, “Son, where do you live?” He said to me, “I am homeless.” I was so taken aback, because I did not really look at the gentleman. I do not judge anybody. I really did not look at him. He was not “dislevelled” or anything.

Hon. Member: Dishevelled.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Dishevelled—and as a result of it I said, “Listen to me, have you had anything to eat or drink?” And he said, “No.” So I said, “Tell you what, come and get something to eat and drink.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, while I do appreciate the story about compassion and the demonstration of compassion, which I think is something that we should all inculcate in our lives, I would really like you to bring the compassion into the budget debate, please.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Well, coming back to the—

Hon. Member: Budget.
Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:—I had to call the Ministry for socially displaced persons to ask for assistance for the gentleman. I was told that I would have to bring him down—no, for him to find his way down to Port of Spain. I could not understand how a socially displaced person would have been able to get down to Port of Spain. So at the end of the day, having spoken with the Minister one week later, I could not get assistance to get the gentleman off of the street.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, your original speaking time is now spent. You have 10 minutes to wind up your contribution.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Madam Speaker, as a result of it, the Ministry had indicated that they had transferred this home in Arouca to the Ministry of Health.

Hon. Members: What?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: So as a result of it, we—Madam Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: That is absolutely untrue.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I was on the phone right here speaking, using the Minister’s phone, when they were indicating to me that the home in Arouca is transferred to the Ministry of Health. So I am clearing that up right now.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Absolute rot; untruth.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Madam Speaker, there is so much I would like to say.

[Interruption] The Government could refute that. I know what I had a conversation on the phone about.

Hon. Member: With whom, the Holy Spirit?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: And you would see how it would work, Mr. Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, you know what is amazing? I came in as Minister with eight months—eight months—and I had a number of deliverables that my Prime Minister, my political leader, gave me to do, and, you know, it was about maybe eight or nine projects. I want to say in eight months I was able to deliver eight
projects that this Government in five years cannot deliver one. It speaks about having the ability to do it. This Government just lacks the ability every which way to get anything done, or to get any plans in place.

Madam Speaker, for these last few minutes I would like to speak about my constituency. My constituents are very concerned about a number of things.  

[Interruption]

**Hon. Member:** About their Member of Parliament.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** They are not concerned about me.

**Hon. Member:** Oh yes, they are concerned about you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**11.15 p.m.**

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** We have issues such as we are very concerned, Madam Speaker, that very little allocations were made to agriculture, very little. As a matter of fact, when you look at it, it is more for recurrent expenditure, and my constituency is predominantly agriculture. It means therefore, that we may not even have the opportunity to have access roads, and without proper access roads it means that the cost spirals not just for the farmers, but for the consumers when you have to pay for tyres and for mechanical defects because of the poor roads and also for the bridges, you know, the lack of proper amenities, my constituents are very concerned.

They are very concerned about land tenure, they are very concerned that they have not been able to get compensation for the floods, they are concerned that this Government does not take agriculture and food security seriously. And, you know, something that we have always learnt, and that is, when you are looking to reach First World status, the first thing that you really look at is your food security and unlike the Government, we in the People’s Partnership under Kamla
Persad-Bissessar, we looked after getting food security and putting the various amenities in place. So you have removed—you said everything is tax-free, but what happens after that?—because it was already there.

Madam Speaker, you also have the issues of flood victims. Some victims from since 2018 have not received any compensation, some have not even been assessed, and so it is very concerning that we are one year later and still nothing has been done. It is very concerning, and this Government speaks with passion, about caring for the people, but they lack compassion because they certainly would have taken care of the people long ago.

Madam Speaker, you know, although my constituents have not been compensated, you know, I could still walk and I remain dry. And so—

**Hon. Member:** Even when the rain is falling.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Even when the rain is falling. And so, Madam Speaker, it says a lot about what the Government, you know, what they stand for and what they receive, and what we stand for and what it is we will give.

Madam Speaker, we also have the issues of roads. I have my constituents of Bramble Alexander very upset, they want their roads, it is horrible, and so I am making representation for them. There is also the roads that have to be completed, the Sou Sou lands in Cunaripo. We have in St. Marie Emmanuel, we have in Caigual, we have pipes still to be laid. Madam Speaker, do you know there is no water in Tamana Hill, and you know the reason why? They required a booster, they received the booster, but now they need to get a three-phased electricity and they cannot get that. And so as a result of it, my constituents are without water and have to depend on truck-borne water. Unfortunately, guess what?—the truck broke down, and so the local government does not receive the necessary allocation to be able to keep a consistent supply of water readily available to supply the
And so, Madam Speaker, we also have the issues of social grants. Madam Speaker, do you know that a number of my constituents have come with issues of a number of their grants have been cut for no apparent reason. As a matter of fact, food cards were cut for persons who have public assistance grants, and they were told that, because they got a $200 increase from the Government, they do not need a food card and therefore, their food card was cut. Madam Speaker, this could not be coming from a Government that speaks about caring for anyone. Again, as I say they speak with passion, but they do not have compassion.

Madam Speaker, in addition, we have where the Government again speaks with passion, “Oh, the reason why you are flooding is because your house is built in a lagoon”. And that cannot be so, Madam Speaker, because if it were so, then we would have had to deliver, to save the Minister of Finance from where he was, you know, as according to my political leader, she would have sent the yellow boat to pick him up. [ Interruption] No, no, no. Not a banana boat.

So, you know, I just want to remind the population that we had in place a baby grant that assisted single mothers, and also trained them to begin to understand how taking care of a child is not just having them, but also thinking about their whole emotional and physical and nutritional values, which was very successful.

We also had in place where we signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and with it we established the Carlsen Field Centre which provided for persons to receive therapy to assist with the various ailments that they may have. And also, we provided to the mothers who had children with cerebral palsy, an income so that mothers were able to care for their children. [ Desk thumping] You know, the Government speaks about all this caring with such
passion, but there is no compassion. And as a result of it, when you speak about the
day care centres, I wish you could speak about implementing or re-implementing
the assistance that was offered to single mothers with children with cerebral palsy.
Madam Speaker, how much time again do I have?

**Madam Speaker:** You have five minutes.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. One of the
issues that I am very concerned about in coming back to the socially displaced, is
that there was a unit, the inter-agency unit that was the implementing arm of the
unit. The unit was made up of two sections. One was the one that created policy
and the IAU was the one that implemented the policy.

What this Government has done through the Ministries is that they have
removed entirely the IAU unit and thereby rendering the whole system ineffective
and really inoperable, because you have someone with the policy, but there is no
one really to implement. There is no one to go out on the field and do their
research to be able to convince persons to come off of the system, and they also
had a number of security officers who would have been in the unit as well, who
would have been able to accompany the social workers to ensure that they were not
harmed or injured in their course of duty.

And, Madam Speaker, I remember clearly, two persons during my time and
that is someone who was brought to my attention, who was in a wheelchair in
Couva. She was, in fact, willing to move and within two days was picked up by
the ELDAMO bus and taken to a facility in Piparo where she was cared for. And
then, of course, there was a more popular one where there was a pregnant, socially-
displaced woman on the streets and she was, in fact, visited by the IAU personnel
and was, in fact, encouraged to come off of the street and to be able to receive
assistance. She came off and then she went back out because as I said, there are
certain rights that the persons have that you cannot hold them against their will, and they must come into the system voluntarily. And so a number of persons were very upset that she was back onto the streets, but I just want you to know that because of the IAU, they were able to touch base and they constantly touched base.

So, the Ministry has removed a lot of workers, they have cut off a lot of workers. As a matter of fact, they brought in, they removed the more experienced workers and they brought in OJTs who were unable to manage the offices. Sometimes when you call, and my office would call quite often, and they would tell you, “Look, I am an OJT and I really do not know what to do, I cannot help you”. And so, they have really stifled, they have really circumvented the whole system and prevented it from really helping those who are really in need, the most vulnerable, the indigent, and therefore, I think that this Government needs to not just call the local election, but they need to call a general election and demit office immediately, and allow this UNC party to take governance and to bring back into this country the compassion that is necessary—[Interruption] no, it is under you—you know, that was moved under the Ministry of Health. And so—[Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Moved from where?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Then, you know—so, Madam Speaker, you know, because of this IAU it resulted in the voluntary removal of over 100 street dwellers and homeless from the capital city and provided with rehabilitative services, including re-establishing their identity through the Ministry of Legal Affairs; that is what we did.

We have measurables, Madam Speaker, we can identify, we can call them by name if we needed to, and so we had data. And it also provided for them to get their birth certificates and ID cards in an aim to take this service to other boroughs and towns, as well as the City of San Fernando, but under this Government—
Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, your time is now spent. Leader of the House.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2020) Bill, 2019, be adjourned to later in the proceedings.

Question put and agreed to.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY) ORDER, 2019

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, I beg to move the following Motion:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (3) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”), that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as “the Commission”) has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4 of the Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report;
And whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Minister in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4;

And whereas the draft of an Order entitled the “Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2019” giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission was laid before the House of Representatives on the 5th day of April, 2019:

Be it resolved that the draft of the “Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2019” be approved.

Madam Speaker, this Motion seeks the approval of the House of Representatives to the draft of an order of the President in accordance with section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act. And, Madam Speaker:

“The Commission shall define…”—

Section 4(1) states and I quote:

“The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either:

(a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that an electoral area should be divided in order to give effect to the Rules set out in the Second Schedule; or

(b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number or boundaries of electoral districts in order to give effect to the said Rules.”

Madam Speaker, in accordance with paragraph (a) of the said subsection (1)
of section 4 of the Act, the Commission on the 12th day of June, 2017, submitted to the Minister the Ninth Report in which it recommends that for the purpose of local government elections, the boundaries of the electoral districts into which the electoral areas mentioned in the First Schedule to the Act are divided, should be as defined in accordance with the schedule to the order. 

Sure, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the report was submitted within the stipulated time period for submission as required by subsection (2)(c) of section 4 which states that reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

And in accordance with subsection (c) in the case of a subsequent report, not less than two nor more than three years from the date of the submission of its last report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Second Schedule of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Act prescribes the rules to be followed by the Commission in its review of the number and boundaries of electoral districts into which an electoral area is or is to be divided.

For Municipal Corporations, Rule 4 of this Schedule as amended directs, and I quote:

“The number of electors in an electoral district of a municipal electoral area shall be the number obtained by dividing the number of electors in that electoral area by the number of electoral districts shown opposite the name of that electoral area in the third column of Part 1 of the First Schedule, but the Commission may in consideration of topographical factors vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors in any one electoral district of an electoral area exceed or be less than the number of
electors any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than twenty-five per cent.”

For regional corporations, it says and I quote:

“The number of electors in each electoral district…”—may be as far as possible—“…obtained by the…Commission…in consideration of rule 3 vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors in any one electoral district of an electoral area exceed or be less than…twenty-five per cent.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this particular case the Elections and Boundaries Commission followed for that rule very strictly, and they have said that there shall be in every electoral area a basic number of four electoral districts. To this basic number, and this for Trinidad, shall be added the number obtained by dividing the electorate of the electoral area by 15,000, but where in any electoral area the electorate is either less than 15,000, there shall be five electoral districts. More than 15,000, any residual number left after dividing the total electorate by 15,000 shall be treated as if that number were 15,000, and one electoral district shall be added in respect of such residual number.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last report of the Commission on its review of electoral boundaries was based on an electorate in the regional electoral areas of Trinidad at a number of 1,040,823 persons, and that is the number that appeared on the Commission’s records as at March 14, 2014.

The Commission informs in this report that the number of persons as appears on the Commission’s records as at April 11, 2017, is 1,063,771 persons. On the basis of this increased electorate in 2017, the Commission duly reviewed the number and boundaries of electoral districts into which each of the 14 electoral areas in Trinidad should be divided. After application of the relevant formula, the
Commission concluded as follows.

No alteration is required to the existing number of electoral districts for municipal corporations as these are fixed by the law, and cannot be varied, except that the boundaries of the electoral districts have been changed as follows. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will go through the changes.

A, there is the creation of an additional electoral area in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of San Juan/Laventille by virtue of the application of Rule 2(1) which I quoted previously, and that new electoral district shall be called “El Socorro/Aranguez North”.

B, the creation of an additional electoral district in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Penal/Debe by virtue of the same rule, and the new electoral district shall be called “La Fortune/Debe North”.

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]


There are further changes as follows, Madam Speaker. Changes in the names of, one: two electoral districts in the electoral area of the Municipal Corporation of Chaguanas. Two electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Penal/Debe. And three electoral districts in the electoral area of the
Regional Corporation of Sangre Grande. And the report shows each of these, Madam Speaker. The further changes are as follows.

That the 139 electoral districts in the five municipal corporations, and the nine regional corporations shall carry the names as shown in Appendix B and H of the report. That the 139 electoral districts be defined as provided in appendixes C to Q of the report.

And, Madam Speaker, the report outlines each of these, I will not go through this because all Members have a copy of the report.

The distribution of polling divisions by electoral districts be as shown in the appendixes C to Q of the report, and that the electoral districts in the electoral areas of the 14 municipal and regional corporations in Trinidad would be delineated as shown on the maps which are annexed to the report.

Further particulars on the Commission’s recommendations including maps delineating each of the 139 electoral districts are contained in the appendixes to the report.

Madam Speaker, subsection (3) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act provides that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission has submitted a report under paragraph A of subsection (1) of section 4 of the said Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an order by the President for giving effect whether with or without modifications to the recommendations of the report.

Madam Speaker, in this regard the report was duly laid and, Madam Speaker, it is clear that this report is necessary for the continuation of the good order of the work done by the independent Elections and Boundaries Commission. Madam Speaker, it is customary for the debate on these reports to not attempt to
change the report because this is a report done by an independent institution. And, Madam Speaker, with these words, I beg to move. [Desk thumping]

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to raise an objection to debate this Motion here tonight. Madam Speaker, after a long day in this House, to suspend the sitting on the Appropriation Bill, and then to come to do this Motion on the EBC Draft Order, Madam Speaker, without getting proper notice from the Leader of Government Business in giving the Opposition proper time to debate this report, it is unfair and we object to debate this report in this House here at 11.41 p.m. Madam Speaker, this is not the way we do business in this House.

Madam Speaker, this Motion—my Members had been preparing for an Appropriation Bill since Monday when the Minister of Finance read the budget debate, and we were not told that this Motion would be debated here tonight. We heard about it on Monday that they might have debated it on Monday. Madam Speaker, some of my Members had prepared for Monday. We were not told here tonight officially that we were going to debate this Motion here today. And it is unfair, I think, it is in poor taste, it is reckless, the quality has been broken in this House, Madam Speaker, and you know, we cannot continue in this fashion in this House where this Government feels that they can just bulldoze their way with the Opposition, and we could have met, and the Leader of Government Business could have communicated properly with myself as the Chief Whip in trying to get a proper time to debate this Motion, Madam Speaker.

I have Members who are prepared to speak, given that we feel that it is an important Motion, and I must lodge my objection that we are debating this Motion under duress. Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.
Madam Speaker: So you are just objecting, that is all? You are just lodging your objection, because if it were against the debate, I think, it is out of time. Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I join my colleague in expressing our regret at what is happening with respect to this particular debate, but the Member for San Fernando East, while there is some crosstalk, just said that, to use his words, “We are in charge of the affairs of this House”—

Mr. Indarsingh: They run the House.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—and they run the House and therefore, we are in no position to tell them how to run the business of the House, but I think eventually the people of the country will eventually tell you who runs the business of the country, and that will be important at the end of the day.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney, you know, said that it is customary not to make any changes to this particular report because it has come from an independent institution, but you know, when I examine very carefully some of the changes that have been made, I think it is very curious some of the particular boundary changes that have occurred especially in the area of Siparia where one seat that was UNC has now become PNM, and the votes from that particular seat have gone into Mon Desir.

11.45 p.m.

I am just looking, hon. Prime Minister, at the reconfiguration of the seats according to the redistribution and so on. And then in Barataria in the bi-election that just took place there, which reversed the results, and the UNC had won that seat, suddenly there is a big change in terms of the movement of certain PDs and the addition of other PDs, and now it has reversed, if you reapply the votes you
would see that it has reversed the decision back to the PNM. So, while we talk about an independent institution one has to be careful in that you are not creating perceptions in the minds of the population after you have done a thorough analysis that all may not be right in their eyes as far as they perceive it. But then we want to respect the independence of institutions, and one of the things that we do not want to happen is to have a situation where institutions continue to be broken, and continue to be broken to the point where they get into a state of disrepair and then you cannot repair them again, as seem to be happening in so many institutions in the country which you consider a certain level of institutional collapse that is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, even if we had an objection and we express it here, it would make no sense. The Government has the majority and this requires a simple majority, and the Government has already said that they are in charge, so whatever we say here tonight at this hour will make no impression on the Government and will not have any bearing really upon the report, except that our words can only bring to the attention of the public what might be perceived in their minds. But I want to say that we are dealing with a very intelligent population, a population that has sat back and looked at what has gone on in the country over the last four years, and I think that no matter what the changes are that have been made, when the vote does come on December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, as has been announced by the Prime Minister, the people are going to use this vote to register with a strong protest as to what has been happening in this country and to say that we do not like it so, really, as is going on.

The UNC is always determined to work harder, and we will work harder to convince the voting public that there is a better future for local government under the UNC. What concerns me is that when the Government came into office it had
campaigned on a platform of reforming local government, and I think that was important because I am an ardent supporter of local government reform. As I said in my contribution in the debate on the reform, you know, local democracy is really what I support and that requires the active participation of people in the communities in which they live in order to build stronger communities. You cannot build this country by having people sit on the periphery of development decisions, people must be part and parcel of the decision-making process to develop the country. This is why we have alienation and frustration in the country, whenever people do not feel part of something, whenever they do not feel they have an input into something they will just become silent spectators to what is happening and you are going to have a very sorry situation in the country.

So I am concerned that we are going into this election without the completion of the Joint Select Committee report on the reformulation of the legislation. I thought it would be really good if in fact we had the legislation and went into the election with a new Bill, I think that would have been important. So, we are going into this election under the same legislation, old legislation, and I think that will in fact not be a very happy situation for the population who were hoping for some very formidable reforms so as to get a better system of local government, one that is more responsive and one in which really, people would have been full-time councillors with the total time to serve the population.

So, Madam Speaker, you know, no matter what we say here tonight in this debate it is not going to make quite a change. All I can say is that for a lot of us this sounds like a distraction in the middle of the budget debate, an important budget debate, because this budget debate also has tremendous implications for how the economy would take off and what have you, and I really and truly hope that this is not an attempt by the Government to distract and detract from what has
been, in my view, a level of incompetence in dealing with the economy. So, Madam Speaker, I would have preferred to have legislation in place, but as the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney said in her remarks, it has not been the tradition to change anything in the report but to respect the wishes of what she described as an independent institution. Although I think that, you know, when you look at the analysis of the changes it leaves some doubts in the minds of people, unfortunately so. Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Dr. Fuad Khan (Barataria/San Juan):** Just a short intervention, Madam Speaker. Sometimes, you know, when in the old days when I was Deputy Speaker, I was taught a lesson that says that the Government will have its way but the Opposition must have its say. You see, Madam Speaker, this report of the EBC begs the question of displacing of voters, voters who belong to a certain boundary area, they are now displaced in certain parts of the boundaries. Now, the thing about—you displace voters around the place. Somebody belongs to, let us say Barataria that had 1405 in it, now belongs to El Socorro/Aranguez, and that is a problem with some people who are voters in the area, at just a short notice, registration may have to occur in a different boundary and it has to go forward in a different manner.

Now, Madam Speaker, this begs the question. It is a simple thing that begs the question. We have been stuck with this first-past-the-post system for a very long time. This is a classic example of should we not start to think about proportional representation. You see, Madam Speaker, the report of the EBC has shifted boundaries to such an extent that in most of the country certain parts and certain regional corporations, there are changes to the boundaries. Now, when that happens generally speaking, people belong to different areas. Like as the Member for Tabaquite said, in Barataria it has changed and it has shifted to such a manner
that certain PDs when you look at the polling divisions, some of them are oriented
towards the PNM, some oriented to the United National Congress, and you have
shifted the boundaries and now you have changed the strength of different PD,
polling divisions. It has happened in Siparia, it has happened in San Fernando
East, I think it has happened all over the country.

Madam Speaker, I just want to indicate that it might be a wise thing for the
Government as well as the Opposition to get together to decide on a way forward
in this country, because you see, this type of approach produces safe seats,
marginal seats, non-safe seats and different mechanisms. I will tell you, in
Barataria/San Juan once the UNC captures a seat in San Juan/Laventille Regional
Corporation, the funds that would go to that seat are less than the funds that go to
the other seat. You see, Madam Speaker, it all depends on how the EBC works the
system. It is a sort of a system where if you do not belong to the ruling party, that
may have a problem on you getting your goods and services. So it is time—

Hon. Member: That is not so.

Dr. F. Khan: It is so. Whether we want to say it is not happening, Madam
Speaker, trust me it happens in the first-past-the-post system and it happens in this
country, certain people are denied goods and services, maybe it is not so, some
people are not denied goods and services. I have been here long enough, Madam
Speaker, to see it happen, and the utterances usually are illusionary. We work in a
sort of way, illusion, that this does not happen. No, it cannot happen here, we are
all equal and everything else. Madam, it does not work like that.

Madam Speaker, if you had proportional representation with no boundaries
but with a country itself you would not have that kind of mismatch. So what I am
saying, Madam Speaker, with these few words, I think the time has come, looking
at this thing, and I am also objecting at 11.54 tonight, to bring this Bill, right in
front of us, is a bit of an objection. It just shows that one thing, the Government will have its way and the Opposition must have its say. Madam Speaker, I make the plea, and I make the plea very strongly in order to get rid of this negativity of boundaries, shifting of boundaries, constant work by bringing 25,000 electors in a boundary or whatever it may be, that it is time we look at proportional representation and constitutional reform in this country.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I find it quite unfortunate that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would stand in this House and object to this debate, for two reasons. First of all as we all know, this Motion has been on the Order Paper since April the 5th, 2019, so there was notice to the world since April 05, 2019.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, we have had further notice when I informed the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that we were going to have a debate on Monday. The whole of Trinidad knew about this debate being held on Monday. We did not have it, and those on the opposite side indicated that on Monday they were ready. The Motion remained on the Order Paper, notice to the world, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, yesterday evening I sent a message to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre by WhatsApp—

Mr. Lee: WhatsApp?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, WhatsApp, that is—[Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Excuse me. If you have a conversation across the floor with my friend, I would allow you to do that, but outside.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—indicating that we would debate this Motion today.

Mr. Lee: You want to read out the WhatsApp?
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I would not even do that. I could, but Madam Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has a penchant for a certain level of forgetfulness, because the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre indicated at a press conference that those of us on this side were informed by the EBC that we needed to have the debate on Monday. That I told him that. Totally untrue, Madam Speaker. In addition to that, Madam Speaker, you will recall that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had discussions behind the chair when we were debating the Bail Bill, with the—

Dr. Rowley: The anti-gang.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, the anti-gang legislation with the Prime Minister, and then miraculously forgot that that happened. So, Madam Speaker, I am not surprised that today the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre will again stand up and say that he is objecting because they had no notice. And, Madam Speaker, we are not here to have the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre or those on the other side play victim at all in this country, because they are no victims, but they are people that we have to watch, and we know that very, very well. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to remind those opposite us about a budget debate that they held where those of us on this side were threatened that if we did not speak they would wind up the debate, and one after the other—I was not in the House at the time, one after the other, every Member of the Opposition had to speak for fear of the budget debate being wound up, and then, Madam Speaker, they kept Members in this House for 24 hours, and after everybody on this side had spoken then they unleashed everybody on their side. Unchallenged, because they said if we did not speak they would wind up the debate, and we had things to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and so we spoke, and then after that, one by one they spoke unchallenged.
And, Madam Speaker, they want to talk about us saying that we are in charge of the House. Madam Speaker, they have put this country through hell and back [Desk thumping] on every occasion that they were in charge. And let me make the point, Madam Speaker, that in 2014—I heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre objecting and saying that this should not be allowed now. In 2014 during the budget debate, after the agenda had been set for the Standing Finance Committee, and Madam Speaker, you would know that when the agenda is set for Standing Finance Committee, by the next day you start Standing Finance Committee. Those on the other side brought a whole Bill, not a Motion, a Bill to talk about anti-terrorism, and I think it was the Bail Bill, a miscellaneous provisions Bill—

Hon. Member: Proceeds of Crime.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Proceeds of Crime, anti-terrorism and so on, 2014. I do not care how many speakers, but you cannot say that this is unprecedented and you are objecting. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, those of us on this side pay no regard to such an objection, because on more than one occasion we have had the indignity of having to suffer through those on the other side changing every precedent in Trinidad and Tobago, changing everything that we held sacred in this country. And, Madam Speaker, despite the fact that we would prefer not to do this at this time, during the budget debate, we have to do it, and they cannot stand here and say that it is unprecedented. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I would also like to make the point that the Member for Tabaquite conveniently did not indicate, he is saying that changes were made and they would be to the benefit of the PNM, trying to give the impression that the EBC is not independent. But, Madam Speaker, he conveniently forgot that the El Socorro, Arouca North—
Hon. Member: Aranguez North.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Aranguez North seat may probably give a benefit to the UNC. Conveniently forgot that, but saying that—trying to give the impression that the EBC is not independent. Will you all hold nothing sacred in this country?

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the Member talked about holding this election with the local government reform Bill already passed. Madam Speaker, we would have all loved that to happen, but it is before a Joint Select Committee, and the Member is a member of that committee, and they are the ones who on more than one occasion refused to allow the funding for local government as had been predicted. And, Madam Speaker, I hear the two Members who spoke talking about funding for local government. Madam Speaker, when we were the Opposition, the City of Port of Spain was neglected because they did not give funding to the City of Port of Spain. On both occasions. When the national library was to be built, they allowed pumpkin to grow up on that spot and would not give money for that building because they were emptying out Port of Spain. They did that on the first occasion that they were in charge of the Government, and again during the period 2010 to 2015, neglected Port of Spain. Madam Speaker, they neglected Diego Martin, they neglected all the corporations that they were not in control of, and now they—

Dr. Rambachan: That is not true.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: That is very true, and you know that Tabaquite. You know that.

Dr. Rambachan: I approved $37 million for Mr. Lee Sing to buy equipment for Port of Spain.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite, as an experienced Member, you know if you want to make an interruption you do it in a particular kind of way.
Dr. Rambachan: Very well.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, their conscience could not be clear when they make that statement. Madam Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan talked about proportional representation. Madam Speaker, they are the—when they were in Government they brought a Bill here to change the system of local government by introducing a form of proportional representation in local government.

So, Madam Speaker, I find it laughable that the Member for Barataria/San Juan could talk about that, because they are the ones who tried to bring proportional representation incrementally into the system. And, Madam Speaker, it exists now in local government, so I do not know what the Member for Barataria/San Juan was trying to say. And he is also saying that there should be no boundaries—

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that, in local government.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—in local government. I am just nonplussed, I am perplexed. [Crosstalk] No, he cannot explain because that is inexplicable what he is saying.

Madam Speaker, we on this side are saying that this is an order that has been done by the independent EBC looking in through a mathematical formula that they have examined the entire country of Trinidad. They have looked at the 14 municipal corporations. They have done their work under the law of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, despite the fact that the Member for Tabaquite tried to give the impression that perhaps we could sit here and change it, that is not done. And so, Madam Speaker, I commend the Motion and the Order to this House, and I beg to move. [Desk thumping]
Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2019 be approved.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday the 14th day of October, 2019, at 10.00 a.m. Madam Speaker, we will continue debate on the Appropriation Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.08 a.m.