

*Leave of Absence*

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

**SENATE**

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning and Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams, who are both out of the country.

**SENATORS' APPOINTMENT**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Professor George Maxwell Richards, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D.

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/ G. Richards  
President.

TO: MR. OVERAND PADMORE

WHEREAS Senator Hazel Manning is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, OVERAND PADMORE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Hazel Manning.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 5<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2007.”

*Senators' Appointment*  
[MADAM PRESIDENT]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/ G. Richards  
President.

TO: MRS. MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH

WHEREAS Senator Joan Yuille-Williams is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Joan Yuille-Williams.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 5<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2007.”

#### OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

*Senators Overand Padmore and Magna Williams-Smith took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

#### APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[Fourth Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 03, 2007]:*

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed*

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the following Senators spoke on Wednesday, September 05, 2007: Sen. Anthony Sammy, Sen. Angela Cropper,

Sen. The Hon Christine Sahadeo, Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph, Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan, Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams and Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC.

**Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir:** Thank you, Madam President. We have listened over the last few days to a wide spectrum of views and perspectives on the budget for the fiscal year 2007/2008. The contributions have generated a great deal of interest on the part of all our citizens, both within and without this honourable Chamber.

Let me begin by joining with some of my fellow Senators in congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance, as well as both Ministers in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill and Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo on this 2008 budget.

Minister Christine Sahadeo referred to this budget as the "poor man's" budget, but when I read the measures contained in this budget, it appears to me that Christmas has come in September, because there are goodies for everyone. [*Desk thumping*] From infants to the aged to the physically challenged and to the business sector, there is something for everyone. The increased benefits from NIS; the increase in pensions and senior citizens and other grants; the wage increases and the various business tax incentives will impact positively on the lives of a large section of our community.

Madam President, considerable discussion has already been generated on various aspects of this budget, so I will confine my contribution to highlighting just a few areas of concern, which need to be addressed.

Let me start with education. It is gratifying to note that education continues to top the list as the main focus of the Government. Education and training will receive \$7.6 billion or 18 per cent of the total budget of over \$42 billion. Investing in our human capital translates into investing in our future. Unlike our colonial past, education is no longer a privilege of the rich and the influential. From early childhood to tertiary level education is now available to all. [*Desk thumping*]

I have said this before, and I will say it again, never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has there ever been so many training and educational programmes available to the public. [*Desk thumping*] The truth must be told and the truth must be told loudly. [*Desk thumping*].

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. ANMOLSINGH-MAHABIR]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

These programmes have been enunciated and articulated on many occasions by several Ministers, for example, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Sen. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid; the hon. Minister of Education, Sen. Hazel Manning and the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Sen. Joan Yuille-Williams.

Let me also take this opportunity at this time, to thank Sen. Satish Ramroop for the prompt provision of a package containing information of how to access most of these programmes to Members of this august Senate. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to suggest that similar packages be sent to every library in Trinidad and Tobago, so that this useful information will be readily available to our students and the wider public. Because, having the programmes is a good thing, but the public must know how to access these programmes. There can be no doubt that an improved quality of life can only be achieved through education and this must continue to be our priority.

However, there is an area in which I have a serious concern. After allocating so much of the country's resources to the beneficiaries of free education, especially free tertiary education, we need to put mechanisms in place along the way to inculcate a sense of giving back to the community or to the country.

You see, we must be careful not to nurture a syndrome of "gimme, gimme"; that negative sense of value of being able to receive benefits from the country without giving back to the country. I believe that we must operate from the perspective of the great American President, John F. Kennedy who stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Indeed, we must inculcate a sense of patriotism, a sense of duty and create an obligation on the part of every recipient to succeed and help others to succeed.

Madam President, I am aware that the Ministry of Education is presently engaged in consultations with a wide range of stakeholders to review the Education Act. This consultative approach to improve and update the archaic Education Act is commendable. The Education Discussion Group, of which I am a member, will be forwarding to the Minister several proposals. Among them, a change in the compulsory school age; parental responsibilities; school management and even a controversial issue, the licensing of teachers. A comprehensive package will be forwarded to the Minister for her consideration. [*Desk thumping*]

**1.45 p.m.**

Madam President, I now turn my attention to the Ministry which has received the second largest allocation, the sum of \$4.4 billion or 10.5 per cent of the budget, the Ministry of National Security.

Madam President, I make no apology to state that crime continues to be the number one problem in Trinidad and Tobago. In spite of several costly initiatives by this Ministry, our citizens continue to live in fear of being the next victim of violent crime. Lawlessness continues to prevail on our streets; the crime detection rate is unacceptably low. Much has been said on this matter by other Senators, so I will not belabour the point.

The Minister of National Security went to great pains yesterday to explain the process he is following to bring about positive transformation in the protective services, and while I can understand the length of time it takes to effect change, the public wants to see tangible results and they need to see them urgently.

They want to see the use of modern technology to speed up the process. For example, if you cannot provide visible police presence where they are needed, then where are the surveillance cameras to assist the process? We need to see urgent action.

Apart from internal security, we must also turn our attention to external security, which takes me into the realm of Foreign Affairs, and let me commend the Minister on the good job he is doing. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs in his contribution to this debate stated, and I quote:

“We are in the process of reviewing Trinidad and Tobago's foreign policy to bring it more in line with the thrust of the Government's programme to achieve developed country status by the year 2020.

Further, we are moving swiftly to restructure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into a more modern agency capable of adapting readily to the new policy shifts, while embracing the complexities of a fully developed, modern society.”

Madam President, on page 106 of the document, *Government at your Service*, it states:

"International Agreements signed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago included:

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. ANMOLSINGH-MAHABIR]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

Framework treaty relating to the unitization of Hydrocarbon Reservoirs that extend across the Delimitation Line between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela—March 2007."

This is an achievement. It is always wise to keep a cordial relationship with one's neighbour, especially a powerful one. But historically speaking, Trinidad and Tobago had always faced the possible threats from the hegemonistic, expansionist foreign policy of Venezuela. This position is nothing new, because this view has been articulated in the 1970s, by the then astute father of the nation, Dr. Eric Williams. In the book entitled *Forged from the Love of Liberty—Selected Speeches of Dr. Eric Williams*, there is a very relevant and insightful speech entitled, "The Threat to the Caribbean Community". The information therein is relevant today as it was then.

In the light of present developments, along with the strengthening of our relationship with the African States, India and Asia, Trinidad and Tobago may wish to explore the possibility of taking the initiative and bringing into being, a Washington/Port of Spain/Brasília axis. This may help to stem the tide of disruptive influences in the region and to assist in protecting its economic and political interest.

Madam President, as our oil and gas reserves on the land diminish, we will have to venture further and further out to sea in our exclusive economic zone, and this may possibly incur conflict with our neighbour who is clearly on an expansionist mode. Call it Machiavellian if you wish, I call it prudence. One must be aware of the possibilities and act accordingly to maintain the delicate balance of power in the geopolitical arena.

Madam President, there is another area of concern that I would like to touch on before I conclude and this deals with the delivery of services to the public. Let me make it abundantly clear that I do not subscribe to the view that the Government has done nothing, has achieved nothing and will achieve nothing through this year's budget; it would be to fly in the face of reality. The Government has achieved some measures of progress in quite a few areas as enumerated by several Government Ministers. But there is the opposite side to that coin as well, where there is little progress and even decline and these have been identified by several other Senators. Again, there is the grey area where it is difficult to discern progress or regress. I speak directly to the delivery of services in general, that is, delivery of services to the public.

Madam President, there is a saying that to whom much is given, much is expected, and with the enormous wealth flowing through this country, there is a rising expectation from the public for improved delivery of services at all levels of the public and private sectors, but particularly of the public sector which is funded by the taxpayers. When one reads the newspapers and listens to the call-in programmes on the radio stations, there has been an increasing crescendo of lamentations by the public over the quality of treatment that they have to endure from the public servants.

Madam President, let me refer to a letter to the editor in the *Guardian* newspaper dated Friday, August 31, 2007, page 28. The headline is, "Treated like dog at gov office". Sad. Let me quickly quote some excerpts from this letter:

"We the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are dogs, but not even a dog should have to go through what I and hordes of other dogs experience ..."

And it goes on to explain in detail what occurred. The writer, as I said, goes on to describe what happened, the gruelling experience and states after the ordeal and I quote:

"The shock for me was the extremely rude, brutish, condescending and abusive treatment that I experienced at the hands of this clerk. I cannot adequately convey it in words. How does he get away with this kind of behaviour? Who is accountable? What recourse does a dog have?"

Madam President, this may be an extreme case, but we cannot deny that it happens. What recourse does the man in the street have to address this problem? At times, one feels helpless because it is pointless to complain to a supervisor since it is very rare that any disciplinary action is taken. Perhaps, what we may need to do is to improve our attitudes to our work. It is a start. Having valiantly battled and negotiated for improved salary and working conditions, it is hoped that unions are also urging their workers to provide and deliver efficient and courteous service to the public.

In related matters, Madam President, just this morning I received a letter from a Commissioner of Affidavit, one Mr. Andrew Roopsingh, drawing my attention to several shortcomings in the preparation of birth certificates. The main complaint being that officers appeared to be improperly trained in many areas of operation, namely, knowledge of East Indian names, names in general and geographical places. I know that the Minister of Legal Affairs takes pride in the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. ANMOLSINGH-MAHABIR]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

efficient running of her Ministry, so I feel assured that the suggestions submitted would be taken on board—I would provide the Minister with the letter and the provisions for assisting in that area.

In winding up, Madam President, we have just celebrated 45 years of Independence, and in this context of work ethics, it may be timely to recall the words that the father of the nation, Dr. Eric Williams delivered on August 31, 1962 and I quote:

"This is what I meant when I gave the nation its slogan for all time: Discipline, Production, Tolerance. Indiscipline, whether individual or sectional, is a threat to democracy. Slacking on the job jeopardises the national income, inflates costs, and merely sets a bad example. The medieval churchmen had a saying that to work is to pray. It is also to strengthen our democracy by improving our economic foundations. "

Madam President, we should take heed to these words of wisdom. I thank you.  
[*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo):** Thank you very much, Madam President. It is a pleasure for me to stand in support of this year's budget. I am speaking after four days of budget debate in this place, but I am grateful that I am afforded the opportunity to do it at this stage, if only for the reason that a great deal of time has been spent by the Opposition in saying little of value, and I think it is important that we be reminded at this stage of what is important about this budget.

Madam President, this budget like the others before it, presented by this administration, is about two simple, but critical things. It is about placing people at the centre and it is about focusing on the future. Both Senators Ramadhar-Singh and Cropper touched upon these features. In my experience, Sen. Cropper usually gets the point and so she ran contrary to form, when towards the end of her otherwise valuable contribution, she assessed the budget as not focusing effectively on the future.

Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh on the other hand, new as he is to matters of national governance, hardly ever gets the point and so his suggestion that in this budget the administration has failed to place people at the centre is just more of the kind of "ol' talk" he probably used to pass off in his days of undergraduate politics on students who did not know any better. Fortunately, Madam President,

we on this side do know better. I will come into more detail about Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh's attempt to contribute to this debate in a little while, but for now, suffice it to say that once again, his contribution missed the point.

Madam President, when we on this side talk about putting people at the centre, our performance beats anybody's "ol' talk", any time. It will surprise no one and it is in all likelihood precisely the case, that of all the administrations this country has seen, this administration leads the pack in programmes and in policies designed to assist the vulnerable sections of our society.

In fact, this administration's commitment to the man in the street is so well known, that it has become almost a national pastime to jump up and criticize us for handouts, and to vilify the billions of dollars invested in social development programmes, as fostering a dependency syndrome.

**2.00 p.m.**

Madam President, that is only popular because it is the easiest and laziest thing to do. Those who are too intellectually indolent to try any harder, like our friends on the Opposition Benches, simply cannot resist making a quick buck and sail effortlessly against that tired tide of empty rhetoric. So Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh, despite his experience at UWI, his contribution was typical of that kind of intellectual indolence. Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh cannot have it both ways. This is not student politics where you can do what you want with student funds without any accountability. This is the real world where you have to manage whatever resources there are in country. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** The Senator is imputing improper motives. We have to strike that off.

**Madam President:** I honestly do not know if the Minister was referring to anything. I have no knowledge.

**Sen. Dr. Kernahan:** She spoke about student funds and she called his name.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** She mentioned an area of student funds while he was President of the Guild at UWI. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** If that is the case, I did not hear it. [*Crosstalk*] Members! Please, Senator, let me make the decision. [*Crosstalk*]

Senator, I do not think you would usually do something like that. I did not get that feeling, but I would rather we did not go that way.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** Madam President, I cannot account for any sensitivity. I did not say specifically anything about Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh.

**Sen. Abdul-Hamid:** I will say it in my contribution! [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** I have had the privilege of working with the Ministry of Legal and Consumer Affairs and I can tell you, without any fear of contradiction, that the Ministry's focus over the past fiscal year has been on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and on improving the quality and range of services they access on a daily basis. [*Crosstalk*] This is something the Ministry intends to build on over the next fiscal year.

**Madam President:** Members, I cannot hear what the Minister is saying!

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** As far as focusing on the future is concerned, I am proud to be able to say that over the last fiscal year the Ministry has brought on stream many initiatives which have catapulted this tiny country of ours into a small band of countries in the world with similar services and which have made us leaders in innovation in the areas of e-government and technology. So before I come to the Ministry's several initiatives with respect to putting people at the centre and focusing on the future, I just need to make some brief responses to some of the contributions made thus far.

Let me start with Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark seems to be suffering from among other things, a terrible case of "investigitis". He wants everybody and everything investigated. The affliction clearly affected the quality of his contribution. We are not surprised that anybody on his side should be suffering from "investigitis"; that seems to be their everyday experience, because every Monday morning one of them is in court answering a charge or is under some kind of investigation; so we do not judge Sen. Mark too harshly for that.

That apart, he seems to be seeing the writing on the wall and he allowed himself to get carried away by his own desperation when he said that social development in the country has worsened under this administration. I do not know where Sen. Mark has been for the last five years, but wherever it was, it is obvious that he has been asleep. There is biblical advice for people who are asleep and know not that they are asleep.

**Sen. Abdul-Hamid:** "He brain dead!"

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** I suggest that Sen. Mark's colleagues may wish to take it, especially if the rumour about him harbouring certain political

ambitions as regards Pointe-a-Pierre are true. *[Laughter]* I can tell him for free, looking at it from my seat, that ambition is doomed to be disappointing. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]* He should wake up to that fact.

He also spoke mysteriously about levels of misery and falling standards. Of course, he will be intimately familiar with those concepts, because of the political organization that he has associated himself with. *[Crosstalk]*

The truth is that citizens of this country have never in all of our history had a better chance at economic well-being than they have had under this administration. *[Desk thumping]* Poverty, as we know, has fallen to 16.7 per cent from some 35 per cent in the 1990s. So we wish Sen. Mark a speedy recovery from his "investigitis" and from his delusion that people in this country are worse off today.

**Sen. Abdul-Hamid:** "He getting over that after the election!"

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** Sen. Ahmed described the budget as a whisper of sweet nothings, giving the impression that she has been reading far too many romance novels, those Mills & Boon novels that we used to read as teenagers. *[Laughter]* If anything was a whisper of sweet nothings, it was Sen. Ahmed's contribution.

She spoke disparagingly about the administration's social development programmes; she described them as being pittance handouts, tiny programmes creating weed whackers. I wonder if Sen. Ahmed would be prepared to put her money where her mouth is and tell that to the hundreds of families who can now put a decent meal on their table, because of this administration's social programmes. *[Desk thumping]*

I wonder whether she would be prepared to leave that comfortable soft chair in this Chamber and tell the children of the thousands of fathers and mothers who now have jobs with CEPEP, that their parents are weed whackers. *[Crosstalk]* I wonder whether she would be prepared to tell the thousands of citizens in the country who can now make ends meet because of this administration, that they are hangers-on, surviving on pittance handouts and that the programmes that have restored dignity and literally saved their lives, are tiny things. I wonder whether she would be prepared, while she does all these things, to tell the country exactly what her administration did for the poor and vulnerable when they were in power. *[Crosstalk]*

But you know, Madam President, if anything should have alerted us to Sen. Ahmed's loss of grip on reality, it was her statement that this administration has

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

destroyed agriculture and that if those opposed to us were ever to be returned to power they would put agriculture on the front burner. I think there are really just two questions that would put an end to that kind of tomfoolery: Who, the Opposition? And when, now?

When they had it for six years to do and when the national community felt that if anyone's heart was in doing it, it may have been theirs, where was all Sen. Ahmed's talk? More Mills & Boon fantasy.

This administration has had the courage to do what the former administration did not, the wisdom to do it well and the heart to do it compassionately. Of course, none of these qualities we expect those on the opposite side to have.

We wish Sen. Ahmed the courage to say what she has safely said here, outside this Chamber, to the thousands of people who have felt the caring of an understanding Government, and we wish her the wisdom and the heart to realize that she needs to apologize to them for denigrating their means of honest survival. [*Crosstalk*]

What should we say about Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh? We cannot say too much, after his comment that under the Panday administration there was prudent fiscal management. Imagine that! We on this side are not exactly clear what prudent fiscal management was during those six years or what he finds so impressive about it. Is it the way they prudently managed their private fiscal affairs to the detriment of the public? Just some advice to Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh: Do not try to defend the indefensible. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Abdul-Hamid:** A \$95,000 for a door.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** I just need to respond briefly to Sen. Cropper's comment which she made towards the end of her contribution, that there was no difference in the philosophies of the political parties in the country today. If she was referring to the Opposition political parties, we would all be inclined to agree with her; six of one, half a dozen of the other. They have changed partners so many times, that they could act on the Young and the Restless. [*Laughter*] But in respect of agriculture and the comments that Sen. Cropper made, she asked whether what we were doing now for agriculture was a knee-jerk reaction. My response to her is "No".

The large farms were conceptualized with assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organization. The issues she raised with respect to the Chaguaramas farms were all concerns that are being addressed as we set up the farms. I want to

refer Sen. Cropper to an article in the *Daily Express* of Friday, August 24, 2007. The heading is:

"New dawn in agriculture for farmers"

Yesterday my colleague Sen. Sahadeo spoke about the Trinidad and Tobago Agri Business Association. This article starts by saying:

"Despite the rain, farmers yesterday joyously shared a truck with 5,000 pawpaw plants which they are to cultivate in their shift from sugar cane to food crops.

On Monday they will begin cultivation of more than 28 acres of pawpaw utilizing a total of 30,000 plants...made available to them by...TTABA.

Leading the farmers group, President of the Cane Producers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, Seukeran Tambie, said that pawpaw production announced a new dawn in agriculture for the farmers in the Valley Line district of Barrackpore."

This Government has said that we are focusing on agriculture. The article I have just read shows our commitment. Things have already started to happen and will continue to happen in a big way in agriculture. That is the commitment of this Government.

Sen. Cropper also asked about the Children's Authority, I believe. Yesterday Sen. Yuille-Williams spoke about the package of legislation, but Sen. Cropper also said that you could not find any reference to the funding for the Children's Authority. My information is that under the Consolidated Fund, Public Sector Investment Programme, at page 127, there is funding for the Children's Authority. It is also included under the recurrent expenditure. So that also shows this Government's commitment to the Children's Authority.

Madam President, let me just talk about the work of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. I start with the work we have been doing through the Consumer Affairs Division. Everyone will know that the Consumer Affairs Division has been publishing fruit and vegetable prices, food prices of certain items and hardware and poultry prices. All these publications now come out regularly in the newspapers. We feel that there is a new era of consumer awareness in Trinidad and Tobago due to the work of the Consumer Affairs Division.

The Central Bank reports which are given on a monthly basis, talk about the fact that these publications are assisting the public in the fight against high food

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

prices, because comparison shopping can be done now and the consumer is affected. So the Consumer Affairs Division has been doing a tremendous amount of work in this regard.

In addition, the Consumer Affairs Division sought to decentralize its services further, so last year we opened an office in San Fernando offering full-time services. We now have offices at Rio Claro and Couva which offer part-time services. We have been collaborating with the Ministry of Social Development and participating in the Social Development Community Caravan, which so far has gone into Beetham, Couva, Sangre Grande, Tabaquite, Point Fortin and Port of Spain, where it has provided consumer advice to more than 1,500 persons. We have also established a toll free line for the Consumer Affairs Division as well. All these efforts are towards decentralizing the services of the Consumer Affairs Division.

**2.15 p.m.**

Madam President, consumer awareness and empowerment are essential tools in creating the kind of educated consumer who would characterize the market in 2020. However, within this changing environment, consumer awareness and empowerment must be matched by a strong legislative framework. You may recall that a Green Paper on the reform of the consumer legislation was laid in Parliament and in October last year a contract was awarded for the provision of consultancy services for the development of the new legislation in Trinidad and Tobago.

So far, the first three deliverables under this project have been received and accepted. These are:

1. The reports on existing local policies, legislation and practices;
2. The report on regional and international commitment in the area of consumer protection;
3. The report on international trends and best practices in consumer protection; and
4. The consumer protection in the information age, 'The Way Forward'.

This fourth deliverable was received by the Ministry of Legal Affairs on September 03, 2007 and is being reviewed by the steering committee for this specific project.

So as the business practices change and consumers' demands increase, we recognize the need to ensure that our legislative framework remains dynamic and provides the highest level of protection empowerment to consumers.

The new consumer legislation will therefore address consumer protection gaps, ensure regional harmonization of standards and support Government's strategies for promoting innovation and growth in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, with the new consumer legislation we would see that our consumers are given the right tools and would be afforded effective redress. The new consumer legislation will be expected to provide for the introduction of a Small Claims Court or a specialized consumer tribunal which will be governed by less formal rules and allow for the fast and effective resolution of disputes.

Madam President, in keeping with Government's Vision 2020 operational goals, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has implemented extensive technological infrastructure aimed at improving service delivery for our clients. In fact, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is one of the forerunners in terms of readiness for the e-Government backbone project.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs enhanced technical infrastructure is a key strength because it plays a fundamental role in efficient service delivery. Under the section "Promoting Effective Government," the Vision 2020 operational plan lists the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as a key tool to improve operational efficiency and accessibility of services. One of the many departments of the Ministry of Legal Affairs that effectively uses this technology is the Companies Registry through the Companies Online Search Facility.

As everyone here should recall, this Companies Online Search Facility was inaugurated on March 13, 2007 via the service using web-based technology, anyone anywhere in the world can electronically search the scanned images of companies and business names documents that currently exist in the Companies Business Names Registry.

This has created a more efficient service delivery and subscribers can access the database from their home or offices. In fact, while it would have taken five working days to get a document at the Companies Registry, it can now take seconds depending on the user's line connection or bandwidth capacity and the number of documents to be downloaded. Comparable services are offered by Jamaica and Bermuda regionally and the United Kingdom, Canada and Northern Ireland internationally.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

Madam President, before you accuse me of blowing the Ministry of Legal Affairs trumpet, let me refer to an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* on Thursday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006 at page 21. It was a commentary by the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce. We had just given them a demonstration of this service we were about to offer, and I quote from the article.

“At long last, T&T is positively moving towards the attainment of the benchmarks set by other similar type registries in the world...”

That was the reception we got when we introduced this service.

I move on to yet another initiative of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and it has to do with the computer-generated birth certificate. A lot has been said about this facility over the last few months, but despite all the challenges, the free computer-generated birth certificate is a very rewarding initiative. The electronically generated birth certificate is the vehicle through which each national of Trinidad and Tobago will receive a unique, personal identification number (PIN) upon the registration of the birth record.

Currently, the PIN is used by the Immigration Department as it is an integral part of the process for the issue of the new machine-readable passport. In the long term, it will support functions of all ministries and agencies which need the ability to uniquely identify each individual. It is an essential element of the population registration system which will ultimately serve as a means of uniquely identifying all citizens.

This programme commenced in July 2003 and as at August 08, 2007 some 656,142 computer-generated birth certificates have been issued. Other countries in the region have offered this type of birth certificate; Jamaica, St. Vincent and Dominica but we are the only country that offers the first copy of this electronic birth certificate free of charge. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we have been having some difficulties with the programme recently. There has been much misinformation and miscommunication with respect to this programme. Let me just give one of the typical ones. A typical example would be someone whose birth was registered and the person was not given a name. Thereafter the person would use his birth certificate with a declaration—some people call it an affidavit—really it is a statutory declaration attached to it.

People who have been using their birth certificate with that declaration have been assuming that the computer-generated birth certificate will put the name now on the certificate, but that cannot happen because the legislation that governs the

registration of births—it is your original birth record. All we are doing is transcribing the information from your original birth record to the computer-generated birth certificate, and the legislation gives you a 12-month period.

So, if someone was born and was not given a name at the time, but within 12 months of the first registration they came back and said I have called my child David, then the name can be inserted on the birth record. As I understand it, it cannot be done after that. So a lot of misinformation has gone out, we have tried to clarify, we have even published these frequently asked questions pamphlets about the computer-generated birth certificate and we have sent the information to ministries and public bodies so people would understand it is not the Ministry of Legal Affairs, it is not Minister Kangaloo taking away your name. This is what your original birth record has, and this is what you are getting on the computer-generated birth certificate.

So despite those teething problems and what we are getting now because of course, there is an increased demand for that service, we still think it is something where we have seen technology really enhance our service capabilities.

At our Head Office at Port of Spain we offer a same-day delivery, you apply for it in the morning and you can collect it the same day.

**Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie:** Madam President, may I ask a question, please? Madam Minister, do you need to say that after you have gotten the computer-generated birth certificate without the name, just as you did with the old one where you did not have a name and you got a statutory declaration, that you can now use that new computer-generated birth certificate and get a statutory declaration with all the information you had on that declaration attached to the old birth certificate and it will be attached to the new computer-generated certificate and it will be just as good?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** Madam President, I have a little difficulty with what has been happening with the new birth certificates. Remember we had said that the old, handwritten birth certificate is still valid. So I have a view, and I have been telling my officers that if someone gets the new computer-generated birth certificate, still has the old birth certificate and the declaration attached to it, to me, that should be enough to present to an authority, or to the immigration department to show this is it. There are some people who are 90 years old and they do not have people who can swear a declaration and it is my view that this can be handled by the other authority in this way: Look at the old birth certificate

with the declaration, you have your new one, and therefore, they can accept this is the person. We have tried to tell people that but I cannot account for what other agencies will ask for. That is what we have been saying at the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

**Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie:** The problem is, as you said there are many old people who do not have someone to swear to the statutory declaration because you must have someone who is at least five years older than you are. So if you are 90, it is hard to find somebody who is 95 who could even remember, so let us forget that.

The disadvantage to the people is when they go to get their new machine-readable passport it takes a longer time because you are using the old birth certificate than it would take if you are using the new one. So people who want it quickly—and remember it is the old people who want it quickly, they are impatient, and do not want to wait long. This is the problem why some of them are reluctant to accept the fact that there is a sort of disadvantage.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** What I am saying, Madam President, is that you have the new birth certificate which has been generated, you still have your old one with the declaration and, therefore, you can take both so the Immigration Department will be able to check the information one against the other and accept it. That is what we are trying to let people know now and this is also in the frequently asked questions brochure we have published. We are really trying to work it out because we have put things in place, we have created departments to deal with these issues in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and I certainly hope that no one will say that they have been treated like dogs in the Ministry of Legal Affairs because we have really sought to deal with the influx of people in the limited space that we have. That is how I am suggesting it should be dealt with.

**Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir:** Madam President, I would also like to draw the Minister's attention to the fact that transferring the information from the handwritten birth certificate to the electronic system there is a problem in the transference of data where names are spelt incorrectly and you still have to use a statutory declaration. The Minister needs to be aware of that as well.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** Madam President, sometimes because we are dealing with handwritten records in transcribing from one book to another, you would sometimes see some differences in the names. What should be done in a case where you get a computer-generated birth certificate and something is misspelt, we then have to go to the original records and seek to correct it. So we are not going to tell you to get a declaration unless your original birth record carries that difference in the spelling.

The crux of the matter is that whatever is in your original birth record is supposed to be on the computer-generated birth certificate, but we have had strange situations. We have had people who have spelt their names all their life as C-h-r-i-s-t-i-n-e only to come now and when the computer-generated certificate is given to them you see C-h-r-i-s-t-e-e-n and it is checked and the original birth record has C-h-r-i-s-t-e-e-n, those things cannot be changed. Those are some of the strange issues with which we have had to deal. But I still say that this programme in terms of the service we are giving persons, the fact that you can get your birth certificate on the same day—and at the head office, we deal with about 1,500 a day—is good.

In January 2007, the service was introduced to Tobago and you can get it within five days of ordering it at the Tobago office. It used to be 21 days and sometimes it would take up to two months, so that is the kind of service delivery we have been able to accomplish with the use of technology.

**2.30 p.m.**

I just want to say, in respect of Tobago, that very soon we are going to be giving a same-day service as well. With respect to technology and our land registry—I have spoken about the Companies Registry; the Civil Registry—let me just say that we have been using information technology to increase the rate at which we offer our services in the land registry. There is something that we are about to embark on which has me very excited and I just have to tell you about it. Normally when you have to register a deed, you have to register the deed and then it has to be scanned; it has to go to the data entry unit for it to get on to the system. Sometimes, because of the vagaries of the public service, you may find that your data entry clerks did not turn up for a particular period of time so there will be a lag in entering the data. Of course, that will make it difficult for attorneys who have to do searches to expedite their transactions.

Recently, we have committed to a new type of software that will allow you, once you fill out a particular form on the computer—it will be available on our website; you download it; you fill it out—when you come and you present that form to the Ministry of Legal Affairs when you are registering the deed, once that form is scanned, the data comes on to the system. So no longer will you need the data entry people to be putting it on to the system. That, therefore, means that attorneys or anyone who has a business transaction; someone is buying a home, their transactions will now be able to go through in a faster period of time. So that is something that we are very excited about and we are about to embark on that as well.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

I just want to say that we are upgrading our software in the Civil Registry. That upgrade is also very imminent and what is going to happen is that district registrars will now be able to transmit electronically, the birth records for their particular areas. So that also is going to expedite the whole process of the registration of births.

You may recall a very proud moment for the Ministry of Legal Affairs, but really for the Government, when I announced the law revision process. You may recall that I have said time and time again, the significance of the law revision exercise. Prior to it, there was a 20-year backlog of legislation that had not been incorporated into the substantive law. Therefore, that caused research to be very difficult, to be very tedious. Prior to when I stood in this Senate and announced the completion of the law revision exercise, the laws were last revised up to December 31, 1977 and were published in 1980 by the authority of the Law Revision Order, No. 1 of 1980.

We revised the laws up to December 31, 2004, but we did not just stop there. You may remember that the new revised edition of the laws was made available free of charge on the website of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. After that, we produced CD-ROMS of the laws. Everyone here got his or her CD-ROM and I hope everyone has been making use of those CD-ROMS. But I wish to tell this honourable Senate that revision of the 2005 and 2006 laws is well under way; it should be completed by the end of this year and the website will be updated to incorporate those laws passed. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is determined that there will not be that delay in revising the laws ever again in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am a little disappointed because I was hoping to show Members of this honourable Chamber what the new revised laws in the bound volumes would look like, because in addition to the CD-ROMS, we told you that we are also going to have them available in bound volumes. I just want to tell you because of Hurricanes Dean and Felix, they were to be shipped; they should have been here already but, of course, now that has been delayed somewhat. The new revised laws will be in the red volumes in some 31 volumes, including the index. These black laws came in some 17 volumes when they were published 20 years ago. So that very soon those laws will be in the country and will be distributed.

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** Can I just ask, through you, Madam President, whether the volumes will reflect what is online in the parts. Is it the same?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** As I understand it, yes.

So I have given you an outline of some of the programmes of the Ministry of Legal Affairs where we have used information technology; I have spoken about the Register General's—the registries; I have spoken about the law revision exercise, forgive me, but I have to move on and speak about the Intellectual Property Office of the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

This office really supports the two development pillars: enabling competitive business and developing innovative people. I feel I should just give you a little update on some of the issues on which I had spoken about previously. One such issue is the issue of the steel pan. You may recall the public outcry about the granting of patents by the United States Patent and Trademark Office, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had said that it would respond to the granting of these patents. So I just wish to inform my colleagues here that the two requests have been made to the United States patent office; one is in respect of the production of a Caribbean steel pan. That was filed on February 15, 2007, and the other was filed on April 23, 2007, in respect of the cycle of fifth steel pan.

These matters can take several months and more than one year to be completed, but there could be an indication in a few months, of the direction that the United States Patent and Trademark Office may take. If both proprietors decide not to challenge any contrary findings, the matter could be completed in less than a year. The filing of re-examination request is significant as it demonstrates this Government's commitment to aggressively defending our cultural patrimony from misappropriation.

With respect to the Intellectual Property Office, I also wish to say that this office has been making use of the ICT. We have, for example, for registration of trademarks, before you register a trademark, what you have to do is do a search. This search can now be done electronically from the attorney's office and the results of that search will also be forwarded to the attorneys, and we are moving on to use information technology to, of course, expedite the time frames within which the Intellectual Property Office offers its services.

I just want to say that the Intellectual Property Office, the statistics have shown that the trademark applications have been increasing over the years. For example, in 2004, there were 1,102 trademark applications filed; in 2006, there were 1,291 trademark applications filed and as of August 31, 2007, we already have some 777 applications being filed. In respect of patents, we also see that the number of patents has increased. In 2004 there were 225 patents filed; in 2006, some 281 patent applications were filed, and as of August 31, of this year, we have some 233 applications filed already.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

Sen. King has raised certain issues about patents and I want to tell you here that when we look at the statistics, we see that the number of local applications filed is really quite small and, therefore, we need to take heed of what Sen. King has raised in her contribution about the patents and developing research and development. So it is something that we will be dealing with. As you remember, Madam President, the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill has been laid in this Senate. By this Bill we are seek to enforce our copyright amendment laws, to seek better enforcement of these laws. Of course, all of that is with the view of protecting our local artistes; their heritage.

The Intellectual Property Office also is involved in a lot of public education and sensitization campaigns and they will continue with these campaigns because we need to also move in with the businesses so that people can get an idea of how intellectual property should be included in our business plans. We feel that it is very important that this information in these times—that we start giving out this information. So we will continue on our sensitization campaigns.

I believe, Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, through you, Madam President, that we will be coming to Tobago very soon because it is part of our 10-year celebration of the Intellectual Property Office. This year the office will be celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> year in existence and we will be setting up a clinic in Tobago very soon so that we can sensitize members of the public and business owners, about how they can use intellectual property to their benefit.

I have given you an outline of what the Ministry of Legal Affairs has accomplished in this last fiscal year—

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. J. Jeremie SC*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:** Thank you very much, Madam President.

The accomplishments of the Ministry of Legal Affairs could not have been achieved without the dedicated work of the permanent secretary, the deputy permanent secretary and all the heads of division and members of staff. So I wish to publicly thank them for the very hard work that they have put forward in the

Ministry. In conclusion, I need to end where I began with reminding this Chamber about what is important about this budget and what the Ministry of Legal Affairs and this administration have been doing and will continue to do to keep people at the centre and to focus on the future of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is this administration's sixth budget since its election to office in 2002. It pulls together all the various strands of development which we have sewn over the last five years, into a tapestry of strong sustainable fiscal measures that will serve this country for years to come. Trinidad and Tobago's economy in 2007 is in a far more stable and healthy condition than in 2001. We are proud of our efforts and happy to see that they have borne such fruit. I am tempted to say that we have left the best budget for last, but the truth is that this is far from our last budget. It is certainly the last of this Parliament, but I guarantee you, Madam President, it is just the beginning for this administration.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.45 p.m.**

**Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh:** Madam President and Members of this honourable Senate, in his delivery of a 1967 speech entitled, "Where Do We Go From Here, Chaos or Community", the late great American civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."

As I listened to the hon. Prime Minister Patrick Manning deliver this year's budget and boasting how, it is a love thing, I found that these words were very inspiring of the late Dr. King and were more relevant than ever. I wondered if Prime Minister Manning had ever heard them, because if he did, he would not have come to the honourable Senate and sought to take the image and definition of love in the words of Martin Luther King Jr. or would he have sought to hoodwink the population into thinking that the abuse of power, the tyranny and dictatorship and wanton mismanagement of the country's resources were indicative in any way of love, just because he was able to throw millions and billions of dollars at the people.

Because you have heard it before from us and I will say it again, if the 2008, \$42 billion fiscal package and the past six years of PNM rule are love, then we do not ever want to see hate. As I give the Opposition UNC Alliance final words on the budget today, I will seek to not only point out some of the failings of this

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

administration in every sector, but also analyze the true meaning and expression of Martin Luther King's statement and Prime Minister Manning's budget love promises. This afternoon I will deliver to my colleagues on the other side their final political rites and resting place [*Desk thumping and laughter*] as they prepare to demit office to the relief and joy of this country.

Let me begin with one of the major areas of widespread social decay under your administration, the health sector. This Government has sought to outdo itself in the past six years in terms of incompetence, mismanagement and failure in every sector. Ministers have been and are competing to see who could perform worse; falling over themselves to see who could be more incompetent. But without doubt, the crowning achievement of failure is embodied in the health ministry. Where to start, Madam President? I will need countless days of talking in this Parliament to highlight the numerous ills which you have inflicted upon this society. They have miserably failed this country in providing a basic equitable, adequate health care system.

Let us start with your myriad of promises made six years ago.

**Madam President:** You need to speak to me.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Sure, Madam President. I know that you like to hear me. I will speak with you.

With a beleaguered health system and thousands of health citizens' complaints, Prime Minister Patrick Manning could not help. He promised in 2003 to implement health quality legislation prescribing proper standards for the quality of health in our public and private health sector. He promised to reform the management systems in the RHA; build six district health facilities and begin construction of the National Cancer Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; the St. James District Health Facility; the Point Fortin District Hospital which was promised as early as 2002, as well as substantial improvements to the hospitals in Port of Spain, San Fernando, St. Ann's, St James and Sangre Grande.

In the 2004 budget, the Prime Minister said again:

“We shall continue work in the Scarborough Regional Hospital, the National Oncology Centre...and the construction of a number of district health facilities and enhanced health centres.”

He said that:

“upgrade works will begin at the Sangre Grande hospital and construction of...district health facilities in 2005 and it would be completed in 2006.

Construction of the new Point Fortin Hospital will also start in 2005.”

This he said in 2004.

In the 2005 budget statement of the Prime Minister, he assured the nation work is ongoing at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the general hospitals in Port of Spain and San Fernando. By 2007, we expect that the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital and Scarborough Hospital; the National Oncology Centre again, and the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital will all be completed. He said that in 2005. You know where Scarborough Hospital is.

To date, the Scarborough Hospital is left to ruin since May 2005 with an estimated \$400 million more needed for completion. The Minister of Finance had to bring a supplementary appropriation this year to begin work on the National Cancer Centre, despite having included it in past budgets.

Since 2001, this administration has been promising the people of Point Fortin, a hospital. Six years later—and Point Fortin is represented by a Member of the Government. Whatever differences Prime Minister Patrick Manning had with MP Larry Achong, he has hurt, victimized and brutalized people of the south western peninsula of Cedros, La Brea and Point Fortin with untold suffering and pain.

**Madam President:** Senators behind there, you are speaking too loudly.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** They must never forgive the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health for what they did to them. [*Desk thumping*] To date, they have not kept their promises to the very people who supported and voted for them in Point Fortin and La Brea.

This is the reality. No delivery whatsoever. No action on promises. Instead the health sector, like every other sector, is plagued with deep corruption, extreme mismanagement, wastage and incompetence. Do you know what is particularly damning about this? What is so unforgivable, painful, hurtful, and tearful? Unlike every other sector, mistakes in medicine cost lives. The Minister of Health had promised this nation in 2004, that two renal dialysis centres would have been established, one in the north and one in the south with 200 units; 200 persons would receive dialysis. We understand that tenders were evaluated by the Central Tenders Board; contracts awarded to a company for approximately \$75 million per year for three years, that is approximately \$225 million.

We understand that the award was scrapped by the Minister of Health. The hon. Minister of Health cannot tell this country why this award was rejected. There were tenders of approximately \$50 million; \$75 million and \$150 million in

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

this. Is it because his family and friends were not awarded the contracts given by the Central Tenders Board? These contracts were given by the Central Tenders Board. Four hundred very sick and dying kidney failure patients have been deprived for the last four years of renal dialysis and they may be all dead by now because the renal dialysis centres were not constructed by the hon. Minister of Health and supported by the Prime Minister. This is extremely painful, while the Minister of Health, Rahael's mismanagement continues to plague this sector.

The failure of the NWRHA to pay \$109 million in PAYE taxes was one of the examples of the ongoing questionable administrative problems in the RHA which had forced the hon. Prime Minister to appoint a commission of enquiry into the health sector, when he saw the mess that two ministers of health had caused: Mr. Imbert as the first Minister of Health and Mr. Rahael as the second.

For health quality legislation, it took the death of several citizens who had travelled to Pakistan to undergo kidney transplant where they bought the vital organ. Among them were the Presbyterian Rev. Allison Norbie and even our dearest friend Dr. Rawle Edwards, the chief medical officer. A practice condemned internationally as unsafe and unethical and that had to prompt the Government to introduce to Parliament the much needed Tissue Transplant Act, four years later in 2004, after lives had been lost.

This Minister is yet to account for the \$109 million which went missing that was supposed to be paid to the Board of Inland Revenue and NIB. At that time he said that heads would roll. Whose heads rolled? He needs to tell this country if there was any international tendering for the award of the \$120 million contract for the National Cancer Centre. We have people working for \$150,000 per month and there are three or four senior persons working for \$50,000 per month and the National Cancer Centre has not gotten off the ground. That is corruption.

Hundreds of new employees were hired by the NWRHA. We understand that the HR firm of the wife of the chairman is involved in the recruitment of workers. I am speaking with documentation because I asked this question in Parliament and it was answered. It is in *Hansard*. Over 1,000 workers were employed in the NWRHA.

In response to the question I asked, the CEO and top officers were recruited by the firm Eastman and Associates. That is the wife of the chairman of the NWRHA. A close relative of the chairman of the NWRHA is the CEO of the North Central Regional Health Authority. It is a family business between the NWRHA and North Central Regional Health Authority. Where is the DPP and the Integrity Commission in this?  
[Desk thumping]

With so many questionable dealings in the Ministry of Health, there was approximately \$53 million in the award of contracts for the purchase of MRI and CT machines. I asked Question No. 7 in the Senate in the 2006 to 2007 session of Parliament: Would the hon. Minister please inform the Senate of the name of the company which was awarded the contract for the purchase and supply of CT and MRI machines for use in the nation's hospital?"

The Minister of Health proposedly replied as follows: "The North West Regional Health Authority supply, installation, commissioning, and financing diagnostic, imaging equipment for major health care centres, institutions in Trinidad and Tobago: The contract was awarded to Siemens Medical Solutions." They listed the items and named the directors. Siemens Medical Solutions got the contract of US \$8.89 million almost TT \$50 million. They have the evaluation committee. When I asked the question of who formed the specification committee, this was his answer: "There is no Specification Committee under the RHA Act, 1994. However specifications are developed by the end users in consultation with other professionals."

The same people who drew up the specification were the same people who were evaluating the bids. There is massive corruption of \$52 million in the award of contracts for the purchase of MRI and CT machines. That is only in the North West Regional Health Authority.

Let me give you South West Regional Health Authority. Who got the contract for South West Regional Health Authority? Siemens Medical Solutions again. The value of the bid for South West Regional Health Authority is \$16.8 million. It was the same evaluation team and the same specification team.

For the Eastern Regional Health Authority, who got it again? Siemens Medical Solutions, TT \$6.64 million. When I speak of massive corruption in the health sector it is documented here. The same people who made the specifications did the evaluation. Over the sum of \$60 million was given to Siemens Medical Solutions. We have to ask: Who are the local agents for Siemens Medical Solutions in Trinidad? Is it a friend of the Minister of Health; or a friend of a friend of the Minister of Health? This is corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. When I say that there is corruption in the health sector I can substantiate it. It was \$22 million in the award of a contract for the angiography machine and Siemens Medical Solutions got it. It was \$109 million went missing in the RHA; \$120 million for the National Cancer Centre without any tendering and \$225 million in the award of contracts for the renal dialysis system. Half billion dollars in

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

corruption in the health sector! Who is held responsible? Is this why the Minister of Health has to resign and he is not going back up? Is he afraid of litigation? Is he afraid that he will have to go to court? When we get into government he will be before the courts. I can assure you that we have enough substantiation on that.

The country demands that this Prime Minister—this is the Prime Minister. “It is time for me to move over and make room for others”, Rahael bows out. He rides out. Crying Rahael quits. The Prime Minister’s sister says, “Oh happy day.”

The country demands that the Minister of Health and the already resigned Attorney General, as he almost resigned yesterday, give the country the information on these highly questionable wheeling and dealing in the health sector. Hundreds of lives are being lost. Patients with renal failure are awaiting dialysis while there are nefarious criminally corrupt deals under the direct watch of the Minister of Health.

For their number one boast, the Same Day Surgery Programme which they have been speaking about all the time. MPATT had to request information for access to official documents under the Freedom of Information Act on the Same Day Surgery Programme. The Minister of Health refused to provide any information. Did he have something to hide?

### **3.00 p.m.**

Yes they had to hide these facts. What does Elaine Cuisine, eTour Travel Service and Cascadia Hotel have to do with a surgical waiting list and surgery?

Directors from England registered a company in Port of Spain. When were these tenders advertised? They were never advertised. There is total and absolute corruption in the \$18 million Same Day Surgery Programme, with the Minister of Health at the helm. The Minister has sacrificed the life of so many of our people in pursuit of making up numbers in the surgical waiting list programme. He has sacrificed quality for quantity

**Madam President:** I have been listening very carefully and I am trying to make sure that you are not crossing the line as far as imputing improper motives. If you have not crossed the line, you have gotten very close to it, so I would be very careful in how you go.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I thank you, Madam President, for the advice and I can assure you that I will not cast any aspersions, but I will state the facts.

So many young ones have died as a result of brain damage. That is a fact. There are two children who had anesthesia in the Same Day Surgery Programme and are brain damaged and vegetables now. This programme has been a colossal failure—the same programme that the Minister goes through the country saying is a success.

Are we doing surgery at hotels and conference centres? Where has been the evaluation of all these tender processes? If you think that is as bad as it can get, like a horror story, scene after scene of the PNM's regime gets progressively worse. A toddler, four years, died as a result of a simple umbilical hernia repair; not needing the surgery because most of these hernias go in by five years. Many patients came forward after reading about this, relating similar unfortunate deaths of their loved one. Is this really a caring health sector? Is this really a caring Government when we lose lives like this?

Twenty-three newborns died from enterobacter at Mount Hope. Whose head rolled? Not one person was held responsible for it. Four in Tobago died from staphylococcus at hernia operations. The hon. Minister of Health has a lot to answer for. The country demands an explanation from this Government.

A simple thing like the ambulance service they cannot get right. Our administration introduced and effected a very efficient emergency ambulance system. Twenty thousand calls were attended to in the first six months in a 10-minute period. At its highest, the cost to the UNC government was \$19 million. They brought in 45 ambulances under the UNDP subsequent to this at a cost of \$75 million. Where are they?

The ambulance service system is now privatized. There is nothing wrong with private sector/public sector participation, but why jump to \$56 million for the operation of an ambulance service which is less efficient than it was under our administration? That is another question he has to answer for the citizens of this country, who are at the mercy of an atrocious, painful and decayed health sector. Mistakes in medicine cost lives and, as I said before, any serious mistake in medicine is a life. But life to this administration is cheap; not their lives, they go abroad for treatment, to Cuba, USA and England, but the poor people, the indigent and the vulnerable population have to withstand whatever treatment is given to them and pray to remain alive in our institutions.

Madam President, you know that I have worked in at least 14 hospitals around the world, on four subcontinents, but I have never seen a human life less valued than here in Trinidad and Tobago. It pains all of us to witness the cruel slaughter

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

of innocent people in our health institutions. The Medical Chief of Staff wrote the Administrator of the Anesthetic and ICU Department at the Port of Spain General Hospital on the Same Day Surgery Programme. Do you know that we have a Doctor of Theology managing the Same Day Surgery Programme at the Port of Spain General Hospital? I would not call his name, but the Minister knows who it is and all my colleagues in the medical profession say to me: Tim, how can we have a Doctor of Theology involved in the Same Day Surgery Programme?

Madam President, Senators opposite must know what is going on with their colleague in the Ministry of Health. Is this why Mr. Manning says that he must not go back up and he is crying crocodile tears? Mr. Manning knows what he has inflicted on the population and this is why he called a commission of enquiry into it. They are talking about a hospital in Central Trinidad and they cannot even build a Point Fortin hospital in six years. Not even one district health facility of the six that were promised since 2002 was built.

They are now speaking about Johns Hopkins University. They have the Medical Faculty of the University of the West Indies to deal with and they are talking about Johns Hopkins University? How irresponsible, silly and stupid they can become when they talk about trying to associate with them. Johns Hopkins University will not come to Trinidad. They are going to Asia where there are certain medical schools. Cambridge and Oxford Universities are going to Asian countries. They are not coming here to waste their time. We do not even get a student on an elective programme coming from Johns Hopkins University to the University of the West Indies. The Trinidad and Tobago Government is trying to fool the population because Johns Hopkins has a big name. They know they cannot do anything.

This administration tried to interfere with the Medical and Pharmacy Boards, in typical PNM style. The Minister of Health attempted a legislative coup with respect to the Medical and Pharmacy Boards of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, the previous Minister pulled a coup on the medical profession by setting up a parallel medical board because the Medical Board was not registering the 75 doctors from foreign countries who were below competence level. They got a simple majority, set up a parallel medical board and registered the 75 doctors. How have they affected the health care system in Trinidad and Tobago? One of the guys came down as a consultant neurosurgeon. Do you know how he has ended up? A House Officer is a rank just above an intern. He was a consultant neurosurgeon. They fooled the population. So when you see so many lives being lost as a result of all this incompetence, you feel very sad.

What about the actual implementation of Vision 2020 in the health sector? PAHO, which is a WHO country strategy report of October 2005, says that the health sector is in crisis because the Ministry of Health has been unable to assume effectively the leadership role and transform itself into an effective policy planning and regulatory organization. This is the Pan American Health Organization Strategy Report 2006/2009, Trinidad and Tobago Country Cooperation Strategy Report. PAHO is the regional office of the World Health Organization. They are saying this; not the UNC Alliance. Of course, there is the damning Gafoor report, which confirmed the country's worst fears about the health sector. That was a hotbed of corruption, inefficiency and waste as described in the Gafoor report.

To date, we have not heard a squeak from the Attorney General about the status of the criminal investigation that the Prime Minister initiated in this report saying that he would send it to the Integrity Commission and for investigation by the Commissioner of Police and the DPP. Hon. Attorney General, you deserve special attention. I will come back to that.

While the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister fiddle with the serious business of the lives of all our loved ones—this is a love thing—the Attorney General and the Prime Minister must tell the people of this country if the Prime Minister sent this commission report to the DPP or the Commissioner of Police for investigation. That is the commission of enquiry into the health sector where there is massive corruption, irregularity and malfeasance. Has he sent it to the Integrity Commission or is it another instance of his repeated amnesia? [*Interruption*] You will answer. Is another apology coming to this country of not having done so and confusing it with another report?

The Prime Minister apologized recently for confusing the health enquiry report with the Monteil enquiry. On this issue alone, the Prime Minister should have resigned. How can you confuse something as fundamental as that, making the excuse that you thought it was a commission of enquiry into the health sector? If by chance he did send this health sector enquiry, Madam President, the hon. Attorney General can give the answer to Sen. Dr. Saith when he is winding up. The hon. Attorney General needs to give the people an update on this issue. Where has it reached? Has any police investigation been done into this widespread corruption, malfeasance and serious irregularities?

The Prime Minister set up a committee for one month to implement the recommendations of the Gafoor Commission. Three months later we have heard nothing about this committee. There is no report and no mention has been made

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

of this report in his budget speech. He completely forgot it. He completely ignored all the findings and recommendations from the Gafoor report. Why are there no copies of this report available to the Ministry of Health, RHA personnel and the public? Pure “ol’ talk”, promise and no result.

What does he say? We must continue to keep the faith with love and wait with love. What actions are to be taken on this report? While the people die, Rome burns and the Prime Minister fiddles. No one will forgive this Government for the number of child victims of the health sector. As if this Government was not satisfied with the record-breaking murder and crime rate that has our citizens living in terror and fleeing the country in desperation, they have managed to make the one recourse for safety, the hospitals, another virtual killing field.

Remember Christine Loubon’s 13-year-old daughter Shanelle Sookoo who was diagnosed with a brain tumour and who was waiting for an intensive care unit bed before she had the surgery and while she was waiting, the Intensive Care Unit at San Fernando was filled? And they promised beds for San Fernando from as early as 2000 and not one has been added.

In 2000, when we were in government, we built a 12-bed Intensive Care Unit at the Port of Spain General Hospital in four months at less than half the cost, at \$6.5 million, and they cannot build an Intensive Care Unit after six years and children are dying.

What about Anthony Blanc, a seven-year-old who died from asthma? Madam President, you know no child is supposed to die and when the Minister of Health was questioned on the number of deaths of children in the public health sector, he said that the system was functioning well. But that horror story does not end there.

Johnathan Belix, a 17-year-old boy, died because our system could not treat a fractured leg. Imagine someone dying from that, Madam President. What is happening? Little Faith Williams died because the health system could not treat her umbilical hernia. Ronald Gill, who complained of abdominal pains, sought treatment at the Port of Spain General Hospital and was diagnosed with muscle strain. A few days later, he died of acute appendicitis.

Baby Shawn Ganness had his collarbone and left hand broken and his cheek displaced during a forceps delivery at the San Fernando General Hospital. Innocent children are dying yet the Minister says that the system is functioning well. *[Interruption]* He is the person in charge; he has the responsibility. If he does not want to be in charge, he should move out and give the responsibility to someone else.

I wonder if Minister Rahael is listening to the cries of our people or is he still too busy posing for the cameras. On the front page of yesterday's newspaper, Mr. Rahael was crying, but hundreds of families of victims of the health sector under his watch are still crying daily for their dearly departed loved ones who died in the health sector. Mr. Rahael is the first person I know to stalk the paparazzi, rather than they stalking him. Every time he sees the cameras, he runs after them as if his ultimate goal is to become Cabinet's next top model.

Mr. Rahael, remember the warning of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:6: "But whomsoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Mr. Rahael can now ride off into the sunset.

### **3.15 p.m.**

The PNM's definition of love is the suffering of little children. As you know, we should not really be surprised at this callous running of the health sector from this Minister. After all, he is the former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who was responsible for the decimation of Caroni (1975) Limited with its lush rich cane lands and the loss of jobs and incomes of 1,000 Caroni (1975) Limited Workers and, by extension, nearly 100,000 more people in Central Trinidad have suffered. Now that the Minister has destroyed our arable agricultural lands, he has come to destroy the refuge of the sick.

I wish to remind Minister Rahael of the warning given to him by Mr. Basdeo Panday in his 2004 response to the budget hosted in this Parliament:

"Last year I warned you that you had scorched the earth in Central Trinidad, and that the earth would not forgive you. I assure that it has not, and your day of reckoning shall surely come, if it is Caroni's land that you are looking for, I am told all you will get is six feet of it."

Well, I see the day of reckoning for Minister Rahael has come. You said that you have opted to bow out of the election race, saying that it is time for new blood, as if we believe that.

Obviously, hon. Prime Minister Patrick Manning would have told him that we can no longer allow our country to continue inflicting pain and sorrow on this poor and vulnerable population under his leadership. He knows and the country

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

knows that he is taking in front before he is fired. How did he score in the Manning's polls? No doubt, so horrible that it convinced him and his misguided leader that he should be banished into the political wilderness.

The ultimate testimony to this tragic destructive performance in the health sector is the fact that he is terrified of a single electorate; terrified of their judgment; terrified of what is coming to him after he has literally caused so much pain and suffering in this country over the past six years.

Madam President, I could compare the PNM's performance with the UNC government's performance in the health sector. We spent \$3.9 billion in six years; they spent \$14 billion, three and a half times more.

Let me just give you a small snapshot of our achievements in health and it reads as follows: We built 47 health care centres and two new district health facilities at Couva and Princes Town; we built 37 new chambers in the Port of Spain Mortuary; four new wards at St. Ann's; we opened four new wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; we outfitted all hospitals and health care centres with over \$220 million worth of equipment; we launched the Emergency Health Service with 65 fully equipped ambulances; we trained over 600 nurses and 300 patient care assistants which had been stopped by the previous PNM administration; we increased nurses' salaries by 25 per cent; we provided free paediatric services at Mount Hope Medical Complex; and launched the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programme. When we get back into office and we are on that side, we will continue the progress that we had started in 1995. [*Desk thumping*]

We will continue our progress that we have made during that period. [*Desk thumping*] We will build the Point Fortin Hospital; [*Desk thumping*] we will establish the Burns and Intensive Care Unit at San Fernando General Hospital; [*Desk thumping*] we will construct the National Cancer Centre; we will enhance social support for cancer patients and their families; construct the six district health facilities; complete the Scarborough Hospital with an intensive care unit; [*Desk thumping*] we will eliminate the dual track system of employment; proclaim the Health Services Quality Act; we will expand CDAP with emphasis on the elderly; we will expand the Neonatal Intensive Care Units at the three major hospitals; we will establish a national blood policy—the Blood Bank should be an independent body; revise the Dental Protection Act; transfer patients from St. Ann's Hospital to community-based care centres; adopt the National Mental Health Plan; establish a trauma centre at the Port of Spain Hospital; and implement the guidelines of a draft disability policy document and so forth. For now, I will leave it at that.

All I have to say to the dearly departing Minister of Health, my good friend, is that I hope you repent and seek salvation for your commission and omissions, when you go into exile in the political wilderness in the next few months. To help you get rid of your damaged ego and narcissism, I leave you with the words of the *Bible*, so when you get the chance to see the corridors of power in your dreams, you will understand how to run the Ministry of Health. Ponder on these words, Mr. Minister, as you draw your final political breaths: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” Corinthians, Chap. 13:4—7.

**Sen. Dumas:** Senator?

**Madam President:** Senator, are you giving way?

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** No, Madam President. I have minimum time. They had their time.

**Sen. Dumas:** Ungracious!

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Not this afternoon. Madam President, I am about to speak about the hallmark of this PNM regime. Once more, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. come to mind. These words express exactly how much pain, anger, hurt and betrayal that all citizens of this country feel towards this administration for their unceasing corruption, wastage, mismanagement and nepotism.

Dr. King in this 1967 speech, the “Trumpet of Conscience” said:

“Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor...

I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted.

I speak for the poor in America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption...

I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken.”

I speak as a citizen:

“to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative...must be ours.”

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

That initiative will be grasped at the election by the electorate when the bell is called. We will grasp victory from these people and we will rescue the country. All the ideals of Dr. Martin Luther King we will try to uphold.

This country has begged this regime to stop this wanton thievery, and its cries have fallen on deaf ears. Where to start? Tarouba Stadium, \$1.2 billion; CEPEP, \$1.2 billion; URP, \$1 billion; NHA, \$200 million—ghost gangs in NHA; WASA, \$1 billion accounted to Parliament Joint Select Committee; Scarborough Hospital; \$500 million corruption; Dansam Dhansook; CDAP; waiting list; Waterfront, \$3 billion; housing, \$2 billion; Andre Monteil; Prime Minister's residence, \$250 million; \$22 billion offshore patrol vessels; \$600 million in Ken Julian's empire, UTT; credit card for government to use on shopping sprees; Cudjoe Construction in Petrotrin, \$120 million; and the list goes on and on. Almost \$15 billion dollars were taken away from this country with no transparency and accountability.

Madam President, do you know what? They formed 15 multi-purpose companies with no procurement regulations, but promising to bring a White Paper on procurement. They are still at the Green Paper level and the 15 multi-purpose companies are functioning. They were all removed from the Central Tenders Board. Where is the tendering for all these multi-purpose companies like the Education Facilities Management Company and so many others? There is no tendering accountability and they are spending billions of dollars. That is corruption! [*Desk thumping*]

Never before in the history of this country has a government had over seven Cabinet Ministers, including the Prime Minister, being investigated by the Integrity Commission whilst still in office. There are about 20 PNM senior officials and chairmen of state boards before the Integrity Commission. Madam President, what a Government for you! [*Desk thumping*]

Ministers and MPs are before the courts facing criminal charges, and judging from the number of files before the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Commissioner of Police, no doubt there are several more to come.

The most despicable is the recent revelation of the corruption to come in the \$15 billion Rapid Rail Project. We have called for a halt to this and the Waterfront project, but in the true style of obscene disregard for the people who elected them, albeit mistakenly and misguidedly to office, the Minister of Works and Transport came into this Senate a few days ago and tried to defend the indefensible. The Prime Minister himself sought to defend it, and he thinks that no one can see through this hypocrisy.

The Prime Minister in his last days of office, through sheer desperation, is trying to posture to the country that he is taking a serious stance against corruption, but we shall not be fooled. The irony in that, for all of his love boasting, he is letting his faithful supporters, the people who stood by him, take the fall.

If he was given the Government on the grounds of morality, where is his morality today when the Monteil issue as said by him is legally right but morally wrong? [*Desk thumping*] Why was Monteil not fired as Treasurer of the PNM by the Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, if he believes in morality? There is no morality in the PNM whatsoever, and that is why he has not been fired! [*Desk thumping*] The Manning poll has been sounded, and he says new faces are coming. Old soldiers bow out; service before self. Mr. Manning tells them that if they cannot represent their people well, and if you are not available to your constituents, there is no point then in being a Minister. A word to the wise is enough.

Madam President, already every Member of the Lower House has been dropped like hot potatoes from the list of candidates. The few who are fighting for their political survival and lives know that they are fighting a losing battle.

Finally, my friends on that side, once the chosen few know what the rest of the country feels in the wake of emperor Manning's tyranny, you all are going. He will not forget the little offences, much less the big ones. I am sorry my sister, Minister Joan Yuille-Williams is not here.

We know that she is not coming back. After all, the hon. Minister and Prime Minister Manning fell out and she took her purse and walked out of the San Fernando East office, just because probably she could not deliver on the National Performing Arts Centre or she probably objected when the Prime Minister said that his wife, Madam "breakfastes" was the best performing Minister. We know the secrets. [*Laughter*]

Minister Christine Sahadeo, why suddenly you are not going up for Tunapuna? What really happened between you and the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning? Is he still smarting from the EMBD corruption that you tried to prevent Uthara Rao from moving away millions of dollars in the EMDB or is it more to deal with the Caroni (1975) Limited lands? We just want to ask simple questions.

Minister Christine Kangaloo, my dear sister, who I love very dearly, he is sending you up against Sen. Wade Mark in Pointe-a-Pierre! [*Laughter*] You are going to run back crying. [*Laughter*] Just like when you cried over not being able to help in controlling food prices. Do you remember that you cried? [*Laughter*]

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

I saw our hon. dear sister, Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangkaloo—I really have a soft spot for her—on television wearing a beautiful sari. You looked very beautiful, but I could not help remember when in the early days she carried her surname as Garcia, but Mr. Manning told her that she better drop it so it would look as if his Cabinet is multiethnic. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Kangkaloo:** Madam President, just to share the love, I just want to set him on the right path. My birth certificate and my marriage certificate carry one name. I have never used on any official document the name apart from what you are seeing here. I do not know where my friend got that. Sen. Wade Mark will get licks anyway. [*Desk thumping*] You do not have to make up stories. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam President, I want to remind my hon. sister, Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangkaloo that when the hon. Prime Minister puts her to fight for Pointe-a-Pierre and she loses, I do not think she will be coming back here. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, this Government has spent over \$320 million in the last two years on advertising, publicity, public relations and travel. They spent \$60 million in education; \$14 million in health; and \$110 million from the Prime Minister's office. Madam President, do you know what? They shut down NBN, and put hundreds on the breadline to create yet another "cash cow" for their friends and families. Listen to these details about how much money they have spent on CNMG. That was formally TTT.

In a letter dated January 17, 2007 CNMG Chief Executive Officer, Dominica Beaubrun, admits that budgeted expenditure for the creation of this state propaganda equipment is \$133 million.

**3.30 p.m.**

An actual expenditure from January 2005 to November 2006 was \$83.9 million. This year alone they expected to run up a deficit of \$60 million, 189 plus 84 plus 60 and that is former TTT for you, now CNMG. What a waste of taxpayers'

money for PNM's propaganda machine. And you know what, Madam President? They cannot divulge the fees for the contractors they say, because they do not want another CEPEP exposure. They do not want the country to see them giving their friends and families millions of dollars. Hear the names of some of the contracts awarded to CNMG: Siemens Business Services Media, Tropical Media Holdings, Valerie Satterwhite, Ed Gordon Consulting Group, Judy Flu, InfoTech Caribbean, 3DM Caribbean Limited, Creative Limited, Professional Presentations Limited; all these, summary purpose of the contract, commencement date, completion date. They are afraid to give this information; they are trying to protect it; they say that with regard to the third item, the fees of the contractors, consultants engaged by CNMG cannot be divulged as this information is protected by confidentiality and non-disclosure clauses in their contracts. Madam President, \$131 million, \$84 million, \$60 million in CMNG, former TTT. Why have we put so many people out of jobs and have to spend all this money to bring in PNM propaganda?

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** You looked at it at all?

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, we did. They do not want to come to this country to see them giving their friends and families millions of dollars. In a High Court judgment in December last year, Devant Maharaj won the right to access the list of names the Ministry of Works and Transport had given PBR bus route passes from 2003. Now you wonder why the Ministry would hide this information and only give it because the court ordered them to do so and they had no choice. This is the document that the court ordered to be given because they did not want to release the information on the bus route passes. But let me tell you why. These are the recipients of the bus route passes from every Minister, friend, "tantie", dog, cat, cousin, grandmother. Nepotism, blatant disregard for people and the citizens in the simplest things and that is love.

I would just give you a few of the names: Trevor Boopsingh, PNM; Ronald Boynes, PNM; Pat Butcher, PNM; there are many more; John Commissiong, Astra Da Costa from Ample Advertising, Kenneth DeSilva, Dansam Dhansook; there is even a John Doe, we do not know who is the John Doe; Richard Ettienne, Ashton Forde, all PNM; Malcolm Jones, Ken Julien, Hafeez Karamath; Louis Lee Sing, Michael Legerton, Heathcliff Miller, Louis Andre Monteil, Kayam Mohammed, Eustace Nancis, Rannie Narace, Ojaram Narace, Michael Osuna; the whole PNM "wajang", all of them; Uthara Rao, Fitz Regis, Linus Rogers, Keisha Sahadeo—I understand that is the hon. Minister's daughter—George Singh, Keith Subero. The list goes on, all PNM people riding on the Priority Bus Route, while the rest of the people suffering.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

I want to deal with the Minister of Housing, Dr. Keith Rowley, who believes he is a saint, but Prime Minister Patrick Manning is out for him. Imagine last time on a platform at a meeting in Laventille, a PNM stronghold with less than 10 people at 7.30 p.m. [*Laughter*] Minister Rowley went on a platform and spoke in the same manner as when he was in Opposition. He had the tenacity and audacity to repeat his lies about UNC corruption and shamelessly attack the wife of our political leader. [*Interruption*] Mendacity, Madam President, mendacity. We would not stand for that. Where is Minister Rowley's moral authority to speak in this denigrating way about anybody else? One of the defining corruption scandals of this country's history and this administration is the Scarborough Hospital—[*Desk thumping*—of which he is the star. All accused, whichever way you may look at it, you see the Commission of Enquiry Report was laid in Parliament in November 2005, by none other than the Prime Minister himself; he promised to send this to the Integrity Commission. The Report clearly stated that \$5 million of materials was siphoned from the Scarborough Hospital to the Landate site. Hear what it had to say. It said on page 30:

"...from the testimony of the witnesses as above mentioned and the exhibits, that the appropriate authority should visit the provisions of sections 2, 3, 4 and 21 of the Larceny Act, Chap. 11:12, with a view to addressing the illegal act, if so found by them, committed by NHIC, by the removal of Nipdec's...from the Scarborough Hospital site to the Landate Development project. That Nipdec should revisit its contract with NHIC, which it entered into on March 06, 2003 to ascertain whether a fundamental breach has occurred by such removal and the enforcement of such right to damages especially in the light of clause 3 of the said Cabinet..."

On September 05, 2005, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, hon. Patrick Manning in the Lower House said:

"Mr. Deputy Speaker, in relation to the matter raised by the Member for Siparia a few minutes ago in respect of the Commission of Enquiry into the so-called Landate affair, the Prime Minister has indeed taken possession of the report of that Commission of Enquiry. It has not yet gone to Cabinet. It should go by next Thursday after which, in accordance with the commitment given at the time it was established, the report would be laid in Parliament."

Madam President, to date, hon. Attorney General, why have you not brought your self-style Anti-Corruption Bureau into this investigation? Why have Minister Keith Rowley and Mr. Elias not been investigated, when the report

clearly states an illegal act has been committed? Why do you use the Anti-Corruption Bureau to constantly persecute, harass and prosecute political opponents, but when it comes to do so for colleagues on your side, you refuse to do so? Why this inaction on your part? Tell this country why.

**Madam President:** Senator, Senator, Senator, you are imputing improper motives to the Attorney General. [*Interruption*] Yes, that is a very smart way of so doing. I am not going to be fooled by that, all right. And, please, address me and not the Attorney General.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam President, I stand to address you. None of them has any moral authority to make any allegations whatsoever about corruption when they on that side—do they embody corruption? Do they epitomize corruption? I believe that people have said that they have invented it; they have mastered it and they have perfected the art of corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** "Yeah man, yeah man, yeah man," that is exactly what they have done, invented corruption.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I want to remind the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley that he is still under criminal investigation and that his file is still before the DPP and while he is trying to stall his prosecution, everybody knows that there are seven charges to be laid on him. My last rites to you, Minister Rowley, every Rottweiler has its day; what goes around comes around; you should not throw stones when you live in glass houses; you have lost your credibility in this country and no one takes you seriously anymore; this is pure hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** Rowley boy, Rowley facing jail, boy.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam President, I want to go to my good friend, the hon. Attorney General, and of course, we cannot leave the second in command alone.

**Madam President:** Senator, you have four minutes.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Attorney General, have you subjected the people of this poor country to political persecution never before experienced in the commonwealth, the relentless attack on the independence of the Judiciary? And, has there been a primary role in the collapse of the administration of justice?

**Sen. Jeremie SC:** He is imputing improper motives. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** Senator, I am going to warn you again.

**Sen. Mark:** You cannot take the pressure or what? You assaulted the Judiciary. You know that. Yes, we talking on the platform. Yes, you send Sharma to jail. [*Crosstalk*] You and Monteil conspired. You allowed that.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I want to warn this country that in their last days, because we know Prime Minister Patrick Manning has been trying to get rid of some of them since last year, in their last days after trying to interfere and unsuccessfully trying to bully the DPP for the past two years, Geoffrey Henderson himself, in a television report earlier, expressed serious concern over your move to establish a separate and parallel unit to give legal advice to the police as well as bring the DPP's office in the new constitution as a department of the Attorney General.

Madam President, I want to end by telling the other side, as well as the PNM regime that these are your last days and take these words as your last rites. I want to quote from Ecclesiastes, Chap. 3, verses 1 to 8. For everything, there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born—as Trinidad and Tobago will be reborn in the next few months under the UNC government. A time to die— as this oppressive regime dies the ultimate political death.

A time to plant—as the country will plant the seeds of prosperity and happiness when the UNC Alliance is installed as the government. A time to pluck up what is planted—and they will weed out the PNM like the vicious parasites they are. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] A time to heal—as the UNC will heal the country's bad wounds once more. A time to break down—as you the PNM has broken down the social economic and judicial structures and a time to build up—as the UNC Alliance will once more rebuild. A time to weep—as the country has been weeping in the past six years and a time to laugh—as they would have their last laugh on you. [*Desk thumping*]

A time to mourn—as they have been mourning your regime and a time to dance—as they would dance with joy when we get you out of office. [*Desk thumping*] A time to seek—as they seek political salvation in the UNC Alliance and a time to lose—as the PNM loses the election. [*Desk thumping*] A time to keep silent—as I close, and you falsely believe that we have kept silent under your tyranny. And the time to speak—as the voices of the people will converge and shout from the hills, even from Laventille, that no more will the PNM ever see the corridors of power. A time for war—as we gear up for the mother of all election battles and a time for peace—as the UNC Alliance restores the country to peace and happiness.

The PNM will rest in peace. May you and your PNM administration rest in peace and may God bless your political souls in the political graves, in which you lay. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you.

**The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid):** Thank you very much, Madam President. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** May I have some quiet now, please, there is someone on his feet.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Thank you very much, Madam President. As he uses the word "time", I am reminded of the phrase that became very popular during their tenure in office, when you do the crime you would do the time. [*Desk thumping*] And that is the only appropriate use of the word "time" in context of the UNC. I hope to spend some time being a little more reflective than the speaker who would have gone just before. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** May I have some quiet now please?

**Sen. Mark:** Yes, ma'am.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** I would like to throw our minds back a few decades and tell a story, some of it is personal, but it is also indicative of the experience of thousands of families throughout Trinidad and Tobago. But it is a story that is indeed personal to me and my family and my own family's experience in Trinidad, but as I have said, it is very similar to what many families throughout Trinidad and Tobago would have experienced.

My grandmother was born on November 11, 1912. She was born in Crystal Stream in Diego Martin. When I got to know her she was just in her late 50s early 60s. She was completely illiterate; there were two words that she could spell and she would announce them proudly—B-A-T and C-A-T and those were the only two words that she could spell. Her name was Beakridan Ballack, she could spell neither Beakridan, nor Ballack. She got married to Abdul-Hamid, she never learnt to spell Mr. Abdul-Hamid. She was completely illiterate, but she was able to count because she was a vendor in the market and she had to be able to count to take out money of course. That is how she did her business and she was able to raise her children.

**3.45 p.m.**

My mother was born in Diamond Village, which is now Diamond Vale in Diego Martin as well, in 1948. My grandmother died illiterate. Just around the time my mother was about to enter into primary school, there was an opportunity because of the intervention of the government and although they were not catholic, she got a chance to go to Diego Martin Girls R.C. School—many years later I would attend Diego Martin Boys R.C. School, just opposite. That was a specific intervention on the part of the government of the day, post 1956, the PNM Government.

Madam President, as faith would have it—now that intervention was too late for my mother’s older siblings, so they were without a primary school education—when my mother was just about to leave primary school with no hope of going on to a secondary school, the People’s National Movement under Dr. Eric Williams and its education policy, built an institution in Diego Martin called the Diego Martin Government Secondary School, and exactly in the same year my mother was ready to leave primary school, she did a test and she was able to go on to Diego Martin Government Secondary School; [*Desk thumping*] an intervention that allowed my mother to get an O level education. No one asked her any question other than the questions that she was asked in the test and that is how she was able to access an O level education.

Madam President, years later in 1981, having gone to Diego Martin Boys R.C, not being a Catholic myself, and not being forced to convert to Catholicism or anything like that, I sat a test—the grandson of a market vendor—and I got the opportunity to go to Queen’s Royal College; an intervention in the education system on the part of the Government of the day, and thousands of other poor citizens of this country got opportunities to move from situations or circumstances of poverty, and get access to an educational opportunity.

At Queen’s Royal College, I am sure I got what was, and what I am sure still is, one of the best secondary education in the world. The opportunities available for education in Trinidad and Tobago at Queen’s Royal College and a lot of other schools in Trinidad and Tobago are among the best in the world. [*Desk thumping*] I went on post O level to do A level at the same institution, again, accessing some of the best education and teaching in the world. Beyond that, I went on to the University of the West Indies and I got a first degree.

Madam President, the point I am making is that in three very short generations, we are seeing a family moving from complete illiteracy to O level education, to university education, and the point I am making here is that it is

precisely as a consequence of the education policy of the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] that we have families in Trinidad and Tobago—and my situation is typical. There are tens of hundreds of thousands citizens of this country who have found themselves moving from one generation to the next, sometimes in two generations, we are able to move from complete illiteracy and innumeracy to university, post-graduate and doctoral standards of education. That is as a consequence of this Government's investment in education and recognition of the value of education to upward social mobility.

Madam President, along the way, my education was threatened once, because from 1956 right up until 1986 under successive PNM Governments, tertiary education remained free of charge. Free of tuition fees because consistent with the PNM Government's education policy, access and opportunity must be present for all, regardless from where you might come, regardless from where you may start, but the opportunity must be present for you all and from 1956 to 1981 when Dr. Eric Williams died, tertiary education remained free.

Even in the 1980s when the price of oil crashed, up until 1986 when the price of oil was \$9 per barrel, the hon. George Chambers ensured that tertiary education remained free up until that point. But as we would recall, a new government, a government different from the People's National Movement came into office in 1986 and my education was threatened once and that threat came in 1988. That was the year I sat my A level exams and that was the year I was to move on to the University of the West Indies. There were just about 40 or 45 scholarships available, but there were thousands of citizens who would have sat exams at the A level and wanting to move on to university and for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, in the tertiary education sector, a fee or cess was introduced, reflecting a complete change in education policy in Trinidad and Tobago.

That change was as a consequence of the fact that we had a new government. And today, I hear a lot of crying, a lot of long tears we see coming from among those who would have implemented exactly that policy, claiming today to care about citizens of this country, claiming today to have the interest of our citizens at heart. When they were in government they took decisions and implemented policies that had significantly adverse impact on the poor people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, when I went to primary school there was one boy—I came second almost every time I did a test—who came first every time. Up till today, I still feel he is brighter than I. Today, he drives a van. He does not and did not

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

have for various reasons—Where will we all be, were it not for educational opportunities? A government, including those on the opposite side on the Front Bench and including some of their colleagues who are not in this Senate and the leader of the other political party, Mr. Winston Dookeran, were part of that regime who took a decision to introduce a fee, thereby adversely affecting the welfare of many of our country's poorer citizens.

I remember it well, as I said, because that year the fee that was introduced was \$2,400 in 1988, and for \$2,400 I was almost denied a tertiary education. I had to scramble to see where you could find—it was introduced in the most callous way because it was introduced abruptly without notice, literally a week before the school was opened and students who were already in the system in year two and year three, they too were faced with fees.

So a student might have invested a year at the university, a year of his time and then found himself now being faced with a fee; \$2,400, was the smallest fee, but there were other fees, \$3,500, \$3,600 depending on where you might have been. But the priority of the Government was such that a fee had to be introduced, a situation that hitherto did not exist. And so, the education of many citizens was threatened.

I came from Patna Village and for 18 years the citizens of Patna Village were locked out of the university. The citizens of Bagatelle Road in Diego Martin were locked out of the university. The citizens of Hard Bargain, Williamsville were locked out of the university. The citizens of Enterprise were locked out of the university. The citizens of Endeavour were locked out of the university. The citizens of Caroni, of various parts of this country where the socio-economic circumstances may not have been at the time the best, were locked out of the university for a long time.

So the citizens of the Train Line were locked out and it took, after 18 years of denying citizens opportunities to access tertiary education—and the reality is, if you argue that education is the vehicle for upward social mobility—and we argue it is not gambling, it is not to ask you to win a lotto, that will allow you to move upwards socially, it is not luck and chance, but it is investing your time and your effort in your education, over years, putting that time in, putting that effort in, over years you will gain the rewards. If you make that argument, how can we then say to a number of our citizens, a large section of our citizens that this opportunity for education is not available to you? It must be available to all of our citizens.

So, after 18 years as a consequence of a policy introduced by those on the other side, whether their faces showed up at the time on election posters or not, most of them, if not all of them, were associated with the political movement at that time, with that political activity at that time, those political parties at that time, whether or not they were ministers in government or otherwise, they were associated with that effort and for 18 years some of us did not have any access to tertiary education.

In September 2005, effective January 01, 2006, in the 2006 Budget Statement, it took a PNM Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning to once again introduce a system in Trinidad and Tobago, where tertiary education will be free and available to all the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, that was a phenomenal decision, an historical decision and was a decision that will have tremendous positive impact on the future of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, for all those years when education was available, we have done well; in Trinidad and Tobago many of the citizens have done well. Sometimes it surprises me, it shocks me, to hear some complaints about discrimination, because I recall when I sat my Common Entrance Examination in 1981 and they announced my name and announced my school, no one ever asked me what I looked like. No one seemed to care, it did not matter. All that mattered and the criteria used, was your performance in the test.

I came from Diego Martin Boys R.C. School, a school quite in the back. Few people knew about that school and out of that school, three of us passed for schools in Port of Spain, a number of other children passed for other schools, but no one cared what I looked like. No one called me in and evaluated my allegiances or my family's allegiances or anything like that. We were poor people and we got an opportunity to go to some of the best schools.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

That was the case with thousands of other citizens of this country; so much so that the accusations and comments about discrimination baffled me. What they often say and imply is that persons of East Indian descent are discriminated against in Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot for the life of me understand how they come to that conclusion. Even today as we offer free tertiary education, it is offered to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Citizens of East Indian, African or Chinese descent or what have you, are making full use of the programmes and benefiting.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

As I walk about and go to different communities—I was in Homeland Gardens recently—different citizens come out to me and say, "Yes, we are accessing GATE and we appreciate it; tell de Prime Minister we say thanks." Different colours of citizens, I might add. It fills my heart; I am so happy that a policy of this Government is seen having a positive impact on individuals. If I might give you the number, over 75,000 individuals so far have been able to benefit from the GATE programme alone; that single programme; and they all appreciate it. [*Desk thumping*] It confuses me, it baffles me, and it is difficult for me to understand where this claim of discrimination comes from and what the justification for it is.

I spent some time during the course of last week on the Government Benches in the Lower House and I looked across at the Opposition Benches. I saw the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia; she had a good PNM education. [*Desk thumping*] Dr. Nanan, a dentist, had been the recipient and beneficiary of a good PNM education. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Ramsaran, also the recipient of a good PNM education, right here. Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh, a good PNM education. Sen. Sammy went to QRC too. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Dumas:** And benefited from the fight against the cess!

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** A beneficiary of a good PNM education.

**Hon. Senators:** What is a PNM education?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** The point I am making is that the education policy of Trinidad and Tobago has been characterized since 1956 by justice and fairness to all. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

If any government in any developing country had the wish to suppress and oppress a people, it would deny them education. The one weapon available to a government is the denial of education. If you look at the results of our education system over the last 35 to 40 years, you will recognize that the PNM has always practised an education policy with fairness and justice to all our citizens, [*Desk thumping*] regardless of race, class, region or gender. This PNM's education policy has always been in the best interest of all our people. In spite of our challenges, we have done so well in education. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President, I am seeing some frowns; I want to respond to some of those foolish frowns.

**Hon. Senators:** Foolish frowns? [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** There are some who do not like to accept it. Do you know why? It is arrogance in their hearts, because they do not make a connection between their own ability and the fact that they had an opportunity. Were it not for the opportunity, you could be as talented as ever—Had some of them been born in India, whatever their grandmother was doing, whether she was picking up plastic from a heap, they would be picking up plastic from that same heap; the same as with their mothers, as with their children, as with their grandchildren.

As tough as indentureship might have been, I am grateful and thankful to Almighty God for having been born in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] I am grateful and thankful that I have been able to have an upbringing under the Government of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] I am thankful and grateful that as a consequence of that, my family and many others have also had that opportunity; in spite of the fact that they may deny it. It is an arrogance they feel that they have achieved what they have as a consequence of their own ability. If they were born somewhere else, they would see how much ability they would have had. [*Crosstalk*]

There is a fact of opportunity. Education and opportunity go together, just as personal development and national development. There is a wide range of people who hold that view. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** Everyone had their turn; come on!

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** There are some people who feel they have achieved what they have achieved as a consequence of their own ability. I am not denying their ability. "If yuh bright, yuh bright." God bless you, God bless you. That is the talent God has given you. You have worked hard. Nobody is disputing the fact that you have worked hard, but I am simply pointing out a particular factor, that an opportunity has been provided. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** Everybody had their turn; whether you added value or not, you had your turn. [*Laughter*] There is nobody to judge that. Let him have his say, whether he is adding value or not. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Madam President, there was a young lady who I met quite accidentally. She is on a government scholarship at Luton in the United Kingdom (UK) pursuing a degree in law. She won an open scholarship which allowed her to access that opportunity anywhere in the world. She got that

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

scholarship in drama, a new category. Her scholarship was as a consequence of a decision taken by Cabinet in 2006. Before that there were only 50 scholarships offered, but Cabinet took the decision to increase the number of scholarships to 200 and in the process new categories were opened for open scholarships, one of those was drama. So this young lady got an open scholarship to study law at Luton as a result of her performance in the examinations.

What she did not know was that the year before that scholarship did not exist, that opportunity did not exist. She is benefiting from an opportunity as a consequence of the decisions of Government. That is the role that governments play, by creating opportunities for citizens. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] I can call her name; she is from Charlieville. It is a national scholarship as a consequence of A level performance. [*Crosstalk*]

We have done so well in this country in education that if you were to pass through the entire English-speaking Caribbean and rank the top 4,200 best performances at A levels, including countries like Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia or St. Vincent, 3,500 of them come from Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is not by accident; that is as a consequence of the Government's education policies, and largely the PNM's education policies. It is something about which we are extremely proud.

Even today we continue to make those opportunities available. Even more so, to the extent that our decisions in the past and today allow us to invest more in education, we continue to have the political will to make those kinds of investments. It comes down to political will and political philosophy and a government understanding what its role is in the context of the development of its society.

Madam President, they have started this chant that they care about people. I have no interest, as I said quite recently, in knowing how much they care. I am really not too concerned about how much they claim to care. I am not really even concerned about why they say they care. I am not even concerned with who they care about. I will like to know, "Since when yuh care?" When I reflect that these are the same people who introduced that fee to deny me and thousands of other young people an educational opportunity, I have to ask, "Since when yuh care?"

We introduced the On-The-Job Training Programme between 1991 to 1995 to create an opportunity for young citizens to transit from being students to being in the working world. At the time and even now the principle still holds that a number of young persons leave secondary school and have difficulty getting a

job, because they had no experience. We created an opportunity for them. There was an opportunity for the Government to intervene and create an on-the-job training experience. We did that, and we paid stipends. A number of citizens were able to leave secondary school and get an on-the-job training experience; with that experience added to their resume, they were then in a better position to face the employers of the private sector.

Madam President, they say that they care. That was a valuable opportunity extended to average and ordinary citizens; the same ones from poor communities. These were the poor citizens who had no contact or connection, nobody, no father or uncle in the bank, no godfather as the case might be. These were the poor people who had nobody to look out for them and so the Government intervened to provide an on-the-job training opportunity. So when you present yourself to the businessmen, you could say, "Look, I have spent this time; I can do this; I have proof I can do this task that you are asking me to do."

When they came into office in 1995/1996, they scrapped the programme. They squashed the programme. My question again comes up, "Since when yuh care?" I already know that you do not care about the poor people, "but ah hear yuh talking a care talk". I want to know since when.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was intended to target the same poor citizens of this country who were looking for opportunities. This is the role of government, to create opportunities. They frown their faces. When I talk about the Government's opportunities, I know why I am speaking about them. When they held the reins of government they did not use that opportunity to create opportunities for the people of the country. [*Desk thumping*] We know what they did. The CCC was a programme intended to target citizens of this country who needed a helping hand up, not a hand out, who come from challenging economic circumstances.

I will say something about the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and how some of our Senators are no different from the URP people.

The CCC was the programme we created to create opportunities for our citizens; to bring them into an environment where they could develop. They may be at risk groups, a term recognized in the social sciences; citizens who, because of their socio-economic circumstances, may need more attention and help. An opportunity existed for the intervention of the Government. When they came into government, they scrapped the programme. Since when do you care?

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

You did not care in 1995 to 2001 when you were in government; now you are in Opposition, "yuh coming to tell me yuh care". I can only conclude that care is entirely strategic, in the context of an election. Since when do you care? [*Crosstalk*]

The John S. Donaldson Technical Institute—in 2002 I was the Minister of State in the Ministry of Science and Technology. I took a tour through that facility. For years that had been an institution that provided valuable opportunities for technical education. Remember that our principle, policy and philosophy have always been to serve all the citizens of this country. They starved that institute of funding and redirected all the funding to the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology located in Point Lisas.

**4.15 p.m.**

Madam President, I have no objection to spending and establishing the TTIT at Point Lisas, but if it is done in a fashion that indicates that they intended to starve one institution, I ask myself since when do you care? Certainly you did not care about the people who were serviced by the John Donaldson Technical Institute. Is it related to your fortunes in the area? There is much more I can say about that particular issue.

Madam President, since when do they care? There are two buildings located in East Port of Spain which were constructed for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—the same people they claim to care about. They said those buildings were too good for them and they wanted to put them in the hands of one of their financiers to be converted into a hotel of some sort to be used for some elite purpose. And they come to tell me they care about poor people. Since when do they care?

Madam President, in the last weeks this Government made an announcement that it will increase the wages of all employees of CEPEP and URP by 15 per cent. We created the CEPEP and they washed their mouth on the programme. Sen. Ahmed even in this debate called them weed whackers and disrespected them in a most condescending tone—takes a view that they are weed whackers as though they are some kind of robot in an animated way performing a function mindlessly. That is what the suggestion was—weed whackers.

What they also said in the very early days was that CEPEP has created employment painting every pebble. Their political leader, Mr. Basdeo Panday, used those words. Madam President, that is the same gentleman who is making a point that he is going to make sure they get their pay, and he will die for them? Madam President, since when do they like CEPEP people?

Madam President, they wash their mouth on the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST). They say yesterday was yesterday and today is today, they now care, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago know them better than that and when the election is called the people would remember not their words of caring, but their acts and deeds of demonstrating that they have no concern whatsoever for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, for all the events that took place at the airport, there are a lot of things I do not remember. I do not have time, nor do I try to remember all, that is for the lawyers. But I remember very clearly one of the gentlemen writing a letter referring in his letter of apology that he had been associated with what he called a “criminal enterprise”.

Do we understand as Trinidadians and Tobagonians what that means? A gentleman is referring to a Government and a political party as a “criminal enterprise” and he was an ally of theirs. Madam President, the one thing I remember of all the allegations and statements of corruption that stood out and continues to stand out in my mind to this day when we look at the items that were costed; there was a bill for a door which cost \$95,000.

**Sen. Dumas:** A golden door.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** To this day, a \$95,000 door has stuck in my head. “Ah cyar get it out.” Madam President, when we decide to create an employment opportunity or a training opportunity for a citizen and to pay a MuST trainee \$60 a day, they have a problem with that. With \$95,000 I am sure I can train at least 100 citizens of this country in some skill and impact on those individuals’ life and the life of their families.

Madam President, whenever I speak to MuST trainees and graduates, you should hear their stories; “I was on the block doing nothing, I was playing wappie.” These were the things they were doing and the MuST Programme gave them an opportunity. My question to those on the opposite side and what I would like the population to ask the Members of the UNC and COP, or whoever is affiliated with them is, since when do they care?.

Madam President, they boast about the Distance Learning Centres which they introduced. They always have a sting in the tail you know, anything you see them doing look good at it. I remember they had four centres; one in Couva South, one in Couva North, one in Arouca and the other in Naparima.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

These centres were intended to provide computer literacy opportunities to citizens of the various communities. I made a tour of those in 2002 to see where they were and what was happening. When I got to the one at Couva South it was downstairs the office of Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj; when I went to Couva North, there were two buildings, an open walkway between the two and one building was the Distance Learning Secretariat Centre and the other was the Office of the Member of Parliament for Couva North, Mr. Basdeo Panday; when I went to Arouca, it was in a building owned by Mr. Jack Warner; when I went to Naparima, it was in a building with which Mr. Nizam Baksh is associated. Understand what I am saying. They had no interest in creating opportunities for people, but in creating opportunities for themselves. [*Desk thumping*] A lot has been said about a nexus in the activities of the Distance Learning Centres and the political activities that were taking place next door or upstairs as the case might be. Madam President, we know them well and the citizens of this country know them very well.

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** [*Inaudible*] [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Dumas:** “Don’t worry with her.” Do not respond to that.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Madam President, my colleague Sen. Ramroop has done a very good job in his contribution earlier in this budget debate on the training programmes. [*Desk thumping*] And we continue to make opportunities available to our citizens.

The GATE Programme as you know, not only makes opportunities available to citizens at public institutions but in the world. There is nowhere else in the world as far as I know, the situation exists where students are accessing tertiary education opportunities at private institutions being paid for by the Government. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot get that in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or Canada. You can get that in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—a policy consistent with the education policies of this Government’s intervention.

Madam President, we understand that even if tuition fees are paid there are still some citizens who may not be able to access the opportunity because there are other costs associated with tertiary education. There is the cost of accommodation and if you are coming from Tobago especially, and other rural areas, you have to come close to the institution. You cannot spend two hours travelling from Rio Claro to the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, so you must have funding available for accommodation.

Madam President, as good as the fast ferry is from Trinidad to Tobago, it would be very difficult for any citizen to come to Trinidad to attend school on a daily basis. Because we recognize that factor, we have introduced another programme—

Madam President, I will continue until 4.30 p.m.

**Madam President:** Are you going to wind up?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** I will have to, yes.

**Madam President:** Or are you taking the extension?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** I will wind up.

**Madam President:** Let me give the extension and you will continue to speak.

Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam President:** I think we will take the tea break, return, and then you will take your 15 minutes.

**Hon. Senator:** Let him continue.

**Madam President:** All right, we will continue.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Thank you very much, Madam President, and hon. Senators. Madam President, because we recognize that those costs do in fact exist, we have decided to introduce an entirely new programme to provide a very soft loan to our citizens who are desirous of accessing additional funding to help them pursue their education because tuition fees alone are not adequate. We recognize that, and so we have introduced a new programme, the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) where we provide loans with no interest while you are studying. So for the entire period you are studying, you are not required to make any payments, you are a student. We will cover the interest payments and six months after you graduate, that is the point at which the loan becomes repayable, and even then, we give you a discounted interest rate.

Madam President, if you are studying within Trinidad and Tobago we lend you up to \$25,000 per year; if you are studying within the Caricom region, we lend you up to \$75,000 per year; all of which are intended to make education opportunities available to our citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

More than that—and there is a lot more to say—we have been expanding capacity in the tertiary education sector. When we came into office, the enrolment at the University of the West Indies was 8,000. We have worked and supported UWI, and the budget was \$199 million. This past academic year being completed now, compared to the \$199 million which they offered, by the time this year is finished, this Government would have provided to the University of the West Indies close to \$600 million. [*Desk thumping*]

**4.30 p.m.**

Over the last five years, just over 2.5 billion taxpayers' dollars would have gone into the University of the West Indies. When they want to know about the billions—\$2.5 billion of it, gone to UWI—a single institution; gone into the education of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The University of Trinidad and Tobago was established to create additional capacity with a number of campuses throughout the country. There is one thing I need to point out on the issue of excellence at UTT. The capacity of UTT, I will just hasten to point out, by 2010 when it is completed, will have just around 15,000 quality education places. A lot has been said about UTT and accreditation and I made the point on a number of occasions that in order for an institution to gain the status of being an accredited institution, you must have a cohort of graduates. The reason for that is that accreditation is granted, among other things, on the basis of the performance of graduates in industry. So you have to have graduates operating in industry to determine how well they perform and whether the programme is to be an accredited programme.

We now have cohorts of graduates out of UTT. I have a letter here from the Institute of Engineering and Technology in the United Kingdom, which is an accrediting body for engineering degree programmes. May I point out, as I have before, that the Institute of Business, which is Arthur Lok Jack, operated for nine years without gaining any accreditation status. It was after that, that it got recognized and accredited. The UTT has been in operation for only a short time, but we now have a cohort of graduates. So now the process is complete and we can, in fact, assess the institution for the purposes of accreditation. The letter written by the Institute of Technology out of the United Kingdom says this:

“I am pleased to inform you that the academic accreditation committee has considered the report of the recent visit to the Point Lisas Campus, the University of Trinidad and Tobago and your action plan. Both documents have been accepted and therefore programmes: one, Bachelor of Applied

Technology (B-Teck) in Electrical Engineering, and two, Bachelor of Applied Technology (B-Teck) in Mechanical Engineering, are awarded three years retrospective accreditation from the 2002 intake to the 2004 intake.” [*Desk thumping*]

That is what they were saying would not happen. These two programmes for which we have a cohort of graduates, we now have the Institute of Engineering and Technology out of the United Kingdom coming and granting retrospective accreditation status! I have said so before, that accreditation can be granted retrospectively, back to the first intake, which is precisely what has happened.

We are extremely proud of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. It has been and will continue to be a phenomenal achievement, a source of great pride for the Government. As we move forward towards developed country status, the University of Trinidad and Tobago will make its fair contribution, a contribution in recognizing the expansion in capacity; recognizing and offering relevant programmes and ensuring the highest standards of excellence by any standards through the world. We are proud of the University of Trinidad and Tobago; we will see legislation introduced for the new College of Trinidad and Tobago. A lot of work has been taking place in education and we are proud, and our history and reputation in education dates back to 1956, and it is something that has made this Government and this political party, a great political party, offering and delivering service and opportunity to the people of this country. It is way far and above anything that they have ever even imagined and dreamed to produce. We are proud; we are happy; we are of Trinidad and Tobago. We are the People's National Movement.

Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Members, we shall now suspend for tea. We will return at 5.05 p.m.

**4.35 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.05 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Sen. Brother Noble Khan:** Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to share some words on what is before us today, the Appropriation Bill that will take us into 2008 and give meaning to Vision 2020. Before I start, let me express my gratitude and thanks for being here among such an elevated crowd, so to speak; to be with distinguished colleagues and also to share in a very enlightening experience here over the last few days in this debate.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

Firstly, I will make some comments as I go along and I would like to touch on the economy as it affects the appropriation which is before us. I have raised some questions in my own mind and, to some extent, even after what I heard and these are: Is it derived or driven from sustained development? How long can it last? How did our leadership contribute to the economy? The economy seems to be still geared to a one input-type mono-based phenomenon; where historically it was agriculture, now we see gas and oil.

Now we have been responsible for ourselves for quite some time—more than 50 years—and we are still in that bind. We have passed through quite a bit of intelligence, of intellectuals, of wisdom, and what have you, but we still seem to be in that bind. How soon would we be on the road to sustained development away from oil and gas; that is, to establish a diverse economy? How soon would that be realized? Before 2020? Or would our hopes of developed status never be realized? These are some of the thoughts that go through my mind.

Our resources are not unlimited. Are we putting enough aside? I always have these questions before me and I have shared it whenever I have the opportunity to do so, because I feel strongly about it. Even as we listen here, there is need, I still think that there should be putting aside, even as a special means of dealing with the economic spinoffs from our spending profile. I still think we should put more aside.

I would not go into a resource-based wealth economy—that sort of argument, even as it was proffered in dealing with inflation, but obviously we cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening to those at the lower end of the economic chain. I speak here of the poor and dispossessed, and much has been said by previous speakers. Again, I would say more expenditure should go into capital. The ratio should change between recurrent and capital.

We have heard much about change and transformation and the burgeoning pressures should lead our young to create new ideas and attitudes, which should stimulate and shape their intellect and the life that they ought to live, especially in the world which we are in; one where we can feel proud, even as those who are responsible for it now—this generation and particularly we, who sit in this Senate, we bear a greater responsibility, so that when we leave we could really feel that the watchwords of our nation: Production, Tolerance and Discipline, have left their mark, and also too, our national call of: “Together we aspire, together we achieve”.

I looked at a very ancient translation—more than 1,000 years ago—and I came across words called “critical thinking”, which is rather popular now. When I looked at the words, this is the feeling I got from it—I do not know, it might be

very similar to what more enlightened people than myself who are inside here may come up with. I came up with: the power to discriminate in making choices. Obviously, this is a very important input if we are to become leaders in nation building. Too often I find—I may be wrong but I share what I feel—we are self-centred. How are we to deal with this?

Of course, we have heard that we have universities in our country and these are increasing and we are very thankful for that. One would think in terms of the rational sciences, using as a base, your reasoning. Of course, you have syllogistic, peripatetic reasoning, and I do remember when I considered this in the early days of debates when we had our revered Father of the Nation having debates—Dr. Williams and Dom Basil Matthews. I do remember reading about in the days of Eden now, going back to Aristotle and those great thinkers and the concept of democracy at the time. Of course, much water has passed since Aristotle and ourselves with respect to democracy. Even at that time, when the question of democracy was a sort of elitist grouping within a nation, one thinks if there are not elements of that still existing in our country also, even in the sharing, when we think of the structure that we have had. Of course, we have passed through dialectics, Marxism and what have you. One wonders now what drives us. To me, I find it very difficult. It seems to be very, very elusive, the bases that we follow now.

I touch on the question of the law. I did mention here not too long ago the importance of the law. It may be at the time we were thinking of law in a different environment, but I still find it very fundamental to ourselves and we know that the law forms the basis of our very governance, and the establishment of law and order and its enforcement and administration. Someone has said that wisdom is the companion of the sister of the law. You know, particularly in these areas, to my mind, you have very flowery speeches coming in respect of these areas. One gets the feeling that there is, however, utmost sorrow and pain, a cry from outside, particularly from those for whom it was meant to serve for their benefit. I speak again of those at the lower end of the economic ladder.

Some would say how much better it could be if there were some symbiotic relationship that should exist between the varied relations; between the wives and the various sectors in our society that make this ruling elite, that comes out on top. You know, too, it has been said that injuries by a friend are graver than injuries from an enemy. I relate that particularly to the statement I have said before: Wisdom is a companion of the sister of the law. Perhaps when we think in terms of where the repose of wisdom is, questions will arise, but I am sure we know that within these hallowed walls and what it stands for and the different structures that

are represented in it that forms the governance of our country; one wonders if that might be relevant. But there are certain areas I would like also to comment on. It might be a bit disparate but bear with me, please.

**5.15 p.m.**

I will like to comment on certain areas. Bear with me please, Madam President. We have heard our colleagues speak about health. This is my take and feeling on it. Management has to be improved. Many of the negatives that have emerged and been expressed here and what we are inundated with outside are symptoms of what exists as far as management is concerned. In this chain and system we follow, the one at the top bears the blame. It might be going down the chain that we could see that change could take place.

We are too gratified with some initiatives of the Government. We had made representations for that. I am happy to see that we have overcome that with respect to medicine. I understand that within the area of the diabetic system the test material would be exempted too. This should help to bring a better monitoring system of so many of our people who are under this dreaded disease.

I will like to see more attention being given to our children particularly in detecting early learning disabilities, so they could receive the attention that is needed. I will like to see more attention being given to the support system for parents and the education system and the capacity to build within the communities and families. In our children rests the future of our nation and we have to be very particular in this area with how we deal and provide for them. If you have to leave a heritage it is here. They are God's gift to us.

After the children's level there should be adolescent development programmes. This could act as a pre-emptive to what we see taking place now. This should be national in scope. I had mentioned before that there was a pilot project in which I was part of the resource personnel in Marabella Secondary School. I think it is still active. I do not know if our very hardworking Minister of Education is here, but I am sure that she would have given us some enlightenment in that area of the Adolescent Development Programme. A place we can start with is the school system. I will not identify any school where this could be prioritized. We know some are being termed because they need this type of interaction to bring more ameliorative behaviour among them. Very often areas are stigmatized. I do not agree with that. Where our children fail we have failed.

The development in the area of the early childhood centres is supported and it is good. In my tradition we have said that we have to start from very early. Some

of the ancient traditions say even before birth. This is where we are taking off and where we can provide for. I will like to see this expanded nationally.

On HIV/AIDS, some progress has been made in addressing it. There have been salutary effects on the sexually transmitted infections through one of the high methods of contracting this. There has been an issue burning before us and that is one of the techniques or methods of addressing AIDS. It has been referred to as the condom machine initiative. There has been some indications but I will not go into them because that will be dealt with at an outer level. It might be very interesting. As far as we are concerned, there will be resistance to this on the basis that if it does not prove that what they are attempting to do will be successful, there is also the question of the effects and side effects that we think will have a non positive effect as far as the morals of our young people are concerned.

I know that the NACC of which I am a member—I have served on that since it started and it has been an honour so to do. It has raised many personal aspects in my life. I think that the Office of the Attorney General is responsible for this legislation. Much work has been done in the NACC on legislation addressing HIV/AIDS. I will like to see that when it comes. It should come early and be dealt with through the legal processes.

I will touch on education to which I refer as education from the cradle to the grave. I will like to see support given in partnership with the denominational boards in advancing programmes. I do not think I have to make a case for denominational boards. Their contribution is well known. It should not be allowed to lessen its contribution or to deteriorate. This is important. When you have something good you should use it. There should be cooperation. These are important aspects if we are to go forward and build a nation. We are small and I think that this is the way to go. These boards should be encouraged to grow. I am sure that we recognize this.

Transport within the school system is a tough one and it has been addressed somewhat. Many children are going to school along the East-West Corridor and they live way out eastwards. This could be less burdensome in putting it into effect and will ease the pressure on our children, if we were to use the Priority Bus Route. If more buses are available to transport our children, there will be regularity and safety in this.

I will touch on a question where there is a big gap not only here, but also throughout our country. It is a gap in the moral and spiritual values in the school system and elsewhere. I do not think that I have to make a case for the introduction of moral and spiritual values in the school system. I am not speaking

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

of theology or any particular religious bias. Historically, the faith-based system has been using the system of putting moral and spiritual values. In this millennium, it was recognized by the United Nations and the world systems are bringing the question of moral and spiritual values in the system. Very early, attempts were made in the Ministry of Education to put that in place. It should be done more speedily if we are to think of a holistic balance in bringing up our children. I will not rest long on what takes place in the country among our young.

If we could engender every one of our children to acquire every manner and disposition that is free of fault and to turn themselves in resolution to procuring every noble quality, that is clear of blemish to avoid every vile detestable trait; discard every base objectionable characteristic so that perfection and recognition of morals would be attained. I was thinking about this in terms of children but this should be an ongoing process for all of us.

There is major expansion in tertiary education UWI, UTT and the wider private and professional schools. It is necessary to bring these elements into the learning process. There should be courses in the area of moral ethics and integrity.

I remember a discussion I had with a gentlemen from Canada who was looking at the Integrity Commission. I am sure he would have spoken with many of us. I mentioned to him the question of using the family in the work he did. He shared with me that it was the first time that he had heard this concept in the area in which he was an expert. I know that the question of the family is under heavy stress. Establishing moral laws and principles should not be left out. I make this statement particularly with what is taking place throughout the world. A moral quality could be either good or bad according to value judgments. You could see the importance of this in the process of education, business, medicine and so on. A state prospers in which a person performs his action without deliberation. This is how it was meant to be. We can achieve this if we try.

I feel strongly about the moral quality to understand; to be trained; well-guided; have a high result and aspire to compete with people of virtue and high ideals; to be not of those who are disliked and not to be identified with vile and deviant acts.

It is a continuous process where eternal principles or righteousness are passed on from generation to generation. There is need to bring these elements of moral ethics and spirituality into the matrix of the budget process and the lives of all in our country. A programme of training, of good morals and making this practice habitual is what we should aspire to. That is advice by an enlightened person.

Sometimes the person furthest from fulfilment is the one who is content with the deficiency that he possesses. There is too much arrogance in us. It is important that we do not create an environment for this to emerge or to be present in our schools, communities and country. In any dynamic situation some old assumptions particularly, in our decision makers should be thrown away or changed. We should be always looking at ourselves.

I change now to giving the poor their rights where the Government grants people legal means to control their assets to empower them to plan for their future. This was obtained in the Caroni movement. One wonders how soon this will take place. I think that Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie touched this point. There must be more speed in this. It must be timely to be fair. There must be meaning for the young when you seek to involve them in the work ethic initiatives. We have to look at those programmes to ensure that they have not lost direction.

### **5.30 p.m.**

I remember when crash programmes started very close to where I lived. It took the late Dr. Williams who had sent a message to a gentleman, from whom the talk came, three times and he did not go. At that time, as a young man, the people in the village impressed upon him to go and he did and when he came back he spoke with us and he said that it was a question of work for the people. So it started right there in Laventille where you come up on the back road where it forks, in the yard of St. George County Council, in the little office there and it grew and grew.

It reached a high point in the 1970s and where I worked—I am sharing my experience here—a section was created for it which became institutionalized and it became a regular work which spread. It lost direction insofar that you did not have that pool coming out and new people coming out being trained and it remained stigmatized to some extent and also ossification. It is my knowledge and my experience I am sharing here with you with respect to that.

New programmes came out and new mechanisms, but I only hope that these new mechanisms do not fall into that trap. I particularly refer to the CEPEP, which I take to be an initiative to create entrepreneurs. But some people get stuck in it, particularly the workers. Soon after the budget was announced—I shared this too—a young lady spoke with me and told me she got 15 per cent. This was a young lady and she did not know how to work out the 15 per cent. She told me she got \$500 and she got \$75 more. She was happy and I felt good.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

However, one wonders what is taking place with a person who is working for \$500 per fortnight and gets a \$75 increase. You get the impression that here was a person not too highly developed in an area—she could not work out her 15 per cent—if we are keeping them that way and for what purpose. It was sad. I hope we break out of that. We see that taking place for generations, even with the Crash Programme.

I know a fellow a little older than myself who passed through this and he is the same way—no movement out. There has been a revolt against that, hence we see some of the spin-offs in some of the people. Just today I was getting a whole structure of what obtains at the moment. This applies to the budget before us. Quite a bit of money is being spent—billions of dollars. Who becomes boss and how things go and the effect it has on those in it is a whole new world created.

I am sure people here might be aware of that and may look at it from a different perspective. They may see it as a threat to society and as big people with children would see them—every child in this country is one of our children and would think in terms of that. This is my little take on it, which I divert for a little while to put as a high point we must consider.

Now, Madam President, last year, on the question of agriculture, I expressed some views and even my organization had said that you must concentrate on it. It is indeed heartening to see that some recognition has been given to this. We feel that there should always be a holistic approach. It is a vocation with respect to the whole area of production. Though I have been hearing much about the land scene, I would like to put into the records the question of the fishing industry. This is very important because we are surrounded by water; there are people poaching our fish; the Gulf is dying.

As a young man, we would go just off the Caroni mouth. At the time they had invented a trawling system. Those were the biggest shrimps I have ever seen and today you can get none. That area is all gone: fished out. What made the biggest impact was the pollution. Again, I make a special appeal to deal with the fishing. There is need for training to break out of the old systems and carry them to the next level and to have the type of equipment available. This is important. We are dealing with people at the lower end of the social level and economic level, but they have skills and ambitions like any one of us and are entitled to be treated that way. If we are to raise ourselves to First World status we must have it instituted with proper and relevant technology and equipment. There should be the relevant support services to ensure the success of the operation within funding, advice and so forth.

In the whole process of the agricultural initiatives, I do not know if they have vision. If you are judging by money, by how so much has been made to put so much here and so much there, again it is very difficult to measure quality of life and standard of living that comes so very often to us. I am sure we will hear plenty of that. We are more into bringing values into it and there is need for that. You help to transform your society.

Tucker Valley. When I heard that, it brought back memories. In the days when I first learned of Tucker Valley, the Americans had it under control and the groundwater was the best in our country. The Americans were on the base and there were special local people who would process the water when it came out of the ground and test it. It never failed that they would send it to Puerto Rico where it always passed the test. That memory stuck with me, that it had extra good water. It is always a nice place to go. You feel a sense of tranquility. I am sure we all have that connection when we deal with nature.

What occupies my mind when you hear about Tucker Valley is that you hear Cubans are coming. We had Germans, Americans—the military occupation; the English—we had slavery and indentureship with them; then the French with slavery and then the Spanish with the *encomienda* system and our own native ancestry. Tucker Valley is a beautiful place.

What have all these people contributed so far and what are we to get from it when we think in terms of the Cubans? They are a part of the Caribbean family. Germans brought technology; the Americans brought military occupation. There was a big orange field up there and they used to bring orange in Laventille not too far from where they had the meeting last night.

These are some of the things that come to my mind and they refer to large farms. What are the plans, the programmes and the changes? Tell me, Madam President, this is an important aspect. This question of the gentlemen outside the US gate and there is bauxite on one side, a great pillar. Not too long I went to Nelson Island. I mentioned it to my younger son and what it signify. He did not know about it. That man, where is he in the scheme of things to the Chaguaramas people? They say he was breaking off something from the marker that established that you enter the US territory. When they took it over, they took over areas. When you go to Chaguaramas there is a big pillar there, but where is he in the scheme of things.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

The Americans came; the very life of the world civilization was on the line. They gave the western world 50 old ships and they occupied. They left a 99-year lease. I do not know what the conditions of their leaving are, but I think in part of their conditions, they can come back any time. I do not know if anybody can remember the march to Chaguaramas with the umbrella over the doctor's head. We had our laugh. The point here is, when we got back to the land these people claimed it back. We are not dealing with law here, because I am sure some people will pull out something from some law book, even when we had it with the question of the sea between Barbados and ourselves, some claiming they had the better of it. Of course they were talking law. We are talking about soul; we are talking about people's feelings; we are talking about equity and that elusive quality, justice.

What about him? I heard he got a good work-over and the first thing that struck me is what happened at La Fillette. This is a village on the way to Blanchisseuse. What happened to these families? These are old families. They were there long before there was a road from Blanchisseuse. I know the track and they came with their little children. I think some other administration built a school further up. I am not getting into your business.

The parents came down with their children for the opening of the school and I heard they got a good work-over. How do you feel about that, Mr. Chin Lee, as a parent? Sad. Sad, sad! And we talk about building country and when the young people revolt in ways we do not like it. I do not think I am unfair in bringing it here. That is part of the budget, Madam President. There is education and the school building programme in it.

Remember again those people who have a claim on the base and who came late and how they are there. If I remember in Sanscrit there is a word which refers to an honourable person, a person looked upon with respect and he was placed with the structure of the plan that sees about food for us. Do you see how far back it goes?

**5.45 p.m.**

Madam President, I would like to touch on utilities: roads, water, light and telephones. Well, we laud all the efforts and those who are behind it. Much has been done in this area and much is expected to be done in this area. We praise that and we look forward to it. We have been looking for quite sometime, but we are a very passionate people.

Again, I do not want to get too personal, but where I live covers a wide area and my telephone has been down for two months—not only my telephone, but also persons on the hill. They said that the cables were cut and they are not going to fix it. This is the talk on the ground. But if you want to be a First World country, communication is most important, especially this type of communication, and also electricity.

I know some things have been put in place, but from my perspective and how I see it, there are certain areas that are worse off than in 1976. I know from personal experience that a pump was put in, and now you have to put a pump down the road—this is private. I am not talking about the pump that they put up at the back. The Government tried to push it higher up for the water to take it up to persons homes—a booster. There are senior citizens around. These are some of the things that make life a little rough. I am just bringing this to your attention.

What has been referred to as the “back road,” the Old St. Joseph Road, is still there. Some of the older folks knew when they put it down, and they are still there. When the pressure goes up too high it burst and so forth. If they check the money that was used to repair those lines, I think they could have put down new lines. How much longer should we wait?

With respect to housing, attempts are being made to build more houses, and we laud that. There seems to be no linkage between respect and how people are treated in this housing programme and the initiatives. There are many cultural parts of Trinidad. Trinidad is very diverse—from one place to here. That is not only so in people, but it is also so in the flora and fauna, and this adds to our diversity across the board that makes us unique as a people and who should really cherish ourselves and what we have, but the way people are treated—they would go and break down their houses.

At least, there is part of the English I remember and that is as a young boy they would tell you that honesty is the best policy. When you analyse this, policy could change, and one wonders how far this honesty that they are speaking about is the policy that they are practising. As young people we considered that.

There is also a next phrase, “a man’s home is his castle”. I am sure all of us would remember that phrase. Now, you would go and break down a man’s house with the legal process, and then you are talking about First World and Third World and so forth. That does not make any sense.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

Malick is not too far from Morvant, but they broke down a man's home and told him to go in Morvant which is a totally different cultural thing. This fellow is planting a little garden and you put him in a place where he cannot do that. The thing is not meshing.

With respect to the question of the biodiversity, I am sure that if we go deeper into it—our colleague, Sen. Angela Cropper could really elaborate more on that, but I just bring this to bear as some of the things that we are pursuing.

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Madam President, thank you and also my colleagues. The environment is very important. We are on the world stage and we are in the middle of globalization. We also make massive contributions on the world stage with respect to our gas and our people. We have Trinidadians and Tobagonians who went up and worked on the pipelines that came out of Yukon and Alaska and came down the road. To be of that calibre as workers, you had to be really good. I know that they were trained here. The men who trained them got reports thanking them for the training that these people were exposed to. I am not talking about the training now. This is a few years ago. He felt so good and I felt so good to know that our people were on that scene. So, we are part of the environmental thing and so forth.

I would like to share a quote and it goes like this—there are a series of them, but I am going to take out one. It was written on a board and taken up by someone who is very attached to the environment. One of the quotations he had put on it was before man made us citizens great nature made us men. Nature cannot be ordered about except by obeying her. He told me he took it from Shakespeare, but I do not know. It brings to bear the concept of trust and responsibility. This is very important when we think in terms of our environment.

We are on the cusp of advancement on two horns going forward. We may call it Vision 2020 and so forth which is where we hope to go and, obviously, we will have to interact with the environment. There seems to be a kind of insolence in dealing with ourselves and nature. As the quote says, nature will react. It reacts with consequences. It is a balance. So, this is a very important aspect when we are

dealing with things against the sanctity of that responsibility. This I bring to bear within ourselves that we pay particular attention to. We could pay lip service, because it is easier to say.

How much longer I may have to go again or even some of us? Not much. We have to think in terms of long years. I always like to mention the ancient countries. We think in terms of 2015 or 2020 that is in short term, but they think in thousands of years. That is their vision; that is their pattern. If you were to look into the books you would see that. These are some of the areas that we think in terms of.

With respect to the Alcoa matter—I understand that it has stopped, but they may return again—this is a matter that we should pay particular attention to, as to how it was dealt with at the social level. I spoke with some of the Alcoa people, and they told me that they came here because the gas is cheaper, but the way they were going about it—we were part of that—it did not go down too well.

It reminded me about my readings and so forth—the anegada experience which took place somewhere in the 1950s or 1960s—and how the people from the north dealt with us; perhaps, we must look at that and see how it goes.

The questions of arrogance and ignorance, I would say that these are not strengths. Humility, enlightenment, knowledge and understanding could lead us to love. I hear people talking about plenty love and care—it is not useless, but too often it passes for insolence and disrespect. How about the love that flows from within us and which is instilled within us. It is there, but it is just to bring it out and give it the respect and allow it to grow. That is important. It is good to know that at least we are talking it, and possibly we might be able to live it and put it in.

These are some of the things that I think in terms of. There are some other things, but let me mention the question of the globalization experience. In my view, globalization is not for us. The architects of globalization are the people from the north, and they are refining it as much as they can for their benefits. How can we fit into that scenario is up to us? This is an important aspect that we must see ourselves in. This, again, I think that the question of globalization, we still have a part to play, as small as we are.

Our colleague, Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir made mention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as one of our first lines that you will meet that goes outside. I think historically we have had a very strong and respected foreign affairs section, and it continues in that vein. We are poised for that. In my own way, I would say

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. BRO. KHAN]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

that Trinidad and Tobago is on a focal and physical point. When you look around it we are central within a big sea that goes to the African mother continent, down into Brazil and South America and up on the Southern United States—the effects of which we are poised to leave an impression on. This is very important both culturally and spiritually. These are important aspects which we have to share with and which could lead us and help us to drive our people into being better people and also to share in the world.

I would also like to mention the question of the spirit. We have started to share in that area. Trinidad and Tobago has established—though out of the bowels of an upheaval—the Inter-Religious Organization, which has been able to widen its scope in the Caribbean area, the Latin area, the Central America area and also at global levels. So, here we are in another role where our NGOs are playing very important roles.

Madam President, these are some of the thoughts that I share with you, and I hope by the grace of God as we continue to meet, our country will go from strength to strength, particularly the initiatives between our young persons in the area of knowledge, because historically that has been the area from which all of us have emerged; if there is any betterment that you could think in terms about, not only physically, but spiritually, morally and importantly as human beings.

Thank you and may God Bless us all. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, thank you. I share a similar fate as Sen. Bro. Noble Khan in that we are both speaking at the end of a very long four-day debate and, like him, I will take the opportunity to share a few thoughts in the Senate.

Madam President, I find myself in the same difficulty that I found myself in last year in the budget debate in that there is so much to be said about the two ministries that I have responsibilities for and which are quite important. I know they are important. In fact, there is so much to be said, but there is just one hour.

Let me at the start indicate that in Sen. Ali's contribution I did promise some information. I know I could not make it available in my response, so I collected the information and I gave it to him earlier today and that is the best that I could do on it.

I would start this year, unlike last year, with the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, because public administration and the other

aspect of the ministry, information and communication, is really the key to Vision 2020. The need for an effective public administration regime is an absolute necessity for Vision 2020. It is an absolute necessity for the development of any country.

**6.00 p.m.**

I think someone on the Front Bench, during the course of the debate asked me, “What are you doing in Public Administration?” So, I am going to spend some time talking about what I am doing, especially, it was kind of ironic coming from the Bench. You know public administration started under the PNM in 1991—1995 under Gordon Draper. I thought we handed over a fairly good road map of what public administration should be to the UNC. The reality is, after five years, the Ministry was disbanded and the Minister was fired. I think he became Vice-President of the Senate. So that in 2002, when we came in, it meant starting all over again, and unfortunately, when you start all over again, you lose some of what is there.

Madam President, I will try very quickly to give some information about what we are doing. It is not comprehensive; it is not all embracing, but I think it will give you a picture of what is happening there. The first aspect of the Ministry is public sector transformation; transformation of the public service. And the first element of that, naturally, is the development of the human resource and in that respect, training becomes very important. We have increased the portfolio of scholarships being offered, targeting now, in addition to the ones that we normally do, specific areas; priority development areas: medicine, poverty eradication, educational administration—for which large sums of money have been spent on education—criminology, Ministry of National Security, forensic sciences, estate management property evaluation. We have introduced the programme of development scholarships mentioned in the last budget and have in fact, awarded some.

The Government’s investment in training scholarships for our citizens has grown from \$22 million in 2003 to \$67 million in 2006. And the number of scholars in the system now on scholarship has grown from 266 to 904. [*Desk thumping*] And this excludes the 700 scholarships which are targeted to the Ministry of Education. So, if we add those, there are 1,600 people on scholarship. [*Desk thumping*] The Public Sector/Public Service Academy has introduced numerous training programmes for public officers at all levels, especially in the areas of human resource management and project management. Because this remains an

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

area of deficiency in the Government which translates in the slow implementation of the expenditures that are budgeted and leading and managing change, because that is also an area we are very short of skill and we need to do it.

How do you lead and manage change in an organization? As part of the effort do deal with the shortage of capacity in the country—and I think everyone understands now that there is a shortage of capacity—we set up a company called the Human Resource Services Company Limited, and the objective of that company is to utilize modern recruitment methods to attract nationals and non-nationals to fill skill gaps in our country. The mandate is, not only nationals but non-nationals; when I say nationals, it includes nationals abroad. It is a mechanism to try to bring people in.

It also has been given the responsibility, with all these scholars that we have, when they come back, to place them and manage them. Part of the problem that we had before, was that persons were sent on scholarship and they would come back and would be lost in the system. I went on a Canadian Commonwealth scholarship, when I was in the Ministry of Works, to do Highway Engineering and Transportation Economics. And I was convinced that when I came back I would have been put in the Drainage Division, because that is where perhaps an opportunity for promotion would occur. This company has the mandate now, to manage and to keep ensuring that the scholars who we send abroad to be trained are properly placed in the system, and also to design the initiatives and incentives that are required to help the public service to retain staff and monitor performance, as we also have the problem of the inability to retain staff.

It is not only a question of competitive salaries outside, it is to create the conditions of work that make people want to remain in the public service, as they see it as a contribution to national development in addition to monetary benefits. The company started operations in January of this year and has been working with ministries to advertise and recruit; to outfit offices, and again, I come back to the point, what are the conditions you create to encourage them, and to go into ministries and conduct human resource audit; see where they are.

In respect of the terms and conditions of people working for Government, we have settled all arrears of increments since coming into office; we have tried to keep our collective bargaining agreement up to date. When I took this Ministry, I found that we were negotiating for contracts that had expired and I promised myself that I would try as far as possible, to see if we could negotiate before the

period; that proved to be an impossible task. But what we have done is, we have been able to complete agreements within the period which puts us on the way to moving further and further back.

During the last year, the personnel department has successfully completed negotiations with the first and second division of the police service; officers of the civil service, public service agreements; first division officers of the fire and prison services; that is all for the period ending 2007; the daily rated employees of the Central Government, Tobago House of Assembly, municipal corporations, employees of the sugar cane fleet centre. More recently, I think it is two weeks ago, the Port of Spain and San Fernando corporations. I think the Minister announced last week the completion of the revised terms and conditions for the defence Force.

We have started an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in the public service—*[Interruption]* I need some assistance obviously.

**Sen. Ahmed:** Yes, you need some good help.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:**—and they are working on that. The whole thrust has to be, to create an environment and assistance to the people working in the system as you update their skills to make it effective. Electronic government, we believe, is one of the ways to have effective change in the way the Government operates. This is one of five pillars we have established in Vision 2020.

We have Fast Forward, the national ICT plan and we have been working to see how fast we can implement e-Government, to create a government in which ministries do not operate in silos, but interact with each other. As a result, we have instituted the Government's communications backbone, which is branded as "gov.net".

This wide area network is intended to be the central platform where ministries communicate and collaborate. Twenty ministries and over 200 sites are currently connected to gov.net. Over the next two years, the remaining ministries, an additional 1,200 sites will be connected, including schools and health institutions. In two years time, we hope that every ministry is connected with 1,400 sites. Public servants and people working in the Government can communicate effectively using electronic communications.

We have developed an e-Government portal, "ttconnect" online, which will be a single point of access on the internet for all Government information and

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

services, any time of the day or night, from anywhere in the world. Individual ministries have their sites, but this is a portal that you can come to as your first stop for Government services and be able to have access to individual ministries. At the moment, it provides information on over 375 Government services. And we want to keep adding Government services online, so that we would be able to have all ministries and all specific services for delivery online. This has the potential, not only to make access to Government faster, but to make access to Government easier, because you remove the necessity for being physically in the place where the information is to be provided. And as part of this initiative, we are opening the first tconnect service centre, which are centres to bring Government services closer to communities.

We will offer different channels for accessing services, by a courier service. We are working with TTpost so that you will be able to go there, fill an application out, if you cannot do it online; TTpost will take it to the relevant ministry; they would process it; send it back by TTpost to the service centre where you can collect it. [*Desk thumping*] We will also have online services. We are opening the first two centres in St. James and Princes Town and we hope to open five additional centres during the course of next year. This is in addition to making all the places where we have computer facilities: schools, libraries also available.

We have been able to get the Integrated Human Resource Information System (IHRIS) operational, to transfer all our human resource data and records onto a system. And now, we can automate a lot of our human resource management functions. We want to use it to add value, payroll, electronic document management, electronic payment. For the first time we have the ability to know how many public servants we have; what are their skills; keep their records up-to-date and be able to plan better usage of the information.

Using IHRIS, we started a pilot project, the pensions re-engineering project. I take a lot of pride in this project because those of you who have worked with government and have left know how long it takes you to get your benefits. So, using IHRIS, the project that we are doing as a pilot and hoping to move it quickly forward has these expected outcomes: that you would receive your benefits on the day of retirement; you will receive your monthly payments from the end of the first month after the retirement.

This system will not only deal with the fact that people, after having worked all those years, find themselves having to wait a long time, but it will also reengineer the process of how we manage information, because if the project is successful—and I have no reason why it should not—then we could look at other systems that we are using in dealing with the management of our human resource.

Another achievement is the commencement of the first phase of a national dialogue strategy. We have been having focus groups with key stakeholders on public transformation issues and also with public servants themselves. We continue the Opinion Leader Survey panel to make the information available on constant feedback on the public reactions to progress, effectiveness and delivery of public service and to suggest possible improvement.

**6.15 p.m.**

In my view, you can only make sound decisions on the basis of good information. We all believe we know what is out there, but I like to think there is a way of measuring it scientifically, and make a decision on that basis. So many people called me about this. Yes, they may call me, but it may not be the full extent of what is out there and how people see it.

As I had indicated last year, we decided as a priority to look at the CSO, because without good national statistics, you know you are not going to make good decisions. The consultant's report is in on a restructured CSO and recommended new institutional arrangements, with new legislation. In the course of this year, we will begin to implement the consultant's report, because as I say, if you do not have confidence in your own national statistics, then you cannot have proper developmental plans.

That is part of our problem, when you see all these reports, we are 27<sup>th</sup> here, 59<sup>th</sup> there and 67<sup>th</sup> there, the statistics we are using sometimes are quite dated and sometimes not correct. This reflects on our own status in some of these international benchmarks. We need to get it right because sometimes we know the reality is not that, it may be better, it may be worse, but there is no real basis for making that judgment.

As you know, Madam President, we started the Prime Minister's Award for Innovation and Service Excellence in 2004. It has proved to be very successful and the Ministries are now making a greater and greater effort. I think the Minister of Legal Affairs is very proud of the fact that every year she seems to win the award for IT [*Desk thumping*] and the Attorney General was quite happy

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

last year to win for his day school. We are adding two new categories this year, ICT Service Delivery and for the best new entrant. In other words, we want to encourage more and more Ministries to come in, so, if you are a new entrant and you are the best, you would get an award. Again, it is trying to use techniques to encourage people to become part of the solution of the public service transformation.

Physical infrastructure, I keep saying this each time, if you do not give people a proper working environment and the tools to work, you are not going to get good service. Plus the fact that the businessman in me, tells me, if you are paying \$5 million a month for rent, there has to be a better way of taking that \$5 million and investing it into your accommodation. I hate to say it, but because of the growth in the economy and the demand for space, I am sitting in a Ministry and seeing rents at the end of three years, landlords asking for double what they were—it is a question of supply and demand. So, I have no difficulty in my mind in the building of decent government office accommodation. Whether they are tall; whether they are short; whether they are fat; whether they are narrow; build them.

We have the government campus and car park. The car park is completed; work is continuing on Customs and Excise; Board of Inland Revenue; Ministry of Legal Affairs; Attorney General; Ministry of National Security; the Ministry of Education.

Madam President, I am told that I must put on my other hat and move that the debate, continue until the completion of this Bill.

#### PROCEDURAL MOTION

**The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate continue in session until the conclusion of the debate on the Bill before the Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** The building in St. Clair is now complete and work is progressing on the waterfront, the administrative complex at Chancery Lane in San Fernando; the reconstruction of Salvatori Building, work is going on at the administrative centres throughout the country. In own Ministry, given the

shortage of space and the cost of space, we have begun to move some of our activities outside, which are not necessary to be in Port of Spain to Chaguanas and further east. We are talking to e-Teck about the building of an archives building at Wallerfield, a most modern archive building.

Fast Forward, ICT. We have been continuing to implement the Fast Forward ICT plan and that plan is basically based on access to technology, low, affordable cost of communications and a competitive environment for the telecommunication industry. We have liberalized; we have removed import duties on computers, peripherals; we now have more phones; more computers being used. The number of homes with Internet access has increased from 8 per cent to 29 per cent in the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] While it is good, this is not good enough.

**Hon. Senator:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Households now have Internet access and we are pushing to have that grow, and the way that will grow is to bring down the cost of broadband. Electronic commerce, again, trying to get high speed Internet access, which is happening slowly, at a low cost, will also grow this.

I made a statement in this Senate about enterprise net, the online micro, small and medium size business to business marketplace. We established a pilot project; we are now upscaling the pilot to create a comprehensive e-business strategy to provide among other things, a global listing of trade events, internal market research, practical tools to help local, medium and small enterprises with export process and quick information on new business opportunities.

For small businesses, this is an important tool because they all cannot go out and hire marketing experts and procurement experts and get information. We now have 1,500 companies currently registered and we plan to register an additional 1,800 in the coming months. Hopefully, by the next six months we will have 3,300 companies on this enterprise net. We have created an e-business round table which is a private/public sector collaborative mechanism to increase the adoption of ICT among businesses, and also to get buy-in by the private sector in our ICT plan.

We launched a programme a couple of months ago, where I made a presentation and the President of the Chamber said, "You know, this is the best-kept secret in the country. We need to have more dialogue between ourselves, Government and the private sector on what you are doing." The e-business round table will do that for us.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

We are starting a programme, working with the Commonwealth Secretariat on collecting, upgrading, repairing and replacing computers, primarily for use in schools and communities across Trinidad and Tobago. It is a programme that I saw in Canada about three years ago. A lot of businesses change computers quickly and here the Canadian Government took the opportunity to get them as a donation and create a whole industry of refurbishing them and making them available at a very low cost to schools and other places. It did two things, it trained people in repairing and upgrading computers, so they could train students who could go out and get jobs.

It also allowed all this equipment to find some use and increase the penetration of ICT in the country, because more and more schools, libraries, businesses will have computers. It also deals with the question of the disposal of used computers, e-waste, because if you could find a way to rehabilitate them and use them, then you would not find them in the dump where they end up.

All this, Madam President, has to take place in the context of updated legislation. ICT communication needs updated legislation and we have been working on that. We have the Telecommunications Act and Regulations, we need to look at that. We have the question of data protection and privacy; electronic documents and signatures; security, intellectual property and protection from inappropriate content on the Internet. All these are things that normally we would not have worried about 10 years ago, we have to deal with them now. People want to go and order on the Internet; they want to send documents with signatures.

This package of legislation is being developed. We have done two pieces which are now completed and will be coming to the Parliament soon, but a whole series of legislative action is required to give citizens confidence to do business online, to establish a framework, so that if there are disputes, how they will be dealt with, and most importantly, that they are guaranteed privacy in this new technology. The broadcasting broadband is important because it is the key to communications. Our intention is to provide this ubiquitous broadband coverage over the country and to do it on an on-demand basis, so that at least 80 per cent of our population can get it at internationally competitive prices and we have set March 2008 for this to happen.

We have recently approved a broadband action plan. We have granted concessions to seven international operators and we have approved the first multi-international submarine fiber cable landed at Chaguaramas earlier this year. Because you need to get not only competition internally, but you need to get

international competition out of Trinidad. At the moment, this is limited to TSTT with their America One cable. We have allowed other people to lay cable, the first has come in; I think there is one more to come in, so we will have competition even on the external links.

As you know, Madam President, we began to liberalize the telecommunications sector in December 2005 and the Telecommunications Authority has been working to ensure that we have regulations, policies and guidelines for the sector.

**6.30 p.m.**

We have granted two concessions for cellular phones. We have also granted seven concessions to entities owning their own network for the provision of subscription broadcast television services; six of these are currently offering services and two of the six are national in scope. Four concessions were granted to entities to lease channels from the cable provider. A total of 11 concessions have been granted in this market; that is how some of them, even though they do not have national licences, now have the ability to be seen on cable.

As you know, we granted concessions to existing radio and television broadcasters. We now have 36 radio stations operating in the country and six free to air television stations. The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) has recently invited expressions of interest to provide broadband wireless access services. Bidders have to be prequalified and an auction manager to conduct the process has been selected. We will hold the auction later this month, because we need to allocate spectrum on which to provide this. The Authority is also doing the surveys that are required. We need to know what the real status of the digital divide is in this country—the persons who have access and the persons who do not—and what we need to do to develop a programme which will bring everybody at the same level.

The National Library Information System (NALIS) continues to make significant progress. In the last year, registration in Internet usage by the public at all branches of the library system increased; 39,000 persons accessed computer and Internet facilities at all libraries. Over 100,000 new books were added to the library collection; the total now stands at 571,946. We have increased the loans to individuals from two to six items.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

We have trained 5,000 persons in the use of the Internet by their coming into the library. We have put in a new network infrastructure in 22 public libraries throughout the country, with upgraded additional computer equipment for the staff and public use. There are now over 300 computers available for public use in our library system.

We have created wireless hot spots at the National Library building in Port of Spain and the Carnegie Free Library in San Fernando. We have established computer centres for children at 15 library branches. We have, in the context of the trend that has to be developed in this country, put in facilities for the physically challenged through the service, including ramps for wheelchairs and equipment and staff to assist persons who are visually impaired.

If you go to the library you will observe a room in which blind people can, in fact, access information through specialized equipment. We also instituted a pilot project with the Youth Training Camp to support reading habits of institutionalized members of the community; we are seeking to bring reading services to these institutions.

The Heritage Library continues to play a major role in the preservation of our cultural heritage. We have acquired new collections and have digitized 7,052 local articles for Internet access. The intention is to have it in a digitized form so that through the Internet one can access this information.

We have expanded our library services network. We have acquired a new mobile digital library unit equipped with wheelchair access. We will soon acquire a new mobile library to service communities in North Trinidad.

We have created a new company called the Government Information Services Limited to replace the old Government Information Division. I indicated on more than one occasion that we wanted to use this method to ensure that there was flexibility in the way we recruited people and the amount that we paid them, in what is essentially a very specialized and important function of communication. It is no longer the old system.

The objective of this company is to proactively inform and educate the public about their rights and responsibilities on national issues; to provide a platform for the dissemination of educational programmes and material; to provide the public with accurate, timely and quality information about Government policies,

decisions and actions; to promote the development of quality local programming and to build a culture of pride, ethics and values. This is the company to do that; not CNMG. Funds will go here to do things that are not commercially viable, but which are necessary.

I was always of the view that these companies will be successful if they were able to create a product that got the interest of the people. The one thing I know about communication is the fact that you put it out there does not mean that people are listening to or looking at it. You have to create it in a form and fashion that makes it interesting. Propaganda never works; despite what they believe. If you hear them in this House, you will believe that propaganda works; it does not; people have moved beyond that. So there is no need for the Government to consider using CCMG for Government propaganda; it will not work. You need to let them operate in a commercial environment. The GIS Limited will be the avenue to convey Government information, which is not Government propaganda.

Madam President, that was just a short overview; there is much more that the Ministry is doing. Obviously, if I had another half an hour I could do more. *[Interruption]* But I need to go to energy; Sen. Ali will not forgive me if I shortchange energy.

I think Sen. Ali asked this question, but I will repeat it. Let us look at our crude oil and natural gas reserves. Average oil production for fiscal year 2000, 128,500 barrels per day; in 2006 it is more, 148,000 barrels. In 2007 we had some problems on the Bhp Billiton rig so that crude oil production is estimated for this year at 142,000 barrels, which is similar to what we did in 2006 for gas, it is 4.1 billion standard cubic feet.

I indicated when the Ministry made the presentation on the Ryder Scott report what the gas reserves were, 31.4 trillion cubic feet; oil is 2,500 million barrels of oil. I think at the current rate of extraction it goes to about 100 plus years for oil. We need to set the right policy framework for the continued development of our hydrocarbon sector. We need, as Ryder Scott has indicated, to have an aggressive exploratory programme. We are looking at what we can do to encourage such a programme.

I heard people talk about incentives for drilling and asking why we are giving incentives, as if there is one incentive for all. The onshore, near shore and shallow waters have a lot of activity going on, which means that the regime for these areas

is quite attractive, so there is no need to change. The ultra deep, the one that is outside, is the one where we have only had one bid for nine blocks. Part of the reason is that this year we changed the production sharing contract to see whether we could get more out of any discovery. If we had gone with the old production sharing contract, I am sure we would have gotten more bids. A production sharing contract really means if companies invest and they find nothing, it is their loss. If they find something, then after they recover their expenditure, how you share what is left.

The old system gave a greater share to the company. The new one we put sought to get a larger share for the Government; obviously we need to look at that and see whether we need to adjust it. When we talk about looking at what we need to do for an aggressive programme, it is in respect of the ultra deep and the new production sharing contract, as compared to what we had before and what adjustments we have to make.

In the case of petrochemicals, I think the Government has made it quite clear that we now consider plants to produce pure petrochemicals, a mature industry. We are not building any more ammonia or methanol plants, simply to export ammonia and methanol. We are already a large exporter of ammonia and methanol and, therefore, as a policy we will only continue to go into petrochemicals if there are substantial downstream activities that will accrue to that investment.

We also cannot ignore renewable energy. As I indicated more than once in this House, we need to be at the cutting edge of renewable energy, both for sustainable development, but more than that, if we can use sustainable renewable energy in this country, it frees up our hydrocarbons for export.

We have a pilot solar water heating project; a study on the application of photovoltaic and the formulation of a draft policy document on renewable energy. I recently went down to the methanol plant where they had a pilot project of using methanol to generate electricity, which means that we can also assist our Caribbean neighbours. Where it is difficult or almost impossible to ship energy or gas, you can ship methanol, and it can be used.

If we are to continue, and I see no reason why we should not, to develop energy based projects, we need to put in infrastructure; we need to have industrial estates.

Point Lisas South and East, Cap-de-Ville and the Oropouche bank are earmarked for further studies as industrial sites. I smiled when Sen. Seetahal SC

talked about Dubai. I was there two years ago. A lot of the development they are doing is, in fact, offshore; they are building islands. [*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Minister's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. M. Joseph*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** I was prepared to move my own extension. [*Laughter*]

We need to strengthen the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. One of the key initiatives we have developed is an energy data hub, which is now online and we are able to collect information from all the players in the industry and store the information at the Ministry, for timely receipt and dissemination of information. The Ministry can carry out independent tracking, trending and utilization of our oil resource. The system will be formally launched next month. We did this working with the energy companies in the country.

We need to look at ensuring our upstream sector provides the basis for continued exploration. The committed work obligation arising out of the 2003/2004 bid round has already yielded the acquisition of 4,639 square metres offshore 3D seismic data and the identification of leads for new explorations.

#### **6.45 p.m.**

Two wells were drilled and natural gas was found in commercial quantities on block 4A. Sixteen wells are scheduled to be drilled by PetroCanada; 12 by Kerr, McGee and Canadian superior over the next nine months at an estimated cost of US \$565 million. These are wells to be drilled after fairly good 3D seismic surveys and the identification of good prospects.

In the 2005/2006 bid round, we received six submissions, two of which met our expectations; Guayaguayare Shallow and Deep blocks submitted by Hardman Energy. Proposals were received from Offshore blocks 2(ab) and NCMA2 which met the ministry's expectation. We are now negotiating PSC arrangements for all of them. There were four other submissions that were encouraging but did not

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

meet our expectations. We are discussing with the companies for an improvement in the proposals. That is why I was saying on the near shore, land and shallow areas there is no shortage of companies making an effort.

When these negotiations are completed we expect an expenditure of US \$381 million commencing from 2008 for the preliminary work programme. It is our view that the exploration programme for the next six years would be in excess of US \$946 million and I made the point when the companies invest if they do not find anything, it is their loss, if they find, they share what they find with the Government. These new arrangements have a carrying participation by Petrotrin.

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Thank you, Madam President. I need some information from the hon. Minister. Firstly, in Minister Enill's contribution it is stated clearly that a new regime of incentives to stimulate exploration activity will be introduced in 2008. So a decision has been taken by the Government to offer further incentives in 2008.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** When I say we have to review the production sharing contract, it is in fact reviewing the incentives in the system for ultra deep areas.

We have very large deposits of heavy oil in this country and we have decided to evaluate how much we have. We have a project for this exercise to be completed in the first quarter of next year. It needs to be quantified. Heavy oil, given the price at which oil is selling now becomes a viable alternative.

We are looking at a competitive bidding round in 2008, and we are looking at other blocks which we would put out. I think at our presentation we indicated that 65 per cent of the possible areas are still not yet put out for bids.

Quickly, on the cross border reserves as you know, we signed a framework treaty for unitization. We have the first field, Loran Manatee, and we have had technical discussions and there is a draft text of this agreement with the Venezuelan Government on how we are going to explore it—not what we are going to use it for—then the policy decision will come of what it is used for.

Madam President, on the local content in the energy sector, we continue to seek to have maximum participation by local suppliers in this industry and I do not think people realize that in the service sector of the oil industry, because of our history, we have international local firms that are working globally. Our service sector to the oil industry is highly developed and internationally competitive and we have to continue developing this sector.

We took a decision to create a fabrication yard at La Brea because we felt that local fabrication for the energy sector was something that we should be doing. This has been a success beyond our wildest dream and in 2008 we expect three major projects to be done there; the bpTT Savonetta Deck, 2,300 metric tons of fabrication; British Gas Poinsettia Deck, 4,000 metric tons and the EOG Toucan Deck, 1,800 metric tons. The yard is full and we now have to increase its capacity. This is an industry we did not have four years ago. It was all being done in the Gulf Coast in the US.

Our production of LNG now is 15 million tonnes per year. The next train—as I have said time and time again—will come when we find additional gas. We are working with BG, having signed a memorandum of understanding in March this year to do a joint study of what form it will take if and when we find the gas. But again, I want to say that at the moment it remains a study. We have to find the gas or agree with Venezuela that Loran Manatee's gas use is for LNG.

Sen. Basharat Ali asked about Petrotrin and I passed the information to him, the projects are continuing and we continue with new industrial estates and port facilities. We have new industrial ports at Point Lisas, Brighton and Galeota.

Madam President, with respect to power generation projects that we have approved—let me first of all say that we have taken a policy decision to have power plants in the combined cycle model, that is using gas and the steam from one to drive the other. It will cost more, but you will use less gas. There is a 65 megawatt power plant for Tobago, a new combined cycle 720 megawatt plant for Union Estate, an additional 130 megawatts at Trinity Power that is using combined cycle, an additional 140 megawatts from PowerGen, again using combined cycle technology. We plan a new 225 megawatt power station at Arima and a new 225 megawatt power station at Point Lisas and a 450 megawatt power station at Sea Lots to replace the existing power plant in Port of Spain.

Madam President, with respect to quarries, we have issued a number of regularized licences. We plan to release another 1,100 acres of quarry lands in 2008. National Quarries has commissioned their new processing plant producing 400 tonnes an hour. We are finalizing the lease of the lime stone quarry at Verdant Vale and the preferred bidder has indicated that when it becomes fully operational, it will produce one million cubic yards per annum. I think we are beginning to break the back of the shortage of aggregate.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. DR. L. SAITH]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

We are working on defining a mining zone area in the country and going for EIA for the whole mining zone, so the individual quarry operators would not have to go individually. We will define an area for mining, do a proper environmental analysis and once we give out in that mining zone it will already have environmental approval.

Madam President, I just want to say that in 2008 the country can expect a heightened level of EMP exploration in production activity in the upstream sector as we look forward to the fiscal period of 2007/2008. We scheduled our expansion in the downstream natural gas sector involving a range of products geared to production of high value-added products. I think Sen. Ali enunciated some of the projects we have listed to do that.

We want to further diversify our energy sector by a mix of natural gas exports, petrochemicals, metals and now plastics and the adoption of combined cycle for our electricity generation, improvement in our infrastructure, pipelines and so forth, the emphasis on a functioning framework to guide renewable energy development over the long term and the implementation of legislation. The quarry policy was laid in Parliament and we need to have the legislation come to Parliament arising out of that policy. We need continued promotion of local content in the industry.

As I close, Madam President, it is important to reiterate that the energy sector is poised for further significant expansion, it continues to be the engine of growth and development of the national economy, and Government has undertaken a broad range of strategies to ensure its success.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. the Hon. Conrad Enill):**  
Thank you, Madam President, I would like to thank all those who contributed to this debate. We have spent a long time discussing the matters that were raised and I think that in all that has occurred, my colleagues dealt extensively with many of the issues and, therefore, at this time I wondered in all the various issues that were raised which is the one that I think needed to be addressed and that was very easy. It had to do with a statement made by Sen. Cropper which basically said—if I remember the words correctly—something to the effect that there is really no difference between what they on that side do, and what we on this side have done.

Madam President, I wish therefore to attempt to explain that there is a difference between process reengineering and transformation, let me explain that.

**7.00 p.m.**

When we entered Government, the tools that were being used to manage this economy was the Social and Economic Policy Framework, a document basically that had three years of projections. You took what you were doing, you took into account inflation, the decisions you made and you project it out and then what you sought to do was to fix the process. So if you are doing 10 today, you will try to do 12 tomorrow.

That approach is one in which a lot of the arguments that were raised by those on the other side rarely fit that profile, because, you see, in that sense, you did not have a plan and every year you could come up with a new one, and at the end of it all you had something that was disjointed; everybody was going in all kinds of directions and the effect of that was simply, that whatever you decided was the flavour of the day, would become the topic and everybody would talk about: "We have done this and we have done that." But that is not how you run a country, especially one that has the kind of resources that we have been able to bring to the table. I keep hearing about this notion that Trinidad and Tobago is blessed and the Government did not do anything. Let me tell you what the Government did, because I was part of the Government that did it.

The Government basically took the view that in the context of dealing with the revenue to be derived for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it would renegotiate its tax structure, which gave up a significant amount of the resources that could have been available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You have to understand what we meant. When we talk about energy, for example, in production terms, even if we had the same level of production, the incentives that we met in place created for us a situation where, with high oil prices we were getting less revenue. That is a statement of fact. And by policy, they did absolutely nothing to change that. Therefore, it was this Government that took the view that that was not equitable; that the people of Trinidad and Tobago required more and, therefore, we took the necessary action to use the same resource—a different tax system—and, therefore, we were able to do two things: maintain the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago, because that is what we want to do; and at the same time, ensure that we get more from what was being made available to us.

But let me go back a little. The challenge that those who oppose us face is that, to a very large extent, they are not able to think long-term. What did we do? The first thing we did was that we decided that Trinidad and Tobago must have a goal that is not short term but longer term. In that situation, we did an exercise

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

with the national community for a number of years and at the end of it all, we went through a number of different processes and we have agreement by a significant amount of the intelligentsia in the population who worked on a particular exercise, free of Government interference, and produced a plan called Vision 2020.

The plan, in its construct, was significantly different from anything that we had done before, because usually in our planning process we follow a particular model. In these particular circumstances, we did something different. We developed our plan for Trinidad and Tobago on the basis of something we call, the developmental pillars, because we believe that development is really about people and in that regard, the plan that we have talks about the development of people.

This is the first time that we have been able to put all the pieces together and come to the stage where we can actually have a report on the 2007 plan. It is very important that we understand that all the resources that are available to us now and the way we have used the resources, basically, comes from a planning process. One of the fundamental learnings that we have had in the Vision 2020 exercise is this: that unless we find a way in which the values and attitudes of those who are part of this process is changed, then our progress to developed country would be slow and painful. In order for us to start to move to the state that we have set for ourselves, the values and attitudes of most of us must change.

But when we entered office, we took the view that we would focus on—in the very first instance—education, and we had a number of priorities. We had education, health, housing, social services, security and then infrastructure. Each year we consistently put policies in place so that today, when my colleague, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, and yesterday, my colleague, the Minister of Education, spoke about that which we had achieved, it really was about indicating that the policy we had put in place had, in fact, worked.

There were some issues that came up in the debate and let me just deal with them. One of the issues that came up in the debate was the whole question of Government spending. We have provided some detail on spending from an economic classification perspective: We spent so much on wages; we spent so much on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and so on, but still, you hear the issue about spending. There are a number of ways that we could analyze this thing. If we analyze it, as some would say, in terms of the Public Sector

Investment Programme, which is really capital infrastructure, we would find that if we use the new method by which we evaluate our progress, that as it relates to projects to the developing of a caring society—25 per cent. That is to say, in the total expenditure 25 per cent of our resources went there; for effective government, 17 per cent; competitive business, 18 per cent; innovative people, 22 per cent and sound infrastructure, 18 per cent. So if you were to analyze how we have spent what we have spent and you put it in the context of the plan, you will see that that is what the result is. What it says to us, really, is that, by and large, we are spending on each pillar within the basis of 17 to 25 per cent and, therefore, we are moving along a particular path.

The other issue, of course, that comes up all the time is about the delivery record, and if we did the same thing, if we took 117 projects, which we did, and looked at the delivery record, we would see that in that 117 projects, 27 projects were done; of that, 22 not started; 53 in progress—and projects by their very nature are long term—and 15 are pending. So that when you look at the empirical data in terms of the delivery record, it is totally different from what has been put in the public domain.

During the period 2002—2006, much has been said about spending and spending and spending. Let me just share with you, for example, what has occurred and you would tell me where we have spent in the way that those who talk about this, suggest that we have.

Under Head 1, the President, during the period 2002—2007, there was an allocation of \$129,794,233; the recurrent was \$70 million broadly and the development programme was \$59 million. Is that bad spending? The Auditor General: \$108 million. Is that bad spending? The Judiciary: \$1.1 billion. Is that bad spending? The Industrial Court, \$154 million; Parliament, \$272 million; Service Commission—that is the institution that supports the 84,000 employees that we have—\$311 million-odd, with \$212 million being recurrent and \$98 million as part of the development programme; the Statutory Authorities, \$21 million; the Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$256 million; the Tax Appeal Board, \$21 million; the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, \$11 million; the Public Service Appeal Board, \$8 million; the Office of the Prime Minister, \$4 billion; The Tobago House of Assembly, \$6 billion; Central Administrative Services, Tobago, \$66 million; the Personnel Department, \$144 million; Ministry of Finance, \$28 billion; Charges on Account of Public Debt—and this is after we renegotiated a lot of the debt down, because we took the view when we came in that debt that was at 17 and 25 per cent should be renegotiated

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

down, and we did that, but the charge was \$25 billion. Pension and Gratuities, \$6 billion; Ministry of Planning, \$872 million; Ministry of National Security, \$13 billion; Ministry of the Attorney General, \$1 billion; Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$386 million; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, \$2.7 billion; Ministry of Education, \$16 billion; Ministry of Health, \$11 billion; Ministry of Labour, \$563 million; Ministry of Public Administration, \$2 billion; Ministry of Housing, \$2.9 billion.

The point I am making is that when you look at what the Government has been able to achieve and you relate it to the allocations by Ministry, and you break it down in terms of how many people have, in fact, benefited as a result of these expenditures, it is difficult, in my mind, to understand what is wrong with the Government putting resources to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And for those who continue to say that we should not be spending this amount of money, what should we be doing with it? The only reason that you put a government in place, as I understand it, is to make sure that people's lives are better, and if you are using the resources of the country to ensure that people's lives are better, then we see absolutely nothing wrong with that.

But you know what they say? They say, well, "You have a problem with inflation." Well, what is the problem? If you understand the world in which we live today, Trinidad and Tobago operates within a global environment and global forces are going to impact us. If we live in a high energy-priced environment where we have to both export and import, then some of the things that are happening on the outside are going to affect us. If we live in a world in which China and India have decided to upgrade their countries and go into high capital programmes and they have basically decided that they will do what we are trying to do, which is basically to catch up with the rest of the world, then we are going to suffer as a consequence of that. Then we have to manage within the context of a global environment, and by policy we have decided that one of the ways to do that is through education, so we are focusing there.

It is very important, I believe, that those who comment on these matters and those who have aspirations of managing the economy, need to understand the various relationships with these competing choices and how they impact the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Quite simply put, if you create 48,000 jobs—and we see jobs as the ability of citizens to feed their families; to clothe them; to provide them with shelter; if you do that, you are going to find that there are some things that you have to manage within your society. One of the things that you have to manage is the demand/supply equation.

If you look at the history of Trinidad and Tobago, you will find that based on the structure of our economy—and I hear a lot about changing the structure and I hear a lot about, “we have to do this; we have to do that”—and you know, it almost seems as though those who are involved in getting the benefits have no liability in this matter.

**7.15 p.m.**

Government puts in place a series of incentives in agriculture. Nobody takes it and commentators tell you that it is the Government's fault. The Government decides that because there is a particular problem and on the basis of the analysis we have done, we recognize that you cannot import it because in that way you will not solve the problem. You have to deal with domestic supply. The way to do that is to bring in more supply. We have decided on a mechanism to do that. As soon as you do that you will hear that is not what is supposed to happen. There is much discussion with absolutely no understanding of the issues as they affect people. In many instances you do not have to spend your time dealing with that particular issue. You deal with the issue and get on with the task of governing.

We are where we are today because there is a plan that we have followed. It is a plan that we believe will allow us in Trinidad and Tobago to have the best opportunity of being among the best in the world. In the contribution by Sen. Dr. Saith he made a point which I will re-emphasize. I make the point to illustrate in relation to something that Sen. Mark said sometime ago. Sen. Mark was quoted as saying that in one of the reports when he looked at the index which had to do with communication and telephone lines, we were somewhere at the bottom of it. We have a population of 1.3 billion and between Digicel and TSTT the cellphone population is somewhere in the vicinity of 1.2 million. Digicel can operate the network without having to worry about dealing with interconnectivity issues. In the face of that kind of statistic, how can you say that we are where we are without understanding that while that might be so for land lines, with regard to communication you have missed the entire cellphone communication activity.

We had a situation where the base of the economy had moved from gas to oil. If you look at hydrocarbon profile you will see that we do something in the vicinity of 120,000 barrels a day on oil and an equivalent of 500,000 for gas. Sen. Dr. Saith will tell you the numbers. That is the profile. For many years we never factored that into the system. Those who looked at the data were boasting that we were not going anywhere and doing anything. We have to be careful about how we use the statistics.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

I was in Singapore talking to the World Bank. For the first time I was reading a report about statistics they had done in Trinidad and Tobago and where we were ranked. The interesting thing about it is that I asked them to whom they spoke and they could not tell me, but I found out eventually. A clerk in the institution gave them the data but it was 1992 data. You had a situation where we were part of a statistical database using 1992 data and everybody was using that data and boasting about how bad we are and never checked to find out that the data was 10, 15 or 20 years old.

Notwithstanding what we see, this place is going down a particular direction. I was talking to the business community some time ago and they were saying that on the basis of those who look at Trinidad and Tobago from the outside, what we have been able to do; how we have been able to do it and the time frame that we have been able to do it, we have done exceedingly well. They said that it is the only reason they will come here and consistently upgrade us in the context of how we are doing.

I am saying that in the context of understanding that there are those among us, Sen. Mary King in particular who have a different view about some of the indicators and parameters—I have no fundamental difficulty with that—at the same time it cannot be changed simply by talking about it. We have resources available to us and people who do not believe what we say, let me give you an example. We had two economists talking after the budget. One made the point that inflation is eating away the country; this is an election budget. Another one said that on the basis of the research and the data, if I look at the movement and analysis it does not say so. I am the Minister; I have an economist on the left side telling me one thing and another one on the right side telling me something else. What do I do? Choice; consequence; choice; consequence. We make choices based on the plan and what we think is in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago. At the end of it all we are guided by one principle which is what we are trying to do what is best as it relates to the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What do we do now and in the future? What are the plans for ensuring that those for whom we have a responsibility including our children are not subjected to the mistakes of the past?

There is a particular group that is going about saying that some of what Trinidad and Tobago suffered in the past was as a consequence of an oil economy and that we are going back to the stage where we will go into a boom and bust situation. When we look at the profile of the energy sector in relation to 1980, there are some things that we are doing differently that would not cause us to go

back into some of the problems that we have had before. These are some of them. The impact on the price of oil and gas—if you look at the pull factor—is not going to affect us in the same way that it affected us in the 1980s because we have done some things differently. The first thing we have done is to establish a fund. Those who say that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is the same as the Revenue Stabilisation Fund need to understand what they are saying. An interim revenue stabilisation fund is to deal with any price hikes or drops in price as a result of the price of the product. A heritage fund is one in which you save for the long term. In introducing the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund there are two elements; one is to do with stabilization and the other element is to deal with heritage.

How does that work? If you know from now that your energy resources will be depleted in 10 or 12 years, you take the view that energy provides revenue. In order to run your country successfully you must have revenue. You can get revenue from a source other than energy. You can monetize energy and get it. You can also create a pool of financial assets and invest them so that you can get the same revenue. Trinidad and Tobago is using a model that says we will create a pool of financial assets and ensure that we understand the asset allocation strategies. We will create sufficient wealth so that the investment from that fund will give us any kind of revenue drop that we may have as a consequence of price differences.

We also decided that as was done in Ireland, the international financial centre allows us to get involved in some products and services at the high end financial services operations that can support what we are doing with the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and create another stream of income over the longer term. Insofar as the diversification agenda is concerned, we are very serious about financial services because we believe that that will allow us to protect our future away from oil and gas. That is coming on stream.

We are looking at the normal manufacturing but we do not believe that we need to go there in the future. While we are ensuring that they can retool and get more technologically savvy, we think that we need to go into high end manufacturing. We will do that through the aluminium smelter activity and some of those kinds of things.

Suffice it to say, we have a plan for the issues that have been raised by those who advise us on these matters. On a number of occasions, the IMF has said a couple of things to us some of which we have agreed to and some we have not agreed to. The IMF said to us that we are spending too much money on social

services. We disagreed with that. They have said that we need to spend the money on things that will create revenue. We said that we will do that but we are taking care of people first. Then they said, "You are right because if you did not do that the level of poverty you have will be greater and you will not be able to manage your country." We said that we know that and that is why we are not doing it. Sometimes the advice that we get we do not take because it does not fit with the situation in our country and objectives as it relates to dealing with our people.

They also said to us that as we have this energy wealth we need to save some and invest some. We are trying to ensure that on the basis of the objectives and plans we have we get investment right. We are investing in people, institutions and organizations so that as we build them we have the people to take care of them. Principally, those are some of the things.

I want to deal with something we have talked about and which I think we should bring to the attention of the Senate because we had indicated sometime ago that we will do it. When we examined the spending patterns of many Trinbagonians or citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we came to the view that in the past while there was much money circulating within the system not much stayed with people. People received significant amounts of income, but they did not keep any and even what they invested they invested it badly. They were not into wealth creation mode. We are of the view that this time around more people should be able to use the resources to create wealth for themselves so that they can move their families and generations in that particular issue.

The Central Bank has been involved in an exercise of trying to put together a programme to assist institutions and individuals in dealing with that particular issue. I want to indicate that the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance have been working and are currently developing a number of areas that they will provide to the national community that will assist in the issue that we have identified. For example, they will be developing material and making it available for homeowners. They will be dealing with matters like financing, documentation, ownership and tenant issues and general knowledge.

They will be talking to you about budgeting contingencies; untoward events; new expenditure; loss of income; cost and phase; building versus buying, the pros and cons; type of mortgages; insurances; documentation; loans and credit cards and application. We believe that these things will assist in giving information to members of the society about the use of money. For example, we will talk about the concepts of money, savings, investing, budgeting; thrift; borrowing; investing

for the future and entrepreneurship. These are part of the education that is required. While we create the opportunity and income we are now creating the education and providing the information and tools that are required for the individuals to deal with it.

Insofar as social and culture are concerned which is one that I am worried about, we will be talking about financial value system; what determines success; good money versus bad money; habits; family financial practices; choices; freedom; poverty versus wealth; needs versus wants; the media influence on choice; sou sou; gambling and a number of other issues which many of us take for granted, but which if you look at them, they make the difference between those who are wealthy and those who are not.

**7.30 p.m.**

That programme, Madam President, is going quite well and I believe that we would, in the not-too-distant future, see the effects of that.

Let me just deal with a couple quick issues. I think it was Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie who asked whether or not health surcharge was one of the areas where there is an amnesty. The answer to that is yes. There was an ad in the newspaper which was pulled. *[Interruption]* Health surcharge is included in the amnesty. *[Interruption]* We have pulled the ad. I checked and they basically said it was not supposed to go out. The information was wrong. Government's policy is that—all taxes, and the Finance Bill will reflect that.

We are trying to deal with some of the challenges we have faced. I did not talk much about the revenue authority, but at the appropriate time I will talk a little about it. Suffice it to say that the mechanism by which we will deal with some of the challenges raised is through a different instrument.

I am not sure whether or not Sen. King was misquoted in the exchange on devaluation because the media provided a headline which said that Sen. King said, if we go the way we are going, there will be devaluation.

**Sen. King:** I mentioned it yesterday when Sen. Sahadeo read from the newspaper article and I clarified what I had said. I had said, given the wealth-driven economy, which is what you just talked about, if we were to put so much savings for the next 12 years, we would have less to spend, from the Central Bank's point of view, and we could drive ourselves to a devaluation. That is the point I was making.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Let me just, for completeness, put it in this sense. The Central Bank has intervened in the foreign exchange market to the extent of US \$2.9 billion over the last three years. Fact! If there is an increase in domestic savings, including through the HSF, which is what you have said, there will not be sufficient resources to support the exchange rate, thus the Government will be forced to devalue the TT dollar. That is it as I understand it.

Firstly, Madam President, devaluation is normally the end result of a weakening economy and all impartial analysts, both foreign and local, concede that the Trinidad and Tobago economy has never been stronger. In fact, the strength of our economy is one of the main reasons for the increase in inflationary pressures that we now face. In addition to the rapid growth in both the energy and non-energy sectors and the strong employment performance, the strength of our economy is reflected in our balance of payment performance. We now have a current account surplus of 25 per cent of GDP and this is among the highest foreign direct investment level in the hemisphere, a level of international reserves of over US \$6.1 billion. Our international reserve level is now close to 12 months of import coverage. A country that has foreign reserves equivalent to 12 months of import is not close to devaluation. That is a fact.

The second point is that increased sales of foreign exchange by the Central Bank is not a sign of weakness; it is, in fact, an indication of strength. As activity in the non-energy sector intensifies, as the income and wealth of our population increase, the Government pursues its strategy to house the population and the inevitable consequence is an increase in foreign exchange demand. Fortunately, our economy is in a position to accommodate this demand.

The fact that it is partly met through Central Bank sales is incidental. The Government receives the bulk of foreign exchange from the energy sector and passes it on to the Central Bank. The Bank therefore has an obligation to keep the market supplied. Some economies are organized differently. In some cases the bulk of the foreign exchange is sold directly to the Central Bank or authorized dealers. In such cases, the Central Bank intervenes only as a last resort. In our case the Central Bank estimates foreign exchange demand and supply and enters the markets to meet the gap. It is normal foreign exchange activity.

Thirdly, Madam President, the economic textbooks tell us that responsible foreign exchange management implies building up official reserves to your target level, using excess foreign exchange firstly to reduce foreign debt, if these are at critical levels, and selling the balance back to the economy. That is our policy.

We have exceeded our official reserve cushion. We are funding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund at an even faster pace than required under the law and the Central Bank is selling the remainder to the economy. That is our policy and, as far as we know, that is international best practice.

As the Minister of Finance said in his budget, prospects for the energy sector are very bright. In fact, the IMF projections are for international oil prices between US \$60 and \$70 per barrel over the next several years. These prospects, we believe, would allow us to continue to increase savings in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, to maintain exchange rate stability and to provide for all the economy's foreign exchange needs. We therefore see absolutely no need for devaluation.

I would like to note that many well respected commentators have urged the Government to allow the exchange rate to appreciate in order to help reduce inflationary pressures. At this stage the Government has a different view. This Government is committed to fighting inflation through demand policies and by increasing supply, particularly in the agricultural sector. The Government is of the view that, with a sizeable appreciation of the exchange rate, a revaluation of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar is inconsistent with our effort to diversify the economy and to create new sources of foreign exchange earnings. Our policy is to maintain exchange rate stability and aim to increase import competitiveness by enhancing our economic infrastructure, especially our public utilities, and by increasing training to improve productivity. That is the other side of Sen. King's comment and I do not believe that what she has said is, in some instances, inconsistent with our own thinking.

There is just one other issue I wish to speak on and it is that of the gaming industry. Just to clarify where we are on this particular issue, you will recall that on the last occasion we had a budget presentation the Minister of Finance said that slot machines, which were illegal, were to be banned. The institution said to him, should we do that we would suffer some losses with jobs. The Government indicated at the time, through the Prime Minister, that no such activity would take place until there was consultation with the industry. That consultation was going on and then the budget exercise came. We expect that it will continue.

The Government does not have now, did not have then, and will not have in the future, any intention of putting any of our citizens out of any productive employment activity. We have said and we continue to say that it will happen only after we have had discussions with those who would be affected and we are

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

*Thursday, September 06, 2007*

satisfied that they will be well taken care of. That is the statement that we have made; that is the commitment we have made and that is what we have basically said on a number of occasions, and continue to say.

Madam President, the other issue that I wish to speak—

**Sen. Mark:** Is the hon. Minister giving the country and the Parliament the undertaking that the initial decision proffered by the Government in terms of what it will do to the industry has now been reversed and that the Government is no longer contemplating closing the gaming industry?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Madam President, this is what occurred. It is legal in this country to have private members' clubs. There is a loophole in the law in which slot machines come into the country in two parts. It is illegal. It comes as one unit. The hopper comes in; they put it together and there is an illegal machine. That presented the Government with a challenge as it relates to the ambiguity in the law. The Government sought to correct that, but in so doing it would have rendered the industry in some difficulty.

When that was pointed out, the Government said it would hold discussions with the groups that were affected and that we would continue to allow private members' clubs, but that casino gambling was illegal. That is still the position. Private members' clubs are legitimate, but there is a loophole which we are trying to fix. This notion about closing the industry, I do not know where it came from. It is about dealing with something that is called an illegal activity under the Act.

There are those who say that because you tax the table, you know it is legal. That was never the discussion. The discussion was always private members clubs and the rules and regulation that went outside, need to have compliance, challenge in the law, put that in a particular context.

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the Hon. Minister has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Minister's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Let me also tell you what we have found because it is an exercise that we have been looking at. We have found, for example, that in looking at the particular industry, there are individuals who receive significant sums of money but have little skill. It would seem to us if that is the case, and we

think it is, we need to go through a programme, because they are available, where they can have a back up system. Now that we have all these programmes—free tertiary education and a host of educational opportunities—we do not believe there is anybody in Trinidad and Tobago who should not avail themselves at this time. It gives them more choices.

One of the things that we will be seeking to do is to point out the opportunities to them, while ensuring that our original intent of ensuring that private members' clubs legislation, which we are looking at, gives us the ability to regulate the activity. That is basically what we are saying.

**7.45 p.m.**

Madam President, unless there is any issue that I had not dealt with—

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Madam President, the Minister had promised to answer a few of the questions I had about the incentives. So, may I ask the question? [*Interruption*] I do not think you were here, but in the course of my contribution, I was interrupted by Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith who denied my statement that the Prime Minister spoke about giving incentives before the close of the third bid round. I am sure Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith did not wish to mislead the Senate, but he did forget that on November 24, 2006, the Prime Minister said in the House of Representatives:

“I can tell you that on every occasion on which we find the exploration activity goes down, we review the tax structure to ensure that there is enough incentive for the oil companies to explore.

Now, I made that statement in the context of questioning whether we needed to give incentives. That is the substantial point. I want to know whether the Minister can explain that, especially in view of former Minister Franklin Khan's contribution in the budget debate.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Madam President, when we negotiated the last set of tax rounds we did two things. We made a commitment that we would review the companies' situations every three years, and on the basis of that review, we will be driven by the following: Is the tax system at this point in time allowing us to be internationally competitive or are we getting the best receipts for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We have committed that we will do that.

When we looked at the Ryder Scott Report it says something to us. What it says to us is that the time has come for us to sit again and negotiate with these companies to determine how we can extend that period for which they must now

go and get an inventory. In the context of doing that—the only way that you do that and the way that we have always done that is through the mechanism of tax incentives.

What the tax incentives do is this: If I am going to take a risk, how much is the Government prepared to take and whether or not we can do that on the basis of some economic model? That is how the industry works, and it is in that context that there will always be the discussion about tax incentives, and there will always be the discussion on how do you do it to ensure that you move that period from 12 or 13 or whatever the number is. That is really normal in the context of what is happening.

We also said that two things happened. The companies sometimes come to the Government and say: “I need you to review this, because this is what is happening.” Sometimes the Government goes to the companies and says: “We need you to rethink this.”

Let me tell you what has happened. When we were looking at gas, for example, we found ourselves in a situation where we had contracts that were based on contract prices, and when we looked at where the gas was ending up—it was ending up in premium markets. So, we went to them and said to them, this cannot work, and we changed the law which says now that we will receive revenues from wherever the gas ends up.

So, what you find is that when you are determining the netback price at the wellhead in order to determine what your tax take on gas should be, you go to the higher end market rather than the contract price. You could have a depressed contract price, but a real high premium price based on where they go. We now have the ability to track all over the world and wherever it goes, so we could go and look to see what is happening.

The energy sector is one that we have some competence in, especially on the gas side based on energy transactions. I think that we have found ourselves in a situation now where companies are saying that we are unfair; we are getting too much, and they are not prepared to move forward until we give them some more.

I think the principle that we have to understand is that if we take a company like bpTT, for example, just to keep their machinery going in Trinidad and Tobago, they need to spend approximately \$100 million a year in maintenance. So, there is a lot of plant that is invested in Trinidad and Tobago; not as

something that you could simply get up and move in the way it was before, but you actually have an industry and you have to sit and negotiate. We have a totally different kind of understanding.

Madam President, most of my colleagues on that side have been making speeches about this being the last budget. Let me join with the group by saying that in this parliamentary term, this is the last budget of this administration. On behalf of my colleagues, I want to say how happy we have been to be able to be in this place, and to have some of the exchanges that we have had over the last term.

We have no doubt in our minds that we have done the best that we can in the circumstances, and we also believe that you have done the best that you can. I think that we would like to wish you the best. I expect that on the next occasion that we meet, we will be here and you will be there.

Madam President, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 63, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read the third time and passed.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

#### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

**The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, before I move the Motion for the adjournment, I seek leave of the Senate to move a Motion in respect of the DNA Bill 2007, which was read for the first time in the Senate on Monday, September 03, 2007.

**Sen. Mark:** I do not understand where Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith is going. We have received correspondence from the Clerk, indicating that the DNA Bill will be taken through all its stages at the next sitting.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** It is on Tuesday.

**Sen. Mark:** I thought you were talking about today. Sorry. [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith:** Madam President, I know hon. Senators have received a letter from the Clerk indicating that it is the intention of the Government to take the DNA Bill through all its stages on Tuesday, September 11, 2007. However, in order to satisfy the requirements of the Standing Orders, I now formally move the Motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, notwithstanding the expressions of the end of our term here, and the end of the budget, we have work to do. I beg to move that the Senate be now adjourned to Tuesday, September 11, 2007 at 1.30 p.m.

Madam President, I want to put Senators on notice that it is my understanding that the Bail Bill will be debated on Monday, September 10, 2007 and on the assumption that it will be approved, I am asking the Clerk to circulate the Bail Bill tomorrow. If it is approved on Monday, we will debate it on Wednesday, September 12, 2007. As I said, we still have a lot of work and we will be here for a little while.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 8.00 p.m.*