SENATE
Tuesday, September 22, 2009
The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS
[Mr. Vice-President in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. the Hon. Dr. Emily Dick-Forde, who is out of the country.

SENATOR’S APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Prof. 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. FOSTER CUMMINGS

WHEREAS Senator Danny Montano is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his 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, FOSTER CUMMINGS, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 22\textsuperscript{nd} September, 2009 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Danny Montano.

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 17\textsuperscript{th} day of September, 2009.”
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Foster Cummings took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

Mr. Vice-President: I will stand down the reading of the swearing in of the second Senator for a later time.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF KUWAIT
(INDEPENDENCE GREETINGS)

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received correspondence from the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait:

“H.E. Mr. Danny Montano
President of the Senate
Port of Spain—Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dear Mr. President,

On the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago I would like to express, on behalf of my colleagues members of Kuwait National Assembly and myself, our sincere congratulations.

I have the pleasure to extend our best regards to Your Excellency, wishing the friendly people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago more progress and prosperity.

Kindly accept Your Excellency the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,
Jassim Mohammed Al-Kharafi
Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait”

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2010, brought from the House of Representatives [The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.

[Hon. M. Browne]

Question put and agreed to.
PAPERS LAID

1. The Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chairman’s Fund of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2004. [The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne)]

2. The Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chairman’s Fund of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2005. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


5. The annual audited financial statements of the Export-Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2008. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]

6. The annual audited financial statements of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2009. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


10. The annual audited financial statements of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) for the financial year ended September 30, 2008. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]
11. The annual audited financial statements of the National Enterprises Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2009. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


15. The audited financial statements of the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2007. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


17. The Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order, 2009. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


42. Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2010. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]

43. Social Sector Investment Programme—2010. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]

44. Public Sector Investment Programme—2010. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]

45. Public Sector Investment Programme Tobago—2010. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]

46. Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme—2010. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


51. The annual audited financial statements of the Education Facilities Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2007. [Sen. The Hon. M. Browne]


Papers Laid

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10.15 a.m.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Vice-President, by agreement with the Leader of the Opposition Business in the Senate and the coordinator of the Independent Bench, questions will be deferred until the conclusion of the Appropriation Bill.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Dr. Rupert Griffith and Dr. Vincent Lasse
(Status of Debt Incurred in Judgment)

13. With respect to the judgment in the matter involving the challenge by the Prime Minister, honourable Patrick Manning of the Crossing of the Floor Act relating to Dr. Rupert Griffith and Dr. Vincent Lasse, could the hon. Attorney General inform this Senate of the status of the debt incurred by him? [Sen. W. Mark]

Nation’s Judges
(System of Monitoring)

36. Could the hon. Attorney General outline to the Senate the system of monitoring that is in place in respect of assessing and evaluating the performance of the nation’s judges? [Sen. W. Mark]

National Academies of Performing Arts
(Details of)

40. With respect to the construction of the National Academies of Performing Arts in Port-of-Spain and San Fernando, could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment provide the Senate with:

(a) a detailed status report on the construction of the National Academies of Performing Arts;

(b) the original estimated cost of construction of the National Academies;
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(c) the initial projected completion dates for both Academies;
(d) the current estimated cost and new projected cost of the construction of the Academies; and
(e) the new projected completion dates for the National Academies? [Sen. W. Mark]

Rental of Cruise Ships
(Details of)

47. Could the hon. Minister of Finance provide the Senate with a detailed account of the cost of renting the two cruise ships to be used as floating hotels for the forthcoming Summit of the Americas? [Sen. M. F. Rahman]

National Test Results
(Details of)

91. A. Would the hon. Minister of Education indicate to the Senate whether all primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago have received the June 2008 National Test results?

B. If the answer to (A) is in the negative, could the Minister inform the Senate of the reason(s) for the delay? [Sen. Dr. A. Nanan]

Maqueripe Beach Upgrade
(Status of)

105. A. Would the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment indicate to the Senate any cost overruns on the Maqueripe Beach upgrade?

B. Would the Minister also state if there was planning approval for the said beach upgrade? [Sen. Dr. A. Nanan]

Association of Caribbean States
(Benefits for this Country)

126. With respect to the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), could the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs advise the Senate of:

(i) The benefits this country derives from its membership in the Association; and

(ii) The benefits derived by this country by hosting the Secretariat of the ACS? [Sen. G. Merhair]
Columbus Communications Trinidad Limited  
(Protection of Customers)

137. Could the hon. Minister of Information indicate to the Senate whether it is the Government’s intention to take steps to protect customers from the unsatisfactory service provided by Columbus Communications Trinidad Limited? [Sen. G. Merhair]

Ministry of Information  
(Details of Port of Spain Property)

141. With respect to item 2.72 under Head 57—Ministry of Information at page 110 of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2007/2008, could the Minister of Information inform the Senate:

(i) What is the address of the property located in Port of Spain for which $138,000 was paid in rent during the period December 18, 2007 to September 30, 2008; and

(ii) Whether the property was ever occupied during that period? [Sen. G. Merhair]

Fifth Summit of the Americas  
(Removal of Homeless Persons for)

145. With respect to the hosting of the 5th Summit of the Americas and the removal of homeless persons off the street, could the hon. Minister of Social Development inform the Senate of:

(i) The number of homeless persons removed from the street;

(ii) The cost of removing these homeless persons off the street; and

(iii) The number of homeless persons who have since returned to the streets at the conclusion of the Summit on April 19, 2009? [Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol]

Disabled Persons  
(Details of Funds Allocated)

146. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development provide the Senate with the details of funds allocated to each category of disabled persons for fiscal years 2006—2007; 2007—2008 and 2008—2009? [Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol]
High School Population
(Details of)

147. With respect to students who have dropped out of high school during the academic years 2006—2007, 2007—2008 and 2008—2009, could the hon. Minister of Education indicate to the Senate:

(i) The total school population for each academic year;

(ii) The percentage of students that have dropped out in each academic year; and

(iii) The name of each school, total student population and number of students that have dropped out in each academic year? [Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol]

Gang Violence
(Details of)

150. A. With respect to gang violence in Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of National Security provide the Senate with the details of the model being used to combat the problem; and

B. Could the Minister also provide the Senate with any evidence of the success of the model being used in other countries, particularly in the Caribbean, Britain, United States of America and Canada? [Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol]

Red Mite Disease
(Details of)

151. A Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources indicate to the Senate the measures which have been put in place, implemented or proposed to stop the spread of the “red mite” disease that has plagued coconut producing areas in Trinidad, and in particular the South West peninsula of Cedros and Icacos since 2005?

B Could the Minister also indicate the extent of the devastation in financial and non-financial terms of the “red mite” to coconut, bananas and ginger producers of Trinidad and Tobago? [Sen. L. Oudit]
Recreational Facilities
(Details of)

152. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs indicate to the Senate:

(i) The number and geographical locations of full service recreational facilities, that is, facilities containing jogging/field track, covered bleachers, washrooms, children’s park, full lighting and secured perimeters which are either operational or proposed in Trinidad and Tobago since 2006?

(ii) The number and location of such recreational facilities that currently exist in Central and South Trinidad?

(iii) The rationale used to determine rural/urban need of full service recreational facilities in Trinidad and Tobago since 2006? [Sen. L. Oudit]

Health Surcharge
(Current Value of)

153. Could the hon. Minister of Health indicate to this Senate:

(i) The current value of the Health Surcharge contribution to the national Treasury since 2006; and

(ii) The ways in which the Health Surcharge has been used to improve health care in Trinidad and Tobago since 2009? [Sen. L. Oudit]

Contracts Re: Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel
(Details of)

161. Could the hon Attorney General outline to the Senate for the period January 01, 2008 to May 31, 2009:

(i) the names of the various private law firms and/or Attorneys-at-Law who have been contracted by his office to perform legal drafting duties for or on behalf of the Office of Chief Parliamentary Counsel;

(ii) the number of contracts issued or entered into between the parties and the detailed character of these contracts; and

(iii) a breakdown of the cost of each of these contracts? [Sen. W. Mark]
**Drafted Legislation**
(Detailed Account)

162. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with a detailed account of the various pieces of legislation drafted and submitted by the Chief Parliamentary Counsel as well as those drafted by private law firms or attorneys-at-law during the past three years that is 2007 to 2009? [Sen. W. Mark]

**Inspection of Electrical Installation**
(Status of)

163. Could the hon. Minister of Health indicate to this Senate:

(i) the date of the last inspection of the electrical installations at the Port of Spain and San Fernando General Hospitals; and

(ii) the date(s) of the next or future inspection of the electrical installations at the institutions mentioned at (i) above? [Sen. G. Merhair]

**Domestic Violence Cases**
(Details of)

164. With respect to the issue of domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs indicate to the Senate:

(i) the number of cases which have been reported to the police within the last five years;

(ii) the number of persons who have died as a result of abuse suffered through domestic violence; and

(iii) the steps taken by the Government in the last two years to combat this scourge? [Sen. G. Merhair]

**Town and Country Planning**
(Bribe Taking within)

166. A. Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state whether there have been any reported cases of ‘bribe taking’ within the Town and country Division of the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment within the last five years?

B. If the answer to (A) above is in the affirmative, could the Minister indicate what action has been taken? [Sen. G. Merhair]
ttconnect terminals in constituencies
(Placement of)

167. Could the hon. Minister of Public Administration state whether the Government has contemplated the placement of “ttconnect” terminals in all forty-one (41) constituency offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago? [Sen. G. Merhair]

Investigations into Effects of Absentee Fathers on Young Males
(Details of Findings)

168. A Could the hon. Minister of Social Development state whether the Ministry of Social Development has undertaken any investigations into the effects of absentee fathers on young males in Trinidad and Tobago?

B If the answer to (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister provide the Senate with the details of its findings? [Sen. G. Merhair]

Trinitrain Consortium
(Details of)

178. Could the Minister of Works and Transport provide to the following information in respect of the design, build, operate and maintain contract with respect to Trinitrain Consortium:

(a) the length of time or period of the contract?
(b) the exact contract price involved
(c) the number of trains that will be delivered;
(d) the speed of these trains;
(e) whether these trains would be diesel driven or electric powered; and
(f) how many segments would the train system have as well as the number of stations? [Sen. W. Mark]

Rapid Rail Project Phase II
(Status of)

179. A. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state whether or not Phase II of the Rapid Rail Project will be put out for public tender?

B. If the answer to (A) above is in the negative, could the Minister explain the rationale for such a decision? [Sen. W. Mark]
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Trinitrain Consortium  
(Details of Procurement System)

180. A. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport inform the Senate what procurement system was used by his Ministry in awarding Phase I of the Rapid Rail Project to Trinitrain Consortium?

B. Could the Minister also inform the Senate of the number of bids received and the names of the Companies and /or organizations which submitted tenders?

C. Could the Minister further inform the Senate what was the final evaluation criteria employed in the determination of the successful bidder? [Sen. W. Mark]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions were asked by Senator Wade Mark:

Debt Service Projections  
(Interest Rates Used)

62. Could the hon. Minister of Finance state what are the annual interest rates used in determining the country’s service projections?

Public Service Employees  
(Status of)

82. Could the hon. Minister of Public Administration state whether the public service is over-staffed or under-staffed, and if so, by how many and in which categories?

(A) Could the Minister further state in precise and definite terms the current size of trained professional personnel in the public service and their respective categories?

(B) Could the Minister also advise the Senate of the precise size in terms of numbers on the establishment of the public service in respect of the following categories:

(i) Civil Servants

(ii) Fire Officers,
(iii) Prison Officers,
(iv) Police Officers,
(v) Teachers,
(vi) Defence Force Personnel both in the Regiment and the Coast Guard inclusive of the Air Guard.

The following question was asked by Sen. Dr. Sharon-ann Gopaul-McNicol:

CXC Examinations Results  
(Details of)

148. Could the hon. Minister of Education provide the Senate with the details, inclusive of the names of the schools and the number of students from each Senior Secondary School throughout Trinidad and Tobago, who have received a full certificate in the CXC examinations for the academic years 2006-2007; 2007-2008 and 2008-2009?

The following questions were asked by Senator Wade Mark:

Senior Counsels Appointed  
(Names of)

157. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with the names of the attorneys-at-law who were appointed Senior Counsel since the Government assumed office under the leadership of the current Prime Minister on December 24, 2001 to June 16, 2009?

Dr. Lloyd Barnett  
(Fees Paid to)

159. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with the quantum of legal or consultancy fees paid to Senior Counsels appointed after June 01, 2005 by any State Enterprise, Municipal Corporation, Statutory Authority, Government Ministry or other State Agency from the period of their respective appointments to June 16, 2009?

Legal Senior State Offices  
(Staff Shortages)

160. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with:

(i) detailed information of the staff shortages currently existing at the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Solicitor General and the Director of Public Prosecutions; and
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(ii) the specific steps or measures that are being urgently taken to address these critical shortages?

_Vide end of sitting for written replies._

**ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

_The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):_ Mr. Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Order No. 20(4), I seek the leave of the Senate to deal with Government Business instead of Private Business.

_Agreed to._

**SENIOR'S APPOINTMENT**

_Mr. Vice-President:_ At this time we have the matter that I deferred, the swearing in of the second Senator and we will take that now.

Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Prof. 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. NOEL GAYLE

WHEREAS Senator Dr. Emily Gaynor Dick-Forde 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, NOEL GAYLE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 22nd September, 2009 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Dr. Emily Gaynor Dick-Forde.

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 17th day of September, 2009.”
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Noel Gayle took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2010) BILL

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year October 01, 2009 to September 30, 2010, be now read a second time.

Mr. Vice-President, this is a money bill and it was approved in the other place on September 16, 2009. The Bill provides for the appropriation from the Consolidated Fund the sum of $44.366 billion under the various heads as indicated in the Schedule to the Bill.

Mr. Vice-President, the objectives of Vision 2020 remain our primary focus and these are:

1. Developing Innovative People;
2. Nurturing a Caring Society;
3. Enabling Competitive Business;
4. Investing in Sound Infrastructure and Environment;
5. Promoting Effective Government.

Since 2002, we have pursued a mix of macroeconomic policies geared towards generating sustainable economic growth and development and to enhance the quality of life of our citizens. There is always room for improvement hence the theme of the 2010 budget statement is “Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges”. Once again I wish to emphasize the need for close collaboration between the Government, the private sector and the wider society to meet the challenge of ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a developed country by 2020.

Our programme of action is consistent with the themes of the last budget which are:

- prudent and sustainable fiscal stances;
- major structural reforms in the areas of taxation and public institutions; and
- investment expenditure to create the physical, financial and social infrastructure for a modern economy.
Mr. Vice-President, we are in the midst of a global recession. World output is expected to fall from US $60,690 billion in 2008 to US $54,826 billion in 2009 before recovering by 1.9 per cent to US $55,921 billion in 2010. Even with this recovery, world output in 2010 will still be lower than output in 2008.

The IMF projects that the real GDP will decline by 2.8 per cent in the United States, by 4.2 per cent in the United Kingdom and the European Area and over 6 per cent in Japan. In the Caribbean region, real GDP is projected to decline; by 3.5 per cent in Barbados and close to 3 per cent in Jamaica.

In our own domestic environment 2009 was a challenging year for Trinidad and Tobago. In 2008, economic growth measured 2.3 per cent. This rate of growth however, masked the economic slowdown which began towards the end of 2008 and has continued into 2009. Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 1 per cent in the last quarter of 2008, and by 3 per cent in the first quarter of 2009 whilst inflation reached as high as 15 per cent.

Leading economic indicators suggest that the decline has continued into the second quarter of 2009, making 2009 the first year of negative growth since 1993. The unemployment rate for the first quarter of 2009 stood at 5 per cent, up from 3.9 per cent as at December 31, 2008. Even though this is still within the definition of full employment, the Government, in presenting this budget, will propose fiscal measures to maintain employment and investment and to reduce the impact of this decline.

The theme of this year's budget emphasizes the Government's commitment to more efficient use of our resources, by strengthening capacity, harnessing potential, prioritizing projects and improving the quality of service delivery.

It gives priority to the issues affecting the family, our collective concerns for security and safety, a relevant education system, quality health care services, adequate housing and poverty reduction. The initiatives outlined in this budget, therefore focus on those basic elements that will ensure future prosperity and ultimately create a better space and a better place for Trinidad and Tobago in the world.

Hon. Senators would recall that in late January 2009, the Government and the Chairman of the CL Financial Group signed an agreement for a package of financial support for Clico, British American and Clico Investment Bank, after these institutions experienced financial difficulties. This action was taken principally to protect the financial sector from the negative repercussions that could have resulted from a collapse of the largest conglomerate in the region.
The strategy involved the provision of resources to protect the third-party policyholders of Clico and British American and to support the third-party depositors of Clico Investment Bank. Underpinning this strategy is the assumption that overtime, CL Financial will return to profitability and as a consequence the accumulated deficit will be eliminated.

Our strategy in the wider local economy is to continue to generate economic growth by adopting a prudent and focused approach, enhance our economic management and foster efficiency in the various sectors. We will undertake institutional reform in several areas of activity including local government, tax administration and pensions.

Mr. Vice-President, the 2009 budget anticipated revenues of $49.465 billion. Parliament approved the 2009 Appropriation Act authorizing expenditure of $44.2 billion. Added to the direct charges to the Consolidated Fund of $6.75 billion, which is largely made up of debt servicing, as well as expenditure under the Unemployment Levy Fund and Green Fund, it implied a total expenditure of $51.453 billion. This expenditure adjusted for repayment of capital and contributions to sinking fund was $49.446 billion resulting in a projected surplus of $19.5 million.

Early in fiscal 2009, the budget assumptions were recalibrated twice due to falling energy and petrochemical prices. Total projected revenues were revised downwards from $49.465 billion to $44.154 billion and then to $42.2 billion. We now expect revenue to reach $37.947 billion, a shortfall of approximately $11.516 billion from the original budget.

Mr. Vice-President, expenditure for 2009 is projected at $46.403 billion, $3 billion lower than originally budgeted but using actual numbers as at July 31 2009. This translates to a projected deficit of $8.455 billion. Given past experience, this deficit could be in the region of $7.5 billion. The Government awaits the closing of the accounts to determine the actual outturn.

Mr. Vice-President, the budget for 2010 is crafted in the context of projections of real GDP growth of 2 per cent and an average inflation rate of 7 per cent in 2009. The budget is predicated on a conservative price assumption of US $55 per barrel for oil and a gas price of US $2.75 per million cubic feet. Total revenue is therefore forecasted at $36.664 billion. On the expenditure side, the Government intends to appropriate $36.915 billion from the Consolidated Fund while we estimate $9.049 billion in direct charges from the Consolidated Fund and expenditure under the Unemployment Levy Fund and Green Fund in the sum of
$476 million. After adjusting for repayment of capital and contributions to the Sinking Fund the total budgeted expenditure for 2010 is $44.366 billion. For fiscal 2010 the projected deficit is $7.7 billion or 5 per cent of GDP.

10.30 a.m.

Lest we forget, there are few countries in the world today that do not have public sector deficits. The IMF staff estimates the fiscal deficits of the advanced economies for 2009 at 10.4 per cent and project 8.7 per cent in 2010. The Trinidad and Tobago figure for 2009 is 6.3 per cent falling to 5 per cent in 2010. It is to be noted that notwithstanding the existence of this deficit, the rate of inflation was reduced from a high of 15.5 per cent earlier this year, to 5.6 per cent, according to the Central Bank. This statistic is expected to fall even further. In addition, foreign exchange reserves remain healthy with an import cover of 11 months, well in excess of the international benchmark of three months, and the trade balance and balance of payments are positive.

The gross public sector debt, including contingent liabilities, that is, letters of comfort or letters of guarantee signed by Corporation Sole in support of State Enterprises, stood at 60 per cent of GDP in 2001 and improved to 25 per cent of GDP at the end of 2008. The estimate for 2009 is 31 per cent. Once again, this is in line with the accepted international benchmarks.

The Article IV Consultation in November 2008 indicated quite clearly that Trinidad and Tobago was in a better position than many countries to withstand the effects of the global downturn. This is evidenced by the lifting of the negative watch by the rating agency, Standard and Poor's last week. This is an independent, authoritative indicator of Government's sound fiscal policy and prudent management of public debt, supported by strong economic fundamentals. This is also supported by all the "hard" economic data used in the Global Competitiveness Index.

Turning to our objectives and operational strategies for fiscal year 2010, under the heading of “Developing Innovative People”, there are several major programmes and projects that we have promoted to support and maintain the growth and development of our education sector. These include: the rebuilding of several primary and secondary schools; the construction of Early Childhood Care and Education centres; the implementation of a revised curriculum at the secondary level; continued implementation of the support for a Seamless Education Programme; the decentralization of the operations of the Ministry of Education and the shift to school-based management.
In the new fiscal year we will complete the construction of the 50 Early Childhood Care and Education centres and commence a further 50; continue the construction of 15 primary and 12 secondary schools. In addition, the ECCE curriculum guideline will be deployed to all centres. We will continue to implement the National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE) in Forms 1 to 5 in secondary schools; extend a literacy plan at the primary level and secondary level to maintain upward trend of students' performance at the SEA and CXC examinations. We will introduce the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) level II at 11 secondary schools; continue to implement the Health and Family Life Education Programme (HFLE) at primary and secondary levels and ensure that the ICT-led curricula are implemented.

The Government also recognizes that it is essential to maintain education and skills training, notwithstanding a period of slow down in the economy and we were committed to continuing our investment in the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE), Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP), the Helping You Prepare For Employment Programme (HYPE), On-the-Job Training (OJT) and the Multi-sector Skills Training (MuST) Programme. Since its inception in 2004, a total of 262,924 applicants have received GATE approval.

Turning to health, over the period October 2007 to December 2008, 1,205 patients benefited from the Adult Cardiac Programme which has greatly reduced the mortality statistics relating to cardiac disease. Today there are 103 health centres strategically located to ensure increased public access to an expanded range of primary care services. In addition, the Siparia District Health Facility will be commissioned in November and health centres in St. Joseph, Sangre Grande, San Juan and Morvant will be refurbished.

Construction will start on the Oncology Centre in the first quarter of 2010. The Point Fortin Hospital will follow whilst negotiations continue to facilitate a third quarter start of the Arima Hospital; Sangre Grande will be phased in thereafter. In the coming fiscal year, the Government, in partnership with the private sector, will begin construction of two additional Renal Dialysis Centres at the San Fernando Hospital and at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

We will continue to implement the National Health Information System to computerize medical records and to implement the E-card for the health sector. This will provide improved services and promote client privacy and confidentiality. This facility will be accessible at all public health care facilities by 2012.
Turning to community development: The Government will implement a number of special projects as the appropriate basis on which some elements of a developed and unique society are founded. These are:

- Refurbishment of Queen’s Hall;
- Completion of the Academies of the Performing Arts (North and South);
- Construction of new community centres and the refurbishment of others;
- Upgrades of the export centres and the introduction of a vocational certification programme in the craft sector.

Under sport and youth, the Government will continue to invest in the construction and upgrade of sport and youth facilities across the country. We will continue the Elite Athletes Assistance Programme and expect to bring legislation to Parliament to establish the Sport Commission to replace the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago this year.

The Youth Entrepreneurial Success (YES) Programme which targets high risk youth and young adults in disenfranchised areas will continue. Participants are exposed to modules dealing with Leadership & Motivation; Business Planning & Strategies for Success; an Introduction to Computers; Interpersonal Communication and Business Plan Preparation and Presentation.

Under the second pillar: Nurturing a Caring Society, we are committed to reducing the current level of lawlessness that is rampant in our society. This is associated with the drug trade and the trade in guns and ammunition. We must therefore improve our border security. The delivery of the offshore patrol vessels and the six fast patrol crafts will assist in the drug interdiction and anti-smuggling operations. The offshore patrol vessels can accommodate high speed interceptors and helicopters. The Government will also acquire four helicopters to complement the fleet of naval assets involved in missions of national defence and security, and the enforcement of maritime law and safety.

In addition, we have expanded the CCTV or closed-circuit TV network to provide greater coverage as part of the process of upgrading our security systems. Also, we will continue to improve our national security by implementing the 300-plus recommendations made by a military and strategy expert on the review of our national security systems. The Minister of National Security will amplify these initiatives.

eliminate the duplication of services and go some way to reduce the frustration experienced by some clients, by providing a "one stop shop" approach where the majority of client needs are dealt with at an office in their region.

Centres will be established in the 12 regions and the first such centre will become operational in Sangre Grande in the next fiscal year. Government is in the final stages of contracting a provider to develop an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System to automate and re-engineer core business processes to allow for the smooth administration of social services using more accurate data and to facilitate information collaboration amongst Government Ministries and agencies. These developments will also serve to foster dignity and respect for the recipients of these social services.

Under the heading of Enabling Competitive Business, we remain focused on providing the required infrastructure to facilitate industrial growth and diversification. In addition to the existing 17 industrial parks, eight new ones are carded for future development. The Tamana InTech Industrial and Technology Park will further our diversification drive in the non-energy sector.

The Merchant Marine Industry is one of the seven industries where we have already identified our traditional resource base and our competitive advantage. Our strategic geographical location, outside the hurricane belt between key trade routes that connect North and South America, promotes our potential competitiveness. The Government envisions a world class maritime cluster, focusing on the development of three sub-sectors: ship maintenance; shipbuilding and maritime construction. A number of investment opportunities will emerge from this niche.

The Government, in the new fiscal year, will continue to introduce a Single Electronic Window (SEW) for business facilitation. This will improve our international competitiveness by facilitating electronic trading and the transfer of information simultaneously thereby ensuring efficiency in the local trade and business facilitation process.

This project will complement the already operational ASYCUDA system at the Customs and Excise Division and improve the quality of trade data, by allowing the Central Statistical Office (CSO) to generate data two weeks after the end of each month and support business-to-business transactions which are vital for the facilitation of trade.

This project will be implemented in collaboration with a Singaporean company under the auspices of the Memorandum of Understanding on
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) cooperation between this Government and the Government of Singapore. Implementation of this project will commence in October 2009 and is expected to be operational by October 2010.

The financial services sector and services sector, will be increasingly important as the country continues to modernize and diversify its economy. The financial sector continues to play a key role and was the fastest growing non-energy sector. Global and domestic trends have been converging to facilitate the establishment of an International Financial Centre in Trinidad and Tobago (TTIFC). This centre will be the designated hub that will provide a range of front office financial services including, but not limited to, banking, asset management, capital market activities, specialized insurance operations on the international commodities markets.

In addition, Government has established three state enterprises as limited liability companies to meet its objectives of a modern financial centre. These are the Trinidad and Tobago Financial Centre Management Company Limited, the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Management Company Limited and the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited.

The Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited will promote the International Financial Centre domestically and internationally as an attractive location for business and investment activities, as well as a credible financial centre and a leader within its targeted area of focus. The company is mandated to ensure the growth and development of the TTIFC through the provision of policy recommendations to support the expansion, in terms of tax, legal, regulatory, human capital development and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) requirements.

The Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Management Company Limited will allow for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the collection of revenue with project oversight by the TTRA Management Company.

The Government will also continue to promote the city of Port of Spain as a commercial and business hub. The Port of Spain International Waterfront Complex will address the country's need for state-of-the-art conference and meeting room facilities and now includes a 428-room hotel and 55,000 square feet of conference facilities.

Under the Fourth Pillar of Investing in Sound Infrastructure and the Environment, this Government is committed to improving the agricultural sector. As a result of Government's initiatives, employment in this sector increased by 30.7 per cent in the quarter ending March 2009 to reach 21,000. In addition, increased
production, most notably from Caroni Lands and the Tucker Valley farm initiative, improved distribution and supply of agri-produce through the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) and the farmers’ markets all contributed to a significant reduction in the cost of agricultural produce to our citizens during fiscal 2009.

A coordinated and collaborative approach is required in addressing key obstacles faced by farmers and stakeholders to ensure that limited resources are used effectively and efficiently. Priority will be given to areas which have a high impact on the success of the agricultural sector.

10.45 a.m.

The Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) will assist farmers’ associations by providing finance on favourable terms to purchase the necessary machinery and equipment. The ADB has designed a micro credit facility to assist persons who lack the collateral and technical support and land tenure; prerequisites to qualify for such financing but those who have good business initiatives and who may be successful if provided with an opportunity would be considered. This credit package will also involve the support of NAMDEVCO and the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association. Farmers will also be able to access financing through a Probationary Tenancy Agreement, an incentive to boost production and to stimulate the sector. This arrangement will give farmers a greater degree of freedom in accessing capital at competitive rates. To support the ADB’s credit facility initiatives, an allocation of $75 million will be provided to the bank with an additional sum of $75 million which will be made available if required.

The development of this sector would be supported by public/private sector initiative between the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago and the Estate Management and Business Development Company (EMBD).

The establishment of farmers’ markets is also important. The number of farmers’ markets as well as packing houses will be increased. A number of locations have been identified for such facilities: Rio Claro/Tabaquite, Sangre Grande, Chaguanas/Couva, Tableland/Barrackpore and a temporary facility at Port of Spain. Farmers using these facilities will benefit from technical support and marketing advice from NAMDEVCO.

The Government has been exploring mechanisms to provide a cheaper supply of compound fertilizers. Government has accepted the offer by YARA Trinidad Limited to import up to 2,000 tonnes of compound fertilizer on behalf of the Government for resale at cost, inclusive of distribution to registered local farmers. This will significantly reduce the import costs to farmers and the final cost of agricultural produce to our consumers.
The Government also proposes to accelerate the land regularization process using EMBD especially for those farmers with expired leases awaiting renewal; farmers with lands already assigned to them and survey plans approved and farmers who have occupied land for over 10 years and who have already applied for regularization.

A more efficient and time sensitive solution will be available in the short term through a system of farmer recognition supported by a document from the EMBD which will identify the bearer as a state lease recipient. This will permit the farmer to access short-term funding from the ADB, not previously available to untenured farmers, up to the market value of the property leased. These actions are expected to increase output productivity and increase the capability of our nation's farmers and ultimately lower prices for consumers and improve the standard of living for farmers and their families.

The Water Management and Flood Control Project was launched in 2009. The goal of this project is to reduce flooding by dredging water channels, building embankments and installing pumps, culverts and overpasses to minimize the incidence of flooding. This initiative will relieve the plight of our farmers who suffer losses to crops as a result of flooding.

Turning to the energy sector, the Government is discussing a new fiscal incentive regime with stakeholders in the energy sector to encourage exploration and development activities, offer a more equitable sharing of economic returns that reflect the optimal use of our natural resources while maintaining the global competitiveness of our major sector.

The proposals for our production sharing contract regime are also being reviewed to encourage exploration, production activity and to improve the competitiveness of deep water exploration and production; to make multi-well exploration programmes attractive and to ensure the development of relatively small fields.

The modernization of the retail gas service stations began nationwide in 2005 with tank replacements and storage capacity enhancement, modern underground storage facilities and the rebuilding of sites. We intend to increase the number of CNG service stations throughout the country before the end of the fiscal year to promote the use of environmentally friendly, cleaner and cheaper fuel. We will also support the cost of CNG conversion kits and the importation of CNG vehicles. As the number of CNG stations increase we will be able to reduce the subsidy on gas. The Minister will have more to say on these matters during his contribution.
With respect to tourism, the Government has positioned Trinidad and Tobago as a meeting and conference centre and events capital of the Caribbean. To achieve this goal, adequate accommodation and airlift are critical. The Government has hosted a successful Summit of the Americas Conference in April 2009 and plans are well under way for the hosting of The 54th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting later in November. Trinidad and Tobago is also rapidly becoming a transportation hub with new links to Atlanta, Houston, Panama and Curacao. Links to Holland will be established shortly.

Accordingly, we are taking steps to enhance our customer service standards on all fronts and to market our islands internationally as well as locally to build our tourism product.

Other hotel investments are under active consideration in Port of Spain and we are currently reviewing our tourism legislation with a view to facilitating additional investments in the accommodation and ancillary services subsector.

Plans for the redesign of the Maracas Beach Facility are well under way to transform Maracas Beach and its facilities into a modern, safe, clean, well-managed and environmentally-sustainable attraction of the highest international standard.

One of the fundamental principles of Vision 2020 is to have more modern technology and a communication infrastructure which would facilitate access to broadband, video and security services and connectivity. Government anticipates that over 60 per cent of households will have access to Government e-services and this will include e-learning, e-commerce, e-culture, e-security, e-government and e-health.

With respect to housing, to assist in making housing more easily accessible and affordable to our citizens in the fiscal year, the Government proposes the following initiatives:

- To further assist persons under the Beneficiary Owned Land Programme, the Government will provide and absorb the cost of approved plans made available to prospective homeowners;
- A register of approved small contractors who can be utilized by prospective homeowners for house construction;
- In this fiscal year the Government implemented a measure exempting first time homeowners from stamp duty for houses up to a value of $850,000. In fiscal 2010, we will bring further relief to homeowners by absorbing all of the legal fees attached to the purchase of any HDC housing unit. Further, under the Approved Mortgage Company Programme, companies are exempt from tax on income derived from mortgages to first time
homeowners up to a maximum of $450,000. This would be increased to $850,000. The preferred rate on such mortgages will be between 6 and 8 per cent.

This year we can record much to the satisfaction of thousands of commuters the significant reductions in travel time that have been achieved through the opening of Phase B of the interchange at the nation's busiest intersection, the Uriah Butler Highway and the Churchill Roosevelt Intersection.

A contract has been awarded to Vinci Construction to construct a flyover at Aranguez to allow the removal of traffic lights on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and at the El Socorro Intersection. In fiscal 2010, we expect to complete a third lane on the Uriah Butler going south to Chaguanas and on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway going east to Piarco. We will also upgrade the Diego Martin Highway in the Four Roads area and complete the dualling of the South Trunk Road from Gulf City to Mosquito Creek.

Phase 1 of the Water Taxi Service between Port of Spain and San Fernando was launched in fiscal 2009. It now offers a Monday to Friday schedule, with eight round trips daily, taking just 50 minutes from north to south in air-conditioned comfort. A contract has been executed with Austal Ships of Australia for the construction of four new water taxi vessels expected to arrive in Trinidad toward the end of 2010.

Further, in 2009, the Public Transport Service Corporation continued its aggressive fleet expansion and renewal programme and acquired 120 new buses.

An international project consultant has also been engaged and work is in progress to finalize contract documents and design briefs for the invitation of design/build proposals for, and to commence construction of several new highway projects.

By the end of 2010, it is expected that construction will begin on the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin; a new highway from San Fernando to Mayaro; and the extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Wallerfield to Manzanilla.

Work has also progressed on the National Drainage Development Study consistent with Government's objective to develop drainage systems to meet ecological requirements and settlements patterns.

In the business of electricity transmission and distribution, the obsolete microwave radio communication system will be replaced and a modern fibre optic cable network and the completion of advanced metering infrastructure. This will
achieve improvements in communication technology within the electricity transmission and distribution sector.

T&TEC will install a national geographic information system map which will more accurately and swiftly locate faults on the system. The system's database will be shared with relevant stakeholders.

Turning now to the environment, the Government in conjunction with the Environmental Management Authority has replanted 15 acres of the Nariva Swamp as part of the Nariva Swamp Restoration and Carbon Sequestration Initiative. Over the next fiscal year, Government will also develop and maintain a National Waste Inventory for Trinidad and Tobago to collect information on the generation, movement and disposal of hazardous waste. This will better inform the development of national policy and legislation to protect the environment for present and future generations from the deleterious effects of hazardous wastes.

Turning to the Fifth Pillar, Promoting Effective Government, it is clear that to survive in the increasingly competitive world, we must improve the way our institutions function with a focus on performance or output. Therefore, we propose to introduce an integrated financial management information system which will represent the backbone of a new financial and information management system to improve the efficiency of the Ministry of Finance and all other ministries. This will be a major undertaking and will take time to implement.

It is expected that the system, when deployed will make performance information more publicly available and user friendly. This will increase the level of accountability and transparency in the conduct of Government's business.

The purpose of property tax is to provide a revenue source for the deployment of public goods such as garbage collection, street cleaning, road maintenance, street lighting, fire services, maintenance of recreational parks and other community services. These taxes will support the activities of local government bodies.

Property taxes are not new to this country. The system of property taxation currently used by the nine regional corporations in Trinidad and Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly is governed by the Lands and Buildings Taxes Act of 1920. The last national assessment was done in 1948. In other words, for most properties the information is 51 years out of date and there is a wide disparity in the rate of tax charged among regions.
Based on assessments dating from 1945, properties located in the nine regional corporations and Tobago pay a rate of between $10 and $20 per acre of land with 7 1/2 per cent tax on the annual rental value of the building. In the municipal corporations however, property tax rates for residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural lands range from 10 per cent in Port of Spain to 2 per cent in Point Fortin.

The existing property tax regime is demonstrably antiquated, inefficient and inequitable. We are committed to providing an efficient, equitable and user-friendly property tax system by January 01, 2010.

The Government is developing a property tax information system which will employ modern technology using a single platform to assess all properties and collect taxes via a harmonized tax regime throughout Trinidad and Tobago, under the management of a single assessment agency and a single collection agency to ensure consistency.

The Valuation Division will continue the assessment of properties, which assessments have been ongoing since 2003, in accordance with best practices to ensure equity. Objections, appeals and queries by citizens in all assessment and valuation matters will be facilitated to ensure that citizens have an avenue for redress. The legislation will allow for total or partial exemption from the tax for any period, or its deferment in any case where it is satisfied that the owner, by reason of age, impaired health or other special circumstances, will suffer undue hardship.

11.00 a.m.

Let me explain how the tax will be administered. There will be five classifications of properties on which taxes will be charged. These range from the executive to the modern to the standard to the substandard to what is also known as shacks. Other factors to be considered would be the geographical location and access to utilities and amenities, which would relate to the rental value of these properties. The Valuation Division of the Ministry of Finance has developed an assessment mechanism and criteria to determine rental value.

The system will adopt the rental value appraisal. This method was arrived at after substantial consultation with valuers and experts in the field. We propose to implement a new four-tiered property tax regime based on present market values of properties. In the case of residential, commercial and agricultural properties, the tax will be 3.5 per cent in the case of residential; 5 per cent in the case of commercial and 1 per cent for agricultural properties.
In the case of industrial properties, the tax will be 6 per cent of annual taxable value, which is based upon the installed cost of plant, machinery and associated buildings. To facilitate payment it is also proposed to extend the time by which the penalties may be applied for non-payment of taxes from the present date of June 30 to the last day of the fiscal year September 30. The new system will facilitate payment and part payment as well as prepayment of property taxes.

By way of illustration, if a property has an assessed rental value of $5,000 per month, the annual rent will be $60,000 and the annual rateable value will be 90 per cent of this figure, that is $54,000 and will attract a tax of 3 per cent, that is, $1,620 per annum.

Legislation to give effect to the new property tax system will be brought to Parliament this year and a communication campaign to inform the public of the property will be launched later this month.

It is also proposed to upgrade the process of payment to allow for a multiplicity of channels through which payment can be made, thus reducing the congestion at District Revenue Offices and guaranteeing convenience. Furthermore, citizens will be allowed to access property and tax information over the Internet, using a unique ID and password. Assessment and financial data, such as property characteristics, sketches, arrears, tax due and payable, payment history may also be viewed online.

The Government is also committed to modernizing the existing pension regime for monthly paid public sector employees, daily-rated public sector employees and Members of Parliament. A plan design has been approved and will modernize the present planned provision. The main changes in the plan design are:

- Improved survivor benefits that will now be paid to survivors, spouse and/or eligible children of both male and female public servants. The benefits payable under the Widows and Orphans Fund will be replaced by the greater of:
  - 60 per cent of the pension in payment prior to the spouse's death; or
  - the minimum public sector pension benefit;
- The elimination of the two-thirds limit on pension accruals to allow public servants to continue to accrue a pension past the 33⅓ years service;
- Improved pension portability for employees who leave the public service or transfer within the public service, and shorter vesting periods;
Pension benefits will be fully vested after two years instead of the present five years, providing more equity in the system by allowing employees to gain entitlement to a pension benefit at an earlier stage.

In addition, the Government is undertaking an actuarial valuation of the daily-rated public sector pension gratuity benefit. Upon completion, a stakeholder assessment will be undertaken. The review is expected to be completed in 2010. In the case of parliamentarians, the Government will review pension plan design options for implementation at the same time as those for monthly-paid public sector employees.

Government will also harmonize and consolidate the various pieces of legislation, simplify the legislative process for modifying pension provisions in the future and modernize many dated statutes. The revised pension legislation is expected to be completed by the middle of fiscal 2010.

State enterprises continue to be a significant contributor to the growth and development of the country. It is comprised of 57 companies, of which 46 are wholly owned, six majority owned and five in which Government has a minority shareholding. The vision for the state enterprises sector is one in which activities are guided by equity, transparency, efficiency and accountability. The Government's equity in these shareholdings total $7.9 billion. In the financial year 2008, these enterprises realized a total profit of $8 billion.

The Government fully appreciates the need for oversight of these enterprises. The Ministry of Finance has put in place a central audit committee to assist in monitoring these operations of all state enterprises. This is in addition to the internal audit function and the statutory audit of all state enterprises.

In 2010, the Ministry of Finance will improve the performance monitoring manual which provides benchmarks for state enterprises such as dividend policy, remuneration and other corporate governance rules. The Government has also approved a project management protocol to be used in special purpose enterprises. It is specifically targeted to improve project execution and ensure quality and delivery within project deadlines and budget.

Government has also established a subcommittee of Cabinet which is preparing procurement rules and guidelines as we seek to revise the procurement policy to ensure that all government entities, including state enterprises, comply with appropriate procurement rules. The new policy will be based on electronic procurement and will also include complaints mechanism and stricter penalties for non-compliance.
In keeping with this thrust, the Ministry of Finance will continue to implement e-auctions as an alternative form of procurement whilst we reform the procurement regime. Already several state enterprises have benefited from savings amounting to over TT $40 million on traditional supplies after using the electronic auction process.

The major provisions for Tobago included in the budget for fiscal 2010 are as follows:

- Implementation of a Tourism Rolling Plan;
- Designation of the Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park as a regional development area to accelerate the transformation of the Tobago economy;
- Resources to fund both the administrative infrastructure at the Cove, as well as new activities at the Assembly-owned Tobago Cassava Products Limited and the Fishing Processing Company of Tobago Limited;
- Expansion of the Tobago Venture Capital Fund to promote private sector investment;
- Completion in 2010 of the Scarborough Hospital, the Shaw Park Cultural Complex, the Scarborough Library, the Financial Complex, the Indoor Sporting Complex at Bacolet and the Buccoo Goat Race Facility;
- Extension of the Store Bay Local Road to Shirvan Road and the Claude Noel Highway to Charlotteville on a phased basis;
- Commencement of a new, first class road from Les Couteaux to Plymouth;
- Construction of a five million gallon desalination plant and a sewer treatment plant which is currently in the design stage;
- Completion of the upgrade at the Vanguard Hotel;
- Completion of Tobago's new electricity generation plant in collaboration with T&TEC at a substantial cost; and, in addition,
- The natural gas pipeline to Tobago and the natural gas processing facility at Cove will also be completed in collaboration with the National Gas Company.

I turn now to the fiscal measures to be adopted for 2010. The Government continues to promote productivity and competitiveness of the small and micro enterprises to support employment and production levels and foster national
economic growth. The Government will stimulate the construction sector by subcontracting small competent contractors, the building and refurbishment of community health and recreation centres, schools, police stations and city and borough sidewalks. A 30 per cent mobilization fee, up from 10 per cent, will be paid to contractors from the Infrastructure Development Fund.

Further, the small and micro enterprises sector continues to attract new entrepreneurs. The National Entrepreneurship Development Company promotes the development of the SMEs by giving and providing financial management advice while offering financial products and development support services. There are approximately 9,000 registered applicants. First time applicants are now entitled to $100,000, while returning applicants who have repaid their previous loans can access up to $250,000. From October 01, 2009, Government proposes to increase this as follows:

- First time applicants up to $250,000;
- Compliant second time applicants $250,001 to $350,000;
- Compliant third time applicants $350,001 to $500,000.

Also, from October 01, the Government will expand the value of public sector contracts accessible to the SMEs from $1 million to $5 million.

In 2010, the Government will increase retooling incentives for the improvement of existing plant capacity to further strengthen the efficiency and competitiveness of the manufacturing sector. We therefore propose to increase the initial allowance relating to machinery and plant from 75 per cent to 90 per cent. When combined with the applicable 25 per cent Wear and Tear Allowance for subsequent years of asset utilization, this measure provides an additional benefit to manufacturers by reducing their tax liability. This measure takes effect from January 01, 2010 and will require an amendment to the Income Tax Act.

The Approved Property Development Allowance has been an incentive in the past by encouraging the expansion of activity and job creation in the construction sector. This allowance was reintroduced in the Finance Act, 2007, but only in respect of projects that commenced after 2005 and were completed before December 31, 2007.

It is proposed that the Corporation Tax Act be now amended to allow approved property development companies to claim a 15 per cent deduction of the capital expenditure incurred in the construction of commercial or industrial buildings which commenced on or after October 01, 2009 and are completed on or before December 31, 2014. This measure will also require an amendment to the Corporation Tax Act and will take effect from October 01, 2009.
Turning to motor vehicle penalties and fees, in an effort to maintain safety on our nation's roads and to deter road traffic offenders, the Government will increase significantly the penalties under the First Schedule of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:52 for offences with fixed penalties and introduce new penalties. Some examples of the proposed amendments to these penalties are: the use of a vehicle without park lights, improper overtaking, dangerous overtaking, and exceeding the speed limit. These will each face an increase in fixed penalty from $200 to $1,000. The unauthorized use of the Priority Bus Route, motor vehicles not fitted with seatbelts and illegal tints on vehicles will see an increase in fixed penalty from $200 to $2,000. The Government will bring forward legislation to make mandatory the use of child restraints for children five years of age and under. These measures are expected to contribute an additional $40 million in revenue and take effect from January 01, 2010.

Further, to harmonize the fees and duties under the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, the Government proposes to amend the cost of the renewal of drivers' licences from $200 every three years to $500 every five years and increase all other fees and duties under the First Schedule by 75 per cent. These measures are expected to contribute an additional $35 million in revenue and take effect from January 01, 2010.

It is also proposed that the Motor Vehicles Transfer Tax be increased by 50 per cent in each of the respective categories. This measure is expected to contribute an additional $10 million to revenue and takes effect from October 01, 2009.

The Government remains committed to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and proposes to increase the excise and import duty on tobacco products of Common Market origin and the tobacco tax on extra-regional tobacco products, all by 15 per cent. This measure is expected to contribute an additional $30 million to Government's revenue and took effect from September 08, 2009 and will require amendments to the Customs Act.

With respect to alcohol and spirits, we propose an increase of 15 per cent in excise duty on locally manufactured rum, beer and other alcoholic products; as well as the import duty on rum, beer and other alcoholic products of Common Market origin. Import duty on rum, beer and other alcoholic products from extra-regional sources will be increased by 30 per cent.

This measure took effect from September 08, 2009 and requires amendments to the Customs Act. These measures are expected to contribute an additional $50 million to revenue.
11.15 a.m.

In conclusion, the Government will continue to implement macroeconomic policies geared to generate sustainable export-led growth and development, but the world will not wait on us, and no plan will work unless we as a people: public sector, private sector, labour, citizens all; unless we make it work. Indeed, the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. The paradigm of mistrust between public and private sector and between labour and everyone else must be bridged with constructive dialogue, geared towards promoting the development of the country. We will build on positions that, in time and over time, have demonstrated the soundness and effectiveness of our policies and which will continue to focus on infrastructure, education, social development, housing, health and national security, to enhance the quality of life of our citizens and bring us progressively closer to the achievement of developed country status by 2010.

Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Sen. Wade Mark: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. Budget 2010 has completely devastated and frustrated the dreams, hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of our citizens, rich and poor alike, who currently are already living and in many cases merely eking out an existence under extremely difficult and strained circumstances.

The provisions of this budget will undoubtedly adversely affect each and every citizen in this country: the rich, the poor, the middle-class, the underclass and the differently-abled. This callous and heartless administration has squandered the natural gas boom which our country enjoyed for the past years. By failing to prudently manage the economic fortunes experienced by this country and this economy in the manner in which they should have managed, the Government has created an environment of great uncertainty for the people; uncertainty with respect to the ability of the ordinary people and ordinary struggling middle-class families to attain their economic goals and to function in an environment that is tabled equitable and safe; an environment where hard work is rewarded and prosperity is not a crime.

The Government, by neglecting and refusing to listen to the advice proffered by nearly all interest groups concerning the management of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund, has left the citizenry paralyzed by fear, uncertainty and unwarranted anxiety. Why is the population so frustrated? Why are they so
fearful? The population is afraid, anxious and concerned because of two factors. One is that the country was in this situation in the recent past, 1980s and 1990s. The second reason is that this Government has given the population absolutely no indication that it has understood the crisis in which it has found itself and it can appreciate the cures for the current malady that the country is experiencing. Clearly, they have not learnt the lessons of history and are therefore condemned to repeating them.

The economic environment has changed, but the Government’s policies have remained the same. The Government is acting as though the current crisis in which we have found ourselves will simply go away tomorrow and they have not given us any assurance as to what the future holds for the people of this country. In the current fiscal package, the Government has saddled the country with a debt burden of some $8 billion and another $8 billion is expected in fiscal 2010.

In two short years, the Government has increased the public debt by some 30 per cent and debt servicing anticipated for the current fiscal year will exceed $6 billion. Payment on interest alone is escalating to what soon would be the equivalent of the cost of the entire wage and salary bill of the public service. This Government is rapidly moving the country from a relatively low debt burden to the point where, more than 20 per cent of the revenues will have to be allocated to debt servicing. There is the distinct possibility that this country may well have to approach the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance if current trends continue.

What the Minister of Finance appears to be doing is using her ability to borrow in such a manner which, if we are not careful, will result in this country falling into the debt trap; a place which our country is not unfamiliar. It is a place where interest payments become so high that the Government will not have sufficiently available resources to service the daily needs of our population.

Mr. Vice-President, the Central Bank’s foreign exchange reserves is at an alarming rate. The price of oil and gas is low and is expected to remain low in the short to medium term. This is the cold and brutal economic reality facing the people. This country will face not only a difficult period in 2010, but there could be worse to come in 2011 and 2012. During this challenging period, the Government is expected to dismantle most of the economic gains the country has recorded in the past few years.

It is against this background that we intend to assess, analyze and evaluate fiscal package 2010. Let us examine fiscal package 2008/2009. This country experienced a cataclysmic decline in revenues from an estimated budgeted total as
outlined by the Minister of $49.5 billion to a revised figure of $37.9 billion, which represented a shortfall of approximately $11.5 billion. This is indeed shocking and frightening. What this means is that the Minister of Finance has failed to secure a quarter of her projected revenues. This is mismanagement of the highest magnitude. How could someone not anticipate such a huge fall in revenues? This is the same Government that ridiculed the economic pundits and institutional experts when they challenged the Minister's optimistic forecast for fiscal 2008/2009. These pundits were wrongly condemned and dismissed as prophets of doom and gloom. In the meantime, the country has lost more than 25 per cent of its total estimated revenue for fiscal 2009. Oil production has declined significantly in our country from over 150,000 barrels per day to less than 105,000 barrels today. We are in an environment in which our revenue flows are highly uncertain and unpredictable. The oil market has become volatile, whilst the gas market has become precipitous and uncertain in light of newly found reserves in Venezuela, USA and Europe, among other countries.

The Ryder Scott Report has simply aggravated the situation, but all this is not new. We predicted this some time ago. The Government neglected all the advice proffered and continued along their reckless and irresponsible path of unsustainable development and squandermania and now it is the population of this country which must face and pay the consequence of the excess of an irresponsible administration.

In this budget, we heard nothing about the ravishing effects of inflation. The Government appears to be only concerned about the huge problem of the rising deficit and its narrowing revenue base. Not for one moment did it give thought to the plight and condition of the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed and the underprivileged in our country. These are the people who should benefit the most by any budget. One of the key functions of a budget is to redistribute income to the people who are least able to help themselves. The inflation rate has been in excess of 10 per cent for the past few years. We know it fell this year, yet, during the course of the year, the cost of food remains extremely high. Indeed, electricity bills rose and there was an increase across the board in transportation charges, however, not a word in the budget as to how the Government is going to help the poor, the underprivileged and the downtrodden masses.

We have heard a great deal about the non-cash transfer scheme, which was aimed at helping the poor and vulnerable. How many poor people have actually benefited? We are told that there are 33,000 beneficiaries, but there are over 180,000 citizens or 14 per cent of the population still subsisting on less than US $2 a day in our country, while some 220,000 or 16.7 per cent live on less than US
$650 a day. It is our information that some 20 per cent—[Laughter] no, per month, forgive me—of the smart cards are in the possession of smart men. There is need for more efficient social targeting and monitoring of this Smart Card Programme by the Government.

Mr. Vice-President, there is absolutely nothing for the poor in this budget. The budget has been the most discouraging for the poor people of this land.

11.30 a.m.

There is absolutely nothing for the poor in this budget to facilitate an increase in the Senior Citizens Grant; an increase in the disability allowance; an increase in public assistance; and an increase for the thousands of government retirees, including former daily-rated workers. Where is the social justice? These vulnerable citizens have been faced with an increase in their electricity bills; food basket and transportation costs among other escalating goods and services.

There is nothing for those workers who are unorganized and socially unprotected in the labour market. The minimum wage has not been adjusted for several years and, as such, hundreds of thousands of ordinary workers are forced to subsist on an unacceptable low minimum wage of $9 an hour. Many are paid less than the minimum wage and they have no redress. Where is the concern and care for these workers? The minimum rate should be increased immediately to $20 an hour to allow unorganized workers and their families to better cope with the rampant increases in the cost of living. [Desk thumping]

The poor citizens have received nothing in the budget on account of this Government's incompetence, recklessness and virtual cavalier approach to managing scarce financial resources in a period of global economic slow down. Mr. Vice-President, this has caused the poor people to become impoverished. The budget offers absolutely no hope for the poor and the downtrodden. This Government, by its reckless and irresponsible mismanagement of the resources of the country is creating a doldrum of discontent among the poor, dispossessed and oppressed members of this society. It is breeding a culture of despair and homelessness. After spending $300 billion in the past eight years, the quality of life of the people has continued to deteriorate in this country.

Imagine less than 35 per cent of the students who sit the CXC examinations are able to obtain a full certificate! Some 12 per cent of the population, representing over 150,000 citizens, is still unable to read or write in this country whilst just less than 50 per cent of the adult population possesses the literacy levels essential and
critical in a modern society. The pass rate in CXC English is only 55 per cent and
the pass rate in mathematics remains just under 50 per cent, yet this Government
continues to parrot the plagiarized Malaysian concept of Vision 2020, pie in the
sky dream.

More than one out of every four citizens fled this country according to the
World Bank's Migration and Development Fact Book, 2008. Some 28 per cent of
the population has migrated to other countries. More than 75 per cent of our
population or three in four persons with tertiary education have left Trinidad and
Tobago. This is, indeed, a serious brain drain to our country. Every year, since the
UNC demitted office, more and more people have been migrating.

Children are also victims of this PNM squandermania and waste. It takes
between two and three years to secure an appointment to have a simple oral dental
operation at the paediatric ward of the Mount Hope Medical Complex. Do you
know why? The operating theatre is simply not functioning and, as such, children
are forced to sacrifice their health.

In 2000, under the UNC, the infant mortality rate was 17 per 1,000 live births.
Do you know what it is under this Government according to UNICEF? It is 31 per
1,000 live births. Children are dying in this country. This country was ranked at
No. 56 in the world in homicides. We are on the same scale with Somalia which
does not have a government.

Under the UNC, people used to live longer. Under the UNC in 2000, life
expectancy stood at 74.1 years, but under the PNM, life expectancy has declined to
69.2 years. You are dying faster under this PNM Government. People are not
living. The probability at birth of surviving to age 40 in this country, under the
UNC it stood at 4 per cent, meaning about 52,000 people may not have lived to 40
years. Today, under the PNM, it is 9.1 per cent, over 117,000 people.

There has been a consistent decline in the Human Development Index where
we were ranked No. 50 under the UNC in 2000, and under this administration we
have now gone to No. 59.

Mr. Vice-President, the fear of crime in respect of public safety and security
has worsened. Two out of every three persons live in fear for their own personal
safety and the safety of their loved ones.

According to the Government's own statistics, youth unemployment stood at
some 56 per cent. Some 76 per cent of one million citizens of this population do
not have access to a 24-hour supply of water. Some 70 per cent of the population
or some 900,000 citizens are still using outside latrines. Imagine that! Are we
serious when we talk about developed nation status by 2020? There has been deterioration in family life, community life, material well-being, in job security and gender equality. There exists a widening gender gap in pay differentials. This gap was put at 14.8 per cent in 2005 and it has now moved to 19.7 per cent at the end of 2007 according to the ILO.

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value has not been observed in this country and women are the main victims of this scourge. Imagine married women are still being discriminated against in the public service. They face job loss if it is determined that family obligations may prevent them from efficiently executing their duties. Women are compelled to report their marriages to the Public Service Commission still in 2009.

The working poor who had aspirations of living a more comfortable life for themselves and law-abiding and hard-working family have now found themselves in a very difficult and precarious position on account of this fiscal package. This fiscal package means that many employers would not be recruiting labour in the manner in which they would have wanted, given the fact that the economy is now experiencing an extremely sharp contraction. Just look at the dismal picture painted by the just released Review of the Economy! The truth is that the country is in a state of major economic decline, if not, economic depression. We are almost in a similar position to where we were in the 1980s, where the economy is producing less and less every year and where job security is becoming a major concern for the working people.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government has already served notice on the trade unions representing workers in the public sector that they will not receive more than a 3 per cent salary increase over the next three years. What a disgrace! The ordinary workers have literally surrendered to inflation and now he is just waiting in apprehension to see whether his job would be next on the chopping block. The workers' wages have been severely eroded by steep increases in food prices through runaway inflation. This has disproportionally reduced their purchasing power. Indeed, the labour share of income may have declined precipitously in the last eight years. There may also have been a significant change in the capital labour income distribution ratio. The decline in wage share would have inevitably led to deterioration in the distribution of income and wealth. Thanks to the Manning administration, the poor and ordinary working man is living in complete fear and apprehension today. They are the cause; the PNM. This is what the Government has caused due to gross mismanagement, waste and squandermania and corruption. They would not listen to well-intentioned advice.
There is no safety net in this country to cushion the burdens of dislocation and retrenchment of workers and their families in this period of economic decline and falling output. This Government has pitted the poor against each other and there will be a major struggle just to secure the crumbs falling from the master’s table. This situation is going to breed social chaos and this is a far cry from where we were one year ago. Oh, how the mighty have fallen! The mighty will not be falling on their own, but will be taking down all the people with them. This is where the UNC parts company. This is where the battle lines are drawn. The Government has trampled upon the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the working class. They have crushed the hopes and aspirations of the children of the working class to escape poverty from their lifetime. This Government, by its treacherous actions, has taken this country some 30 years back. It is as if we have not made any progress in the past 20 years.

Let us turn to the middle class and the brutal assault on the middle class of this nation. The middle class has been frontally attacked in budget 2010. Where they had taken sniper fire in the last budget, now they have taken a direct hit. The Government has seen it fit to change the structure of taxes now, and it is not only attacking the homes of the middle class, but it is now taxing their very dreams.

This Government does not understand what a home means to an individual. Obviously, if they had read Sir Vidya Naipaul’s famous novel A House for Mr. Biswas they would have known. I strongly recommend it. The Government is taxing the dreams and aspirations of the middle class. They know nothing of that which they do. In one move, the Government has decided to go after the middle class and remove the dreams of this class to acquire their little space in this land. The property tax is the most backward, oppressive and callous tax that has ever been contemplated and imposed on a people by any Government. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, there are two philosophical principles governing taxation; one is the ability to pay, criterion, and the second is the benefits and services to be derived therefrom. The property tax is a wealth tax. It is a tax on a stock and is based on a value where one does not have any control. The tax is onerous, oppressive and regressive. The function of a property tax is based on the principle of wherever one resides, certain benefits are derived from living there. This tax is essentially to finance school districts. Where property taxes are highest, public schools would be the best.
For some 50 years, this Government did nothing about this tax. It was their responsibility to undertake valuations and they failed to do so. When we were in power, the UNC never considered the imposition of a property tax as a revenue raising measure for central government.

11.45 a.m.

Our party's policy is to encourage citizens to accumulate property and to provide the necessary incentives to do so. The PNM Government is engaged in cross purposes. On the one hand, the Government wants the citizens to acquire their homes, while seeking to discourage them through the imposition of this onerous tax. What signal is this Government sending to homeowners? It is a tax on the estimated rental value of one's property. Is this Government bent on creating a nation of tenants?

It is estimated that 30 per cent of the citizens currently rent homes in this country. The tax would penalize persons who choose to construct their own homes and could also impact on net return on investment in the construction industry. The new property tax would lead to increase in the rents for all tenants. Pensioners and individuals on fixed incomes would be affected. Business owners at the industrial and commercial levels will be contributing to a reduction in their levels of competitiveness.

What the Government is doing is taxing the owners of properties regardless of ability to pay. The tax will lead to the majority of people experiencing a quantum leap in their tax obligations. You know, the tax will affect persons who have just built their homes. Such individuals are already paying a 15 per cent value added tax. When you leave the country, a departure tax; income tax, health surcharge, national insurance, inflation tax and now, this onerous property tax.

There will be an increase in the cost of living because of the imposition of this punitive and regressive tax on all commercial properties. This insensitive, objectionable, reprehensible and disgraceful new tax will result in one's disposable income being further eroded. The working person who now has a mortgage will be called upon to pay, not only this monthly mortgage, which he could barely afford, but the new property tax as well.

The middle class is hurting; their salaries are not rising; inflation has already battered them; electricity rates have been increased; new property taxes are now being imposed, and now increases in interest charges on mortgage payments possibly, and we learnt that water rates are about to increase shortly. The Government is giving with one hand and taking away with the other.
The tax will discourage mortgage holders who may wish to opt for earlier retirement; the property tax is inequitable and will discourage the further construction of homes by private individuals and property developers. The battle lines have been drawn on this matter. There can be no compromise on this one. This is a direct attack on the middle class and the property owning class.

This property tax in the hands of an abusive Government could lead to segregation of communities and the development of ghettoes. This tax will further consolidate the rigid class structure in our country. If one is unable to pay this onerous tax the Government can seize one's property and put it up for sale. This is wrong. This tax is open to corruption and discrimination. The sting is in the tail.

Property taxes are based on the annual ratable tax or ratable value of the property, which the Government is currently updating. WASA bills are also based on an annual ratable value, as such, customers may well expect a ten-fold increase in their water bills or WASA bills, when the new assessment and valuation exercise has been conducted by the Valuation Division. Would citizens be asked to finance WASA's debt or deficit of $2.1 billion through the imposition of new water rate taxes or new water rates?

This Government has ruthlessly pillaged the Treasury and now they seek to burden the people with such an onerous tax. We in the UNC would not support this oppressive measure, and we want to suggest the following for the Government's consideration: Improve the revenue collection arms of the State to facilitate greater compliance; increase enforcement of existing tax laws; round up all outstanding individuals and companies owing PAYE and corporation taxes; take measures to plug the loopholes in the VAT system; have greater efficiency in the collection of customs duties at various ports of entry.

It is our information that only 60 per cent of the working people pay income taxes; 40 per cent are outside of the net. Mr. Minister of Finance, collect, do not add or increase. A UNC government—if they call an election and we understand they are planning to call one—will not introduce or return the introduction of nuisance taxes and taxing people's property in this way that is being proposed. A UNC government would not interfere with the property tax regime to raise revenue for central government. The UNC does not envisage any need to alter the current regime to raise revenue for central government. Therefore, we disagree completely and strongly with the Government's interference in this particular area.

Mr. Vice-President, I have not mentioned crime, congestion or even corruption. I have not mentioned the unacceptable conditions under which workers toil in their various workplaces. We have not mentioned how public
infrastructure would be affected as a result of the shortage of revenues. We have not mentioned that the books, in their current state, appear to have been properly cooked, and an Enron type scandal of gargantuan proportions tragically awaits this country. We have not spoken about the "ol' talk" for 30 years about diversification and we do not see any measures in this budget to allow any diversification to take place. We have not spoken about agriculture and the need for us to have a good agricultural policy in a structured manner targeting exactly what Government requires of the sector. We have not spoken about these things.

We believe in the short term, the citizens may well have to brace themselves for more taxes as the economic crisis deepens and worsens in the coming year. We will not be surprised if in the next six months from today, the Minister returns to this Parliament to indicate that she is short on her revenue projections, because oil and gas prices are flat, the GDP is not growing by the projected 2 per cent, but instead contracting by 2 per cent. The Minister may be forced to come back here to raise revenue. There is every possibility that the Government may impose a new round of taxes on an already burdened population.

I just want to look at the energy sector briefly. The gas-to-liquids project: According to information reaching us, an arrangement was made with World GTL to purchase an old methanol plant from the United States of America, convert it to a gas-to-liquids plant, and have it installed at Pointe-a-Pierre. This was some three years ago. A contract was signed between this World GTL and Petrotrin, which allowed World GTL to have 51 per cent and Petrotrin 49 per cent. This GTL plant was originally estimated at US $150 million, and was supposed to be completed over one year ago. The plant is now expected to be completed in December of 2009. The cost of this completion is now US $445 million, an overrun of US $300 million or close to $2 billion.

We understand World GTL will not pay one cent for its 51 per cent shares; Petrotrin seems to be paying the whole 100 per cent and there are no patent rights associated with this project. We also understand Petrotrin auditors may have had some concerns of a possible fictitious company, where money seemed to have been siphoned. I want the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to investigate whether World GTL is renting a home owned by the former executive chairman of Petrotrin, at St. Joseph Village, San Fernando, at a monthly cost of US $5,000.

This scandal, if it exists, is worse than the Brian Lara fiasco, and we think that it calls for an investigation by the Fraud Squad and the DPP. We understand one Mr. Anthony Chan Tack, a former member of the board, was fired when he
sought to question this corrupt project. Whilst I am on Petrotrin, may I also ask
the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, is he aware that a property was
acquired by Petrotrin at Mount Irvine in Tobago, called "Go Beyond House"?

Do you know that this "Go Beyond House" was for the big "sawatees" of
Petrotrin and it cost the taxpayers over $6 million? Is the Minister aware that a
contract was awarded to the son of a director called Mr. Carl Percy Singh? Is the
Minister aware that proper procedure was not followed by the Tenders
Committee, headed by Mr. Malcolm Jones, in awarding this contract? We are
informed that the post of property manager of "Go Beyond House" was never
advertised. Is the Minister aware that Petrotrin transferred $20,000 of its own
funds to the son of the same director's personal bank account, from which he pays
for the upkeep of this "Go Beyond House"? The son of this director is also paid a
management fee of $15,000 a month.

Mr. Vice-President, this is a naked conflict of interest and I want the Minister
to investigate this. The behaviour of the outgoing executive chairman, which is
bordering on misbehaviour in public office, needs to be investigated. The beach
camp scandal, started at $17 million; ended at $34 million. You see where our
money gone? And people are being called upon by this Government to pay
increased taxes and nuisance taxes.

Do you know that we now have a budget deficit of close to $8 billion and
rising, and there is a tower called the Social Development Tower that started at
$368 million? It is now over $600 million and rising. It is over one year and one
month behind schedule. There is a penalty clause in that contract that says if you
do not deliver on time, you pay $118,000 for every day for late delivery. One year
and one month amounts to $47 million. Why has UdeCott not imposed that
penalty on the Shanghai Construction Group? [Desk thumping] We demand that
this penalty be imposed on the Shanghai Construction Group and bring the $46
million into the Treasury and relieve the people of these nuisance taxes on spirits,
alcohol and tobacco.

Mr. Vice-President, this is madness. How can the Government allow this to
take place? It is not proper. You have a situation where $31.2 million could be
paid to some Universal Projects Limited. You know why? Because the Ministry
of Works and Transport and the Office of the Attorney General failed to submit
the necessary paperwork to the courts.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Not when I was there.
Sen. W. Mark: No, not when you were there. Universal Projects Limited is owned by a "fella" called John-Williams and "a next fella" called Harry Ragoonanan, close associates of the ruling party. Is that why they did not submit the papers? I understand it is now under appeal and I do not know if the taxpayers will benefit at the end.

12.00 noon

Mr. Vice-President, let us deal with governance in this country. The governance track record of this Government leaves a lot to be desired. This project is done by the World Bank every year and the last report I have is 2008. Out of 212 countries and looking at six dimensions of governance, namely: Voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory equality; rule of law and control of corruption, look at how this administration has performed under these particular dimensions and headings.

I want to compare the UNC in 2000 and I want to compare the PNM in 2008. Under voice and accountability, the higher the percentile, is the richer the state of governance, the lower the percentile is the more difficulty we have in that process.

Mr. Vice-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. Dr. A. Nanan]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Voice and accountability, under the UNC, 64.4; the higher the richer, the lower the worse; under the PNM in 2008, 61.5. The area of political stability, under the UNC 49 percentile, under the PNM 47.8; under government effectiveness, under a UNC administration 67.3, under the PNM at the end of 2008, 64.5; regulatory quality, under the UNC 72.7, under the PNM 70.5.

The rule of law that is under assault by this administration over the last eight years, under a UNC administration, 62.4; under this PNM at the end of 2008, 48.8, a difference of 13 percentile points. Control of corruption—they boast about it, especially our newly installed Attorney General—under the UNC 60.7 percentile, under your party it has gone down to 56.8. On every score the UNC has beaten the PNM in terms of governance in Trinidad and Tobago and we were there for just six years. [Desk thumping]
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[SEN. MARK]

Mr. Vice-President, what I am saying here is that this Government has used its iron feet to oppress and undermine the various institutions of our country. Whether it is the office of the Chief Justice, whether it is the DPP, whether it is the Solicitor General, it does not matter. They have dismantled or undermined those institutions.

I want to talk about competitiveness, but I will leave that to my colleagues to deal with, because the competitiveness index reveals that this Government has sunk. Do not compare ourselves with the Caribbean. Look at our benchmark countries in your so-called Vision 2020; look at Iceland, look at Ireland, look at Norway, look at those countries, look at New Zealand, look at Mauritius, look at Malaysia, look at Chile, look at Costa Rica; those are the benchmark and comparator countries that we need to really compare ourselves with and not, for instance, talk about the Caribbean. No, no, look at those areas you have targeted in your Vision 2020. Simple Barbados, without any resources, without any Prime Minister, they do not have a Prime Minister in Barbados and look how high Barbados is in terms of development. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Yes, yes, they are under pressure. They are under pressure right now. [Interruption] But we are going into the jaws of the IMF just now the rate that you are—you are going to join Barbados if you are not careful.

Let me deal with another matter. The impression has been given that the UNC, when in Government somehow did not manage this economy. That is the propaganda of the PNM. I want to take this opportunity today to tell this Government and to remind this country that during the period of the UNC where we had the privilege and honour to govern this country and where the average price of oil was US $9, a low, to US $22, a high, I will tell you what we were able to achieve. The International Monetary Fund has recorded us, 6.4 per cent growth in 2000, the highest than the US, Europe and Japan. We were able to have a reserve of $2.4 billion in reserves; we had six straight years of strong economic growth; we had 40 per cent drop in employment; we had 85,000 new jobs that we created. Inflation was an unprecedented 2.5 per cent—I want to repeat just in case the Minister—a 40 per cent decline in unemployment rate. [Interruption] Mr. Vice-President, 40 per cent drop in unemployment rate.

We had six consecutive years of no new taxes with $9 a barrel of oil; six consecutive years of increased personal income tax allowances; we had universal free secondary education, we built 52 primary schools, we built 35 secondary schools, we had six consecutive years of increased foreign investment and we established a relatively safe, secure and peaceful society.
Sen. Manning: That is not true.

Sen. W. Mark: No, she can argue that when she is ready.

Sen. Narace: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order.


Sen. W. Mark: It hurts. I know it hurts.

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, both of you cannot be standing at the same time, if you have a point of order, quote the point of order and let us move on!

Sen. Narace: Standing Order 34(b). Mr. Vice-President, I refer—[Interruption] Can I speak, Mr. Vice-President? I refer to Standing Order 34(b) where the Senator has been misleading this Senate and I am calling on him to give way so that he can clarify some of those matters. He has quoted data and he refuses to give the source of his data. [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, all he is asking and I think you should do it, is to quote from your source. So just quote from your source and let us move on! [Crosstalk]

Sen. W. Mark: I am quoting from the source, UNC. [Raises a UNC manifesto] This is the source. [Laughter]


Sen. W. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, may I continue. [Laughter] Let us deal with some measures. [Crosstalk and laughter] We believe in deficit mutual budgets.

Hon. Senator: Privileges committee for you. Privileges committee for you.

Sen. W. Mark: We will spend what we earn; we will prioritize expenditure that major projects will only go forward if the economy and the Treasury permit; we will increase allocations to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; we will promote job opportunities through the creation of permanent, sustainable and well-paying jobs with acceptable and decent benefits for the workers. In the construction industry we will invest in and partner with the local construction industry to revitalize and develop new strategies in construction. Foreign contractors do little to improve the quality of skills in the local labour force. For far too long we have been promised a new procurement regime with no results. Whilst the grass is growing the horse is starving. Without this regime there is only waste and corruption.
A UNC Government will introduce a new procurement regime as a matter of national priority. This action alone will save the country hundreds of millions of dollars which have been stolen by corrupt persons both foreign and local. In terms of a living wage and the pensioners of this country, we will increase the minimum wage to a living wage of $20 per hour. We will introduce a mechanism to monitor these programmes; workers must be paid their just due. We will increase the Senior Citizens Grant to $3,000 per month and have index to inflation. All public buildings will either be refurbished or rebuilt, whether it is police, fire, primary or secondary schools, hospitals or Magistrates' Courts.

For the agricultural sector we will recommit ourselves to supporting our local farmers and fisherfolk through the provision of financial and technical support to increase production in all areas. There will be exemption of taxes and duties on all equipment imported for use by farmers, fisherfolk and agriculturalists. We will improve and accelerate the access roads programme; we will provide cold storage facilities for the fishermen.

A UNC Government in partnership with the private sector, the labour movement and institutions of higher learning will promote and foster a meaningful diversification programme away from oil and gas, and get into what is called 21st Century industries and organizations. We will promote and establish a diversification strategy secretariat to constantly harness and promote new ideas and review programmes and policies for productive diversification.

Mr. Vice-President, I wish to end my contribution by indicating to the Government our utter disappointment with the 2010 budget. It has failed to provide a clear diversification strategy for our country. If we do not address this issue now, if we do not plan now, when our oil and gas reserves become depleted in the next few years Trinidad and Tobago would be facing a gloomy future.

The budget does not promote sustainable human development for our people. It is both unimaginative and uninspiring. It is not people centered. There is nothing for the population except increased tax burdens on everyone, whether rich or poor, able or disabled; it is nothing more than a document of despair and hopelessness.

It gives with one hand and it takes away with the other. It continues to allocate large sums of moneys to projects which have nothing to do with reducing food prices, curbing crime, developing agriculture, the provision of water, improving health care and providing medication to the sick and elderly. It will do
nothing to improve the delivery of goods and services. It conceives more than it reveals; it will not improve the quality of education—too many students are leaving schools with very low grades in English and Maths.

Imagine the University of the West Indies is now testing students wishing to register in English Language. If education is to be of any use we must improve the quality of education and not the quantity of students in schools only. [Interrupting] The budget does nothing for the criminal justice system. In fact, the Chief Justice is on record concerning reduced allocations to the Judiciary. How and when will new Magistrates’ Courts be built? You know what this budget will herald? Higher food prices, increased water rates and T&TEC rates, increased hardship for all classes of persons, increased unemployment and under-employment, hopelessness for those least able to protect themselves and many small businesses run by young people and single mothers will have to close down. All of this for what? To allow this Government to continue its wild spending on pipe dreams and hare-brained schemes, some without even the respectable clothing of a feasibility study or a cost benefit analysis; it is Government by "vaps".

This Government now has the unfortunate reputation of squandering the wealth of this country. Two oil and gas booms in this country. The people are tired with this economic brutality. They are tired! The time is coming; you can run but you cannot hide. History will not be kind to this Government. It has been said that: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”. When evil men plot it is time for good men and women to plan and to take the necessary action to save our motherland from certain death and destruction from a group of over-ambitious, egotistical and dangerously narcissistic megalomaniacs. We have to prevent that, and we have to save our country from that overambitious, egotistical, narcissistic, dangerous group of people in our country.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, it has been said that the PNM has learned nothing from their experience. They have learned no lessons from their experience, and the country could brace itself for more pressure, more oppression, more murders, more crime. The only way forward for the people of Trinidad and Tobago is to get rid of the PNM once and for all, and we challenge you to call an early election and let the people decide once and for all, what they would do with the PNM. [Desk thumping]

I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I think we will take the lunch break now because I do not think the Senator would like to be interrupted, so we would resume at 1.15 p.m. This Senate is now suspended until 1.15 p.m.

12.16 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

1.15 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for giving me this opportunity to make a contribution on this the national budget. It is often the case and indeed a well-accepted annual ritual, that the national budget no matter by whom presented, will be the subject always of a fulsome dose of criticism. Each interest group in our society would seize upon the budget shortcomings which will not have fully satisfied all parochial needs. Indeed, I think this is as it should be in a dynamic country with a dynamic citizenry. Government, over the past several years has strived to produce in the main, a balanced budget, this is, to expend an amount close to, or equal the revenues that would have been generated. And this formula has worked in my view, reasonably well, over the past several years.

So that after 10 years of decline up to and including 1993, we have had something like 14 years consecutive GDP growth. This year, 2009, being the only exception with, as we are advised, a negative growth in GDP by some .9 per cent. But now, I believe that the wave of revenue has crested, and so if we are not into a period of adjustment, we have to be in a period of at least restraint. Government and indeed by extension, the entire country is caught between Scylla and Charybdis, or as we would say in Trinidad, "caught between a rock and a very hard place".

On the one hand, as economists like to say, if you stimulate the economy for a protracted period of time, that is, run deficit financing of the order of plus 5 per cent for a protracted period of time, you have several outcomes, none of which are pleasant. The first is that you continue to borrow to an undesirably high level which would make it difficult in terms of repayment and would make a larger component of your revenues set aside for the repayment of debt and interest to the exclusion of our clients, the national community. But if the Government chooses not to stimulate, then you have the opposite situation where by not doing so, it would trigger a recession or some would say, an even steeper recession in terms of what will come to us over the next two to three years.

So this is the challenge, the conundrum, with which we as a country and Government would be faced, between stimulation of the economy or non-stimulation of the economy. The Government has chosen the former pathway
which is essentially to stimulate the economy, because when you have a budget deficit as we are advised in 2009 of the $8.4 billion or a shortfall of 22 per cent on revenues from the revised figure, then what you have is a significant stimulus package, whether we choose to call it that or not.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to focus more today on the budget arithmetic and leave it to my colleagues to discuss sectorial parts of the budget as we go along. I would like to discuss the budget arithmetic for the benefit of the nationals and the citizens of this country because we are indeed in a situation where over a period of time, we are in for some—that old word that we used 20 years ago, giving us a sense of déjá vu, we are in a period of structural adjustment or readjustment, because income or revenues for the Government would have gotten to their highest level in 2008. On record, we have never had revenues to the level of $54 billion before, and since that time, 2009, we have seen essentially a cataclysmic decline in that revenue, in a period where the world found itself in very deep convulsion. Yes, we are not immune to the convulsions of the world. But I want to look at the development of revenues and the experience in revenues in some detail for the benefit of the national community, and not so much for my colleagues in this honourable Senate.

It was not so long ago, less than two months before the reading of the budget, that the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance rose in this Senate and said on a matter with regard to the status of revenue in the energy and non-energy sectors, "We expect that our revised budget number of $42 billion will be met, and there is more than likelihood that we will be able to surpass these figures." This is on July 14 of this year. So it came as more than a shock to the citizens of this country and myself, that when the dust not yet fully settled because the year is not yet complete, that the estimate of the shortfall in revenues and the deficit comes to this figure of $8.4 billion, or as I said before, a shortfall of 22 per cent on revenues. So when we put this into context in the last reading of the budget, the original estimate of revenues was somewhere in the vicinity of $49 billion. And then in November of that year 2008, because of the situation in the world with regard to oil and gas prices, we had a revision to $44 billion, and then shortly thereafter in January 2009, we had another revision down to $42 billion.

1.25 p.m.

Even at that point in time, the planned expenditure in January 2009 was to a level of about $44 billion, suggesting that there would have been a deficit in the order of $2 billion. I have told you that the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, in late July, came to the Senate and said that he expected that figure of
$42 billion would have been met or exceeded. As it turned out, that was not the case. It was not the case, because the out-turn for revenues has been calculated, or the correct word is "recalibrated", at $37.9 billion; a vast shortfall.

Of course, we would be aware what some of the reasons for that shortfall would have been; in that, when gas prices would have been predicted or forecasted at $3.25, gas prices fell way below. That gas price of $3.25 really, as experts have advised me, is about a netback figure which is close to about half of what Henry Hub gas prices would usually be. So when Henry Hub fell to less than $3, it meant that we were netting, for budget purposes, $1.50 or $1.75; therefore, the extent of the hole in the budget would have increased.

On the oil side we would have done better, because the average price of oil, over the year, turned out to be about $57 or $56 against the most recent prediction of $45. So we find ourselves in this situation, and the question is: As we go forward into 2010, what can we expect to be our experience, in this year going forward, with regard to revenue collection?

The figure that we have before us is $36.66 billion, compared to the estimated figure for this current year, which is about to close, of $37.9 million. Astonished as I was with the extent of the deficit, I thought that I would look more closely at the breakdown of revenues within the budget.

Before I go there, we would have this year, according to the figures, a deficit of $7.7 billion from the previous year of $8.4 billion. That deficit is dependent, to a great extent, on our ability to attain even the revenues that we have before us of $36.6 billion. The question is: Is this a solid figure? The second question is: Is this a temporary period of adjustment, an interim period, or is it that there are some significant structural issues as we go forward?

We are being told that this is an interim period of adjustment, because the world is in trouble. Yet still, when we look at some of the underlying numbers and issues in the energy sector, there are structural matters that are of concern as we go forward. I am raising this because we all know that as a family we cannot afford to be borrowing for a protracted period of time; no household or nation could do that. The question is whether oil and gas prices would rebound to a level, such that we could enjoy the largesse that we would have enjoyed in 2008, and go past the pain that we would have felt in 2009.

One of the issues with regard to the gross domestic product (GDP), for us, is that oil, gas and energy constitutes about half of our GDP and has constituted, in terms of our fiscal operations, about 46 or 47 per cent of our direct revenues. For
GDP to grow at a constant clip, there is a high dependence upon this energy sector. There are two components about this energy sector that are of importance to us; one is price, but the other is output or volume of output. There is where we have an issue and a concern of great proportion. It would appear that in the cresting of revenues, we have also crested in terms of volume output for gas and oil; in particular, gas.

The challenge is that in order to increase the volume of gas production, we have to provide a certain level of attractive incentives to those who explore for gas. We are, in that sense as well, caught in this constraint of the straits, Scylla and Charybdis; we are caught because we have not yet come up, in a timely manner, with a new regime of incentives that would incentivize those who have to go and explore. Therefore, while price is an issue, we have, to some extent, plateaued in terms of volume. So until this whole regime of incentives could be put in place, an attractive regime to get explorers to go out to look for gas, we find that the volume side of the equation remains flat, or even declining.

The price side is not a side over which we have any control whatsoever; we are not sufficiently large players in the world; we are not in any way affiliated with OPEC. We might have some small organization and some place in a gas organization, but the point is that we are not price givers; we are price takers. If we are price takers, then the only area that we could impact is volume, which would bring up and give increases to our income.

The experts have said to me that since a regime is not in place, even if a regime is put in place over the next year, as has been suggested in the budget speech, we would still have a period of time for exploration and production, which could be, in the shortest possible time four or five years. That being the case, I think our citizens should be put on notice that we have crested, at least for the time being, in terms of the kinds of revenue that we could expect.

This is not a blip; it is not that when prices come back up, we are going to get back to the level of income and revenues that would have peaked in 2008; that is not it. Then when you give incentives, you find that it takes some time to work through before your income—because you are giving away in terms of your income, tax concessions, holidays and all those things—the income for the earliest period of time, in order to gain benefits down the road.

I think we are all in this together; the citizens of this country. It is very clear that we are not going to get a rebound, even if gas prices were to get to $35.50, and translate into $2.75, in terms of the netback to the country, even if oil were to
get back to the very high levels of $100 plus. The outlook for those might not be so strong, but experts have always been confounded as to what price would be. So I leave price wherever it is, at this point in time, and I focus on the whole question of volume output.

Mr. Vice-President, what we have is a situation which could persist, not only in 2009 and 2010, but would be around until such a time as an attractive regime kicks in and is able to result in enhanced revenues for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us look at some of the projects within the energy sector, which have been touted for some time as the sort of projects that would bring us extremely enhanced value added, that could add to the GDP of this country.

In the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, three such areas were pointed out. The first area was aluminium; the second, plastics, and the third, steel. The question is: Which of those projects are going to come on stream and how long would it take for those projects to translate into enhanced revenues for the country? The first is aluminium, which is under the aegis directly of the Government, not having, I believe, any more partners in that particular operation. If that were to come on stream, when and if one gets past the whole question of the environmental issues, it would take, at least, another three years. That is within the ambit of the Government and, therefore, it could move on.

Steel, however, is another matter. The plant, which was supposed to be the Essar Plant, does not seem likely to come on stream, and construction is going to commence certainly within the next year. That being the case, for completion of a plant like that, it would probably take another two or three years. So that is not going to bring us any quick fix solution to the problems upon which we are visited. With regard to plastics, it is not likely that project is going to come on stream, again, in short order.

Sen. Mark spoke about the gas-to-liquids project and the issues involved in that. I am sure my colleague here would speak further to that particular matter.

In terms of Government's development programme, we see that in 2009 the Development Programme was $9 billion of the $44-odd billion in expenditure. In 2009, that expenditure is actually going to fall from $9 billion, in accordance with the Development Programme, down to $7 billion; just under $4 billion coming from the Infrastructure and Development Fund and another $3 billion coming from the Consolidated Fund.
So the question is that we do not have simply a blip in our situation. Do we have another structural adjustment, a previous one of which I would have lived through, and many of us who would have been old enough to live through that in the 1980s?

1.40 p.m.

Last year, according to the estimates of expenditure, we would have borrowed some $2.5 billion. This year, according to the estimates, we will be borrowing something like $4.7 billion which is a virtual doubling of our borrowing. But the question I have, Mr. Vice-President, is: Does this borrowing include the level of support that it has been reported will be required in this year for the CL Financial Clico debacle—I retract that word, it should not be debacle—situation? So we have a situation that we carry on our backs, it is $5 billion and we are told that the overall figure may go to $10 billion. I am not going to go to the $10 billion, I am just looking at the $5 billion that would be required this year. Is that $5 billion in support reflected anywhere in our current budget?

Because it brings me to the question when we start to talk about revenues and start to unroll and unlock these revenues, we see that the estimates show that whereas in 2008 the actual figures, the taxes on income and profits were $38.9 billion, for 2009 that figure went to $22.2 billion and in 2010 it is estimated to be $20 billion, virtually a half in terms of the income and taxes and profits that we expect to get.

Total tax revenue which in 2008 was about $49 billion is estimated to come down to $30 billion in 2010, a 40 per cent decline. Now we have income from non-tax revenues, property income and other non-tax revenues and so forth, and a fair chunk of that comes from royalties and a large component of it comes from the dividends from the state enterprises. Now we can think of two of the major state enterprises which would be challenged in terms of being able to generate income at the same level of 2009 as in 2010, and those would be our flagship companies, Petrotrin for the oil sector and the National Gas Company (NGC) for the gas sector.

When I look at the budget, the budgeted figures suggest that we would get the same set of levels this year as we got last year, and I questioned it because last year in the first half of the year we would have generated very high levels of income because of the oil and gas prices which fell considerably thereafter.

So if I may use the word loosely, a reverse multiplier impact on revenues, one on corporate taxes and so forth and with the reduction in corporate taxes,
expenditure falls and VAT falls and so forth. So I feel that there would be some sort of domino, no not domino, but some impact that would be adverse over and beyond what we have in the revenues.

As I said, we are all in this together. I am not here to criticize Government in any way, I am simply here to try to lay out a platform on which our citizens can understand what are the mechanisms on the revenue side and how that would impact us going forward.

The history of Government also is to spend more than budgeted even when our revenues fall, the history is to spend more than budgeted. So that when in January this year we budgeted and adjusted our expenditure down to $44 billion, we spent $46 billion and when we targeted our revenue to be $42 billion and having a budget deficit of just about $2 billion, our revenues fell to $37.9 billion and hence, our situation.

So my focus really is to look at this and ask the question, what next beyond 2010? And I am making the point that when you go beyond 2010 you are not going to benefit from any fantastic increases in revenue because of the oil and gas situation because volume is not going to increase; and the major development projects that we have are not going to come on stream for another three years.

And, therefore, citizens must not expect that we are going to return to the heady days of 2008. We are in for an adjustment and that could be for as long as two to four years, or as long as the hon. Minister of Finance comes up with a package that would incentify further exploration. The graph shows that when gas output goes up, there is a very close 90 per cent correlation between gas output over the past several years and GDP, and if we were not going to have increased gas output then it is going to talk to a flattening of GDP.

I do not, therefore, expect that there is going to be any increase in real GDP to the extent of 2 per cent in the year 2010. Based on these factors which I have put on the table, I do not see a 2 per cent real growth in GDP.

In fact, from the Review of the Economy, we see that nominal GDP has fallen from a level of 163 billion in 2008 to an estimated figure of 133 billion in 2009, a massive decline by any standard in terms of your nominal GDP.

Sen. Enill: Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to disturb your trend of thought, but I want to understand the point you made about gas volume, because over the next two to three years there is an oversupply, not a shortage. So if prices in fact
come back—and right now I am looking at the bottlenecking in order to push more throughput through the plant so I can get the benefit of additional prices. So I am not sure I understand the volume issue.

**Sen. S. Ramkhelawan:** I think the issue is, probably you could sell the gas. My understanding is that what you have is a situation where you have the gas but to sell it you have to run it through certain plants, convert it to LNG, move it to ammonia or methanol and 60 per cent of our production in gas is LNG and 30 per cent is methanol and ammonia. You have no new plants coming, not at least over the next three years and that is the point I am making.

For you to monetize the gas to take it out of the ground, sell it to get income and so forth, you have to convert it into something and the conversion plant is not there, at least the increases in terms of conversion is not there and would not be there for the next three years. That is the point that I was trying to make and I am sure if you need any further advice from the Minister, I am always available to help you. [Laughter]

Mr. Vice-President, we have talked about the revenue side and some of the challenges that we would have in even attaining the level of revenues on the revenue side at these depressed levels; the expenditure side at $44 billion. I am not averse to stimuli packages, I am not averse to stimuli in the economy; that is a well-utilized mechanism to get an economy going if the private sector is not able to invest for whatever reasons and consumer spending is down, Government which is the third part of the equation needs to invest and spend.

What I am concerned about is whether this spending is for productive and sustainable purposes or that it goes back as we said in the last *déjà vu* situation—like a dose of salts through the system—where on the consumer end, there is that very high propensity to import and the funds go outside of the country and are not retained and are not there for sustainable purposes.

It is not that I am against welfare programmes, they are indeed necessary, but at a time like this what we need to concentrate on is a massive increase in productivity for the deficit amounts that we put out into the system, and that is why as had been said in the Vision 2020 documents, we have to go for the low-hanging fruits; things and investments that we can make that would provide short-term returns during this period of time. And it takes me to agriculture.

I was shocked to see that one of the claims of a government which had $46 billion for expenditure in agriculture, that 1.2 kilometres, not 1,200 not 500, not 5,000, 1.2 kilometres costing the princely sum of $200,000 was worthy of
mention in this budget. That is the great contribution to agriculture; and we have
50,000 acres of agricultural land lying fallow and none of them can say that this is
land that is not accessible. Caroni (1975) Limited accessed it; there are roads
traversing all of those pieces of land.

And we talk for three and four years about some mega farm and 10 other
farms; one that would be 200 acres and 10 other farms that would be 100 acres
which will amount to the grand utilization of about 1,200 acres of the 50,000
acres lying fallow. No pun intended, but that fruit is hanging so low it is touching
the ground, and we have our agricultural czar somewhere around who could talk
to us about cassava, ground provisions and all those things. It is pathetic. Then we
talk about praedial larceny in the budget and we were going to have—was it the
Texas Rangers or some other rangers—Caroni Rangers traversing the roads of
Carlsen Field, as though Carlsen Field on its own comprises any great proportion
of the agricultural land that could be used. Why is it that the Government of this
country is not able to take this resource and make it work? It can work in short
order, because there is not much in terms of additional capital investment and so
forth.

1.55 p.m.

What is it that holds us back? We are missing the boat on agriculture when we
have the land available. The grand contribution of agriculture to GDP is .35 per
cent—grand contribution.

Sen. Browne: When are you going to leave your job and go and do it?

Sen. S. Ramkelawan: Expertise—


Sen. S. Ramkelawan: I think my friend, the hon. Minister in the Ministry of
Finance, seems to forget that there were 10,000 people in agriculture in Caroni—

Sen. Browne: They never were in agriculture.

Sen. S. Ramkelawan: There were 10,000 people in agriculture. How many of
them cultivated the canes, and so on?

Sen. Browne: They were not in agriculture. [Crosstalk]

Sen. S. Ramkhelawan: I do not wish to engage in any argument with the
Minister in the Ministry of Finance. He is not an agriculturist so my job is not to
engage in any argument. My question is: Why not agriculture? You need experts
from Cuba for short crops?
But it is a stark reality that agriculture—attention is not being paid to this low hanging fruit and no matter how you couch it, if the best you can do is to spend $200,000 for 1.2 kilometres and you have to mention that, agriculture is not—[Desk thumping]

Manufacturing—just a couple thoughts on manufacturing before I go to financial services—remains and has remained at 8 per cent of GDP for the longest while, not generating additional employment of any significant order. But we are an industrial country and we have fairly cheap, reliable, accessible energy for the conversion of other raw materials for markets close by. What I have felt for a long time is that successive governments have concentrated on two areas: the mega project, which is the billion-dollar project; those are the sexy projects that take a long time to come to fruition, and spend a lot of time on, what I call small business. But if you look in the middle there, the whole question of programmes, and so on, to push that particular sector, there is, as my colleague would say, a lacuna in that particular area and attention needs to be placed on that. But as I said, I speak to that area of manufacturing in passing and I am sure I will have a chance to speak to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance on that matter a little bit more.

The financial services: We have spoken to financial services being 12 per cent of GDP and we have spoken to the area of enhancing or creating an International Financial Centre. At home some work is being done in terms of setting out the infrastructure to expand and sustain the local financial system. On the legislative front, the Financial Institutions Act has been passed, and the expectation is that the Securities Act would come to this Parliament pretty soon, and then you have the credit union, insurance and the pension and so on.

But, again, in terms of financial services, I want to make the point that an International Financial Centre, even if we get legislation and everything else in place within the shortest order, would not bear fruit for us for another three years, if we even were to get it right. So I do not see that adding substantially to our position in the short term.

I think what would make a lot of sense for us is the idea of a regional financial hub. We are well placed; we already lend money into the Caribbean and into Central America. We are the home of the ACS and there is need—and the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance would probably bear this out. We have trade agreements but we are short in terms of service agreements under which financial services will fall within the various areas.
So I think that this is an area that could bear some focus, but I would leave the rest to my colleagues, simply to sum up and say that we are not in a blip; we are in a period of structural adjustment for which, with the correct initiatives and programmes, we are going to find a third wave of growth and that third wave of growth will not come over the next two, three or four years, but will come after those incentives are in place.

Mr. Vice-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. Prof. R. Deosaran]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. S. Ramkelawan: Thank you to my colleagues. I do not plan to use another 15 minutes; I was actually wrapping up. I was saying that let us be careful, not only on the revenue side for a protracted period, but let us be very careful about expenditure and in terms of expenditure in productive enterprises, failing which, that sense of déjà vu that I have in the gut of my stomach—when it happened the last time we were caught off guard; we have learnt or should have learnt from the lessons not to be caught off guard this time, and not to get carried away that we have a small amount of savings in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, that our debt to GDP is 31 per cent—in very short order, as happened the last time, within a period of three to four years, we moved from a situation that was comfortable to a situation of great discomfort.

Therefore, the citizens of this country have put their trust and faith in the Members on the other side to take us through the straits and avoid Scylla, on the one hand and Charybdis on the other, and it is over to you.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I am pleased to participate in the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2010 and first of all to compliment the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance on presenting the Appropriation Bill, 2010 to this honourable Senate.

I will not respond to the previous Senator on some of the issues that he raised. I am sure that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and also the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will deal with the concerns raised by my hon. colleague. With respect to the contribution made by Sen. Mark, I
would sum it up in terms of the document Sen. Mark presented to this honourable House, when asked what was the source of his information when he was concluding with respect to all what was accomplished during the UNC period, compared to what was accomplished under the PNM as it relates to Vision 2020, I think it was instructive that he showed us the UNC manifesto.

**Sen. Browne:** A very good document.

**Sen. Rahman:** A very good document. Thank you, Sir.

**Sen. Browne:** A very scholarly one.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** Very scholarly, according to my colleague.

Before I address the main issue of my contribution, let me first touch on the thing which is of most concern to this Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The last two weeks have been truly horrific for this nation. Since Wednesday, September 9, 27 people have been murdered. I wish to condemn these killings in the strongest possible terms and offer my condolences and the condolences of this Government to all those affected by those murders.

**Sen. Mark:** I thought you were going to offer your resignation. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** This means that currently the figure for this year, 2009, stands at 387 murders. This is 387 lives lost; 387 families affected by tragedy; scores of children left without fathers; wives left without husbands. Terrible as this figure is, it is my duty to put them into context.

The national community would recall 2008 was an absolutely alarming year for homicides. The figure of 547 people murdered represented an all time high for Trinidad and Tobago. At the start of this year I was criticized by the Opposition and in the media for daring to stand up and say that the murder rate for 2008 was unacceptable and for vowing that it would not be repeated in 2009.

Let me say, when I made that statement I was well aware of the size of the massive challenge that we were facing. Faced with a murder rate that was growing month on month, our first challenge was to arrest this seemingly inevitable rise in murders which peaked in February this year with 56 murders, or nearly two murders a day.

Since then, we have made slow but steady progress to halt this situation. The law enforcement agencies have had several major successes, arresting people who were major players in the criminal underworld and were responsible for many more killings than the murders they were charged with.
You will understand that for legal reasons I cannot go into the details of the full extent of the crimes these people have committed, but let me assure you and this honourable House and the families of their victims, that these people are now being brought before the courts and will face justice. Let me further reassure you and this honourable House, that the agencies within the Ministry of National Security remain committed to tracking down all the killers who are still at large within our community and bringing them to justice.

As troubling as the latest deaths are, the total of 387 deaths to date is still slightly below the figure we were faced with at the same time last year. We would all have hoped that this figure would have been lower, but I remain convinced that the successes by law enforcement agencies will have the long-term effect of stemming this tide of senseless killings that is afflicting our beautiful nation.

The key to my confidence has been the steady improvement in the detection rate for murders, which is now over 21 per cent for this year, against 16 per cent for the same time last year. These are modest gains. Nevertheless, not to recognize these gains is to do a great disservice to the men and women within the law enforcement agencies who have worked so hard to achieve these detections.

Let me state that this Ministry and our law enforcement leaders believe that we are at a critical turning point in this country when it comes to the murder rate. We are finally starting to see that all the investments and initiatives of the last few years are beginning to take effect. I stand by my commitments of the beginning of the year, the murder rate for 2008 was unacceptable and will not be repeated in 2009.

2.10 p.m.

I am not naive. Like any war that is fought over a period of time, we will lose some battles, but we are confident that we will eventually win the war on crime.

With this in mind I now turn to address the Ross Report that was mentioned when the Minister piloted this Bill here and in the other place. Just for the record, there was talk about me not participating in the debate in the other place. It so happened that I was scheduled to talk on Tuesday of last week in the Lower House. The debate ended before I had a chance to speak.

In 2008, this Government decided to conduct a review of the national security sector in the hope of moving the country closer to achieving Vision 2020. A trustworthy, reliable and credible security firm was contracted to perform this
review. Led by Major General (Retired) Cameron Ross, the review team established by HCR International Security Limited of Calvary, Alberta, Canada, realized the review in two phases, between September 2008 and January 2009.

In addition to Major-General Ross, the team included Admiral (Retired) James Fraser, Colonel (Retired) Gregory Hug who has been directly involved in performance measurement, information management and technology, transformation and research and development. Mr. Phil Murray former Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Mr. Scott Newark, a former Alberta Crown Prosecutor who served as executive director of the Canadian Police Association.

HCR International Security Limited submitted its Phase 1 report to the Government in April 2009. Of the highest quality, the report was extremely comprehensive covering strategic and tactical concepts. We have rarely seen such a detailed wide-ranging report that was succinct and logical in its presentation. It included almost 300 recommendations covering 12 areas of our security sector. The National Security Council has approved almost all the recommendations. We were sufficiently impressed that we commissioned HCR International Security Limited for follow-on work that covered an additional five modules. Two of these modules were highly confidential.

Again, we have accepted their recommendations and made appropriate changes to the security dynamics of the country. Bearing in mind the highly sensitive and confidential nature of such a review, we applaud HCR International Security Limited and the review team members for their expertise; maintaining confidentiality and delivering their guidance in a well-organized, comprehensible, truthful and professional manner. The report which the review team produced on time and under budget was precisely what was required to provide a way forward. They have facilitated our movement toward our dream of obtaining developed nation status in keeping with Vision 2020.

Let me state that this report is not a crime plan. Rather, it gives valuable insights on the positioning of selected agencies of the Ministry of National Security and defines specific recommendations with respect to our national security framework and criminal justice system, the improvement of which is a key component in the fight against crime. The report is the result of extensive interviews of over 150 serving and retired local security experts and the review of previous recommendations. The team rather than simply confirming existing and already recognized problems recommended reforms focused on identifying
solutions and harnessing the support of all stakeholders. This approach underscores our Government's commitment to roll up its sleeves and work to implement solutions, rather than just complain about the status quo.

The review team conducted a thorough capability risk analysis of the current national security framework to determine the probability of success in improving the operations of our security sector, while achieving Vision 2020 security objectives. It was determined that the framework needed to be revised to meet changing circumstances and take into account three critical areas:

1. continued strengthening of interagency coordination and collaboration and ensuring that there is reduced duplication of effort, especially in intelligence areas;

2. ensuring informed policy and responsive operational decision-making with a specific follow-up and accountability mechanisms;

3. continuing implementation of targeted crime reduction operations among law enforcement entities.

The new national security framework is to be intelligence led and our security stance would be preventative and information oriented. Given the current scourge of criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago, it is important that close linkages exist between criminal intelligence and that of the security intelligence. Such linkages would ensure that emerging criminal organizations are known to the security intelligence investigators and that the appropriate analysis is conducted to identify potential for subversive and/or terrorist activities.

In addition to the coordinated efforts of intelligence, coordinated efforts in terms of operational capability need to be instituted nationally. A national operations centre would be established to muster the nation's security resources and coordinate and control their employment in a timely and disciplined manner, ensuring that there is accountability at every level. There is recognition that accountability is a key component of the transformed national security sector. The Government will continue to provide the resources required to achieve its objectives. Accountability will be inextricably linked to responsibility as part of the new performance management strategy that would be robustly applied.

The report focused on 12 specific modules of the security sector plus a section on criminal justice reform arising from its inclusion as an area of importance in the national security plans. The modules covered the entire spectrum of national security issues including improving the gathering analysis and sharing of
information and intelligence; maximizing the effectiveness of the National Security Council, the Ministry of National Security and all its divisions and agencies including the Defence Force, the branches of the service, the Special Anti-Crime Unit, intelligence and other specialist agencies.

Specifically, the following key models were reviewed: the National Security Council; National Security Plan; the Ministry of National Security; the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force; Intelligence and Strategic Services Agency; the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago; the Defence Transformation and Integration Secretariat of the Ministry of National Security; the National Training Systems; International Security Cooperation; Project Management Course Delivery and Criminal Justice System.

There was also recognition of the requirement for a hold of the Government's approach in revising the security landscape. Inputs of key ministries are seen as critical in the support of national security objectives. For example, the new national security landscape will see a greater role being played by the Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment in goal-setting, information-gathering and reporting. Over 300 recommendations were proposed in the report that would assist in the transformation of the security sector.

The National Security Council in conjunction with the relevant heads of security considered these recommendations in detail. Two hundred and seventy-five recommendations were accepted by the National Security Council and subsequently approved by the Cabinet. The recommendations were confirmed by Cabinet on July 23, 2009.

Since receiving the first draft report from Major-General Ross in March 2009, law enforcement entities have strengthened operations based on intelligence provided. As such, there has been improved coordination and response to marine interdiction opportunities utilizing the 12 interceptors that arrived in April 2009 and the two interim vessels all provided to the coast guard.

They conducted 701 patrols; seven direct interdictions and seized 1,127 kilogrammes of marijuana. The boat crews have been receiving professional naval training from our international partners. Information from the radars, regional and international partners is proving to be invaluable. The increased collaboration between SAUTT and the TTPS has led to a 29 per cent reduction rate in gang related murders and as I said earlier on, a 21 per cent for murders this year.
However, we are seeing increased murders associated with altercations, robberies and domestic related matters. The entities are sharing data from crime and problem analysis units, CCTV footage and information from various sources. Based on increased intelligence, the TTPS supported by SAUTT and the Defence Force has mounted the series of 1,587 operations and 916 roadblocks which have led to 9,758 arrests; 233 guns, 2,214 rounds of ammunition; 147.4 kilos of cocaine and 3,050.93 kilos of marijuana being seized and 45,050 marijuana trees being destroyed. SAUTT's air assets continue to provide critical aerial coverage for both maritime and land operations.

The Government is confident that these recommendations when fully implemented will result in a transformed national security sector, better resourced and structured to make a significant impact on crime and criminal activity in the immediate to long term in Trinidad and Tobago. This means that the citizens and visitors to this country are already reaping the benefits of some of these recommendations and the situation would continue to improve over the next three years while the recommendations are implemented. These recommendations will be the subject of a comprehensive statement which would be made in the other place subsequently.

I indicated that one of the first developments coming out of the Ross Report is a change focus of the National Security Council. The National Security Council, as I indicated, considered all of the 300 recommendations and went through them in detail, line by line and reviewed its capacity for the agencies to implement those recommendations. As I said, those recommendations subsequently went to Cabinet and Cabinet approved them.

The National Security Council has taken a decision to meet on almost a weekly basis to ensure that it treats with issues that are essential in terms of providing support to law enforcement agencies.

The second matter which the National Security Council considered that I ought to bring to the attention of this Senate is the amendment to the Defence Act. The Defence Act was in a state of review for a considerable amount of time now, almost two years, under the chairmanship of distinguished former Justice of Appeal Ulric Cross and made necessary amendments to it. As I said, the National Security Council considered those amendments in detail and submitted two aspects to the amendments to the Defence Act to Cabinet for consideration.

One is the question of the role of the Defence Force in assisting the security agencies. As you know, the role of the Defence Force exists at two extremes. One is aid to a civilian authority in which case the Defence Force can only assist the police in terms of its operation.
2.25 p.m.

At the other extreme is the state of emergency where, under certain circumstances, they would be able to act. It is felt that, given the new environment in which we operate and given what is also happening in other countries around the world, they are looking at the role of their defence force in assisting in law enforcement.

The first time we saw evidence of that was 10 years ago where the United Kingdom decided to shift gears from defending the realm to securing the realm and, as a result, what would normally have been their armies confined to only fighting wars and invaders have been changed. As recently as a couple months ago, even the United States has been rethinking the role of its national guards, et cetera.

We have also been looking at the role of the Defence Force. We have to do that within the context of our democracy and our commitment to the democratic rule of law in Trinidad and Tobago. It has taken some time. I would have loved to have seen the amendment to the Defence Act finished quicker. It has not because there were some issues, especially the role of the Defence Force in today's changing environment.

As I said, the National Security Council considered the matter important enough to send it to the full Cabinet. They had full discussions and sent it back to the drafters so that they could take into consideration some of those concerns. I think that it would be inappropriate of me to disclose the discussions, but rest assured that we expect, in short order, once we have completed the review and satisfied those concerns, that the Bill will be laid in the Parliament and a comprehensive amendment to the Defence Act.

I take the opportunity, even though they have not completed their work, to put on the record the contribution made by Justice Cross and his team in terms of amending the Defence Act.

Hon. Senators, the other matter that the National Security Council has been considering is an Omnibus Security Bill. The Omnibus Security Bill is designed to address some of the vexing issues the law enforcement currently faces as it grapples with the changing landscape. Basically, there are four pieces of legislation that are designed to make up this Bill. They are as follows:

The amendment to the Bail Act: again recognizing that issues with bail abound in the courts and all too often alleged gang members are granted bail only
to come out and re-offend. The intention was to look at how the Act could be amended to take into consideration those concerns. I do not want to go into more detail.

The second one was an anti-gang Bill. Homicide statistics have increased each year and a large number of murders have been attributed to gang killings. It is against that background that we are looking at how we can bring legislation to outlaw gangs in Trinidad and Tobago, patterning legislation from countries like the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Belize and the State of Illinois in the USA.

Again, it may seem on the surface to be so easy, but then you have to go through the whole issue of determining gangs, determining gang membership and not infringing the constitutional rights of our citizens as it relates to dealing with an issue that causes great concern, and balancing that against not infringing the democratic rights of the citizen. That is the second piece of legislation that makes up the Omnibus Security Bill.

The third one is the Security of Information Bill. The legislation seeks to deal with protecting the public interest by guarding access to official information in the realm of the activities of certain departments, et cetera.

The fourth one was the Interception of Communication Bill.

All of these pieces of legislation are designed to make sure that law enforcement has a better handle on the technologies, the development, et cetera, taking place. We had a committee, the Omnibus Legislation Committee, under the distinguished chairmanship—I hope she does not have a problem with my mentioning her name—of Miss Gillian Lucky, established on March 25, 2009, comprising individuals from various other agencies. The committee completed its work. It was submitted to the National Security Council. They felt that we should get the views of the Crime and Justice Commission and, as a result, all four pieces of legislation that comprise the Omnibus Security Bill were sent to the Crime and Justice Commission.

I must indicate that I sent the package to the Crime and Justice Commission on August 08, 2009, indicating the urgency with respect to the consideration of this package. By September 02, 2009, we received a response. They had gone through all the Bills in detail; they had indicated their concerns and they have now been sent back to the Omnibus Committee so that they would take into consideration those concerns. Once that happens, it will go to the National
Security Council; they will review and the package would be laid in the House in short order because it also represents the opportunity for law enforcement to be provided with more means to deal with the unacceptable situation confronting this nation.

Let me also put on record—I hope members of the Crime and Justice Commission will not mind my putting this on the record the same way I did with Justice Cross—the Government's appreciation of the contribution of the Commission under the distinguished chairmanship of Justice Lionel Jones SC. Miss. Dana Seetahal SC is also a member of the commission, so is Miss Gillian Lucky. I understand that when that matter was being discussed, because she was the chairman of the Omnibus Committee, she did not participate in any of the deliberations of the Crime and Justice Commission; Mr. George Hislop, attorney at law; Miss Jacqueline Tony, principal; Dr. Karen Moore, psychologist and Miss Katherine Ali, mediator/consultant.

Let me also indicate, apart from the fact that the Crime and Justice Commission has done excellent work as it relates to this piece of legislation, they have been doing work—I do not want to say quietly—but they have helped us review the Police Complaints Authority Act to help us to strengthen the legislation. They have held a consultation, a two-day symposium and the findings have been sent to us. Cabinet will be considering it and we will get their second report.

Just for information, the Crime and Justice Commission is one of the outcomes of the crime talks that took place some years ago. We are seeing the benefit from the establishment of that entity. I am saying that because there are times when we are accused of not having a political will; not willing to take action. This Government has said over and over, as we talk about developed society status on or before 2020 and the quality of life and standard of living of our citizens, that we recognize that one of the most critical things is the security and safety of the citizens. We have made no bones of the fact that when you look at what obtains in developed societies and what obtains here, there is a big gap. We know that. But this Government is committed to making sure that it leaves no stone unturned as it relates to moving forward in dealing with this issue.

As I said earlier, we are not happy with the delays. We had hoped to have seen the returns faster, but we recognize that there are challenges we face and we are doing all that is humanly possible to make sure we get the results necessary so
that our citizens could enjoy the quality of life and standard of living they expect. 
I have indicated practical things that so far have come out from the report and the 
National Security Council and the changed role of the Council.

If you look at the allocations that this Government continues to provide for 
national security over the last three years, the allocation to national security 
continues to be, after finance, the second largest budget. The Government has 
indicated that it will provide the resources. What needs to happen is that we need 
now to improve the performance of these agencies and the whole issue of 
accountability, which I spoke to earlier, must loom high. There was a time when it 
used to be said that the police do not have vehicles. That is something that cannot 
be said anymore. Between 2002 and 2009, police were provided in excess of 
2006, 35; in 2007, 121; in 2008, 163; in 2009, 182; a grand total of 1,002.

2.40 p.m.

What is the challenge now? The challenge is deployment. The challenge is: 
How do you now make sure that the police vehicles are used for police work? Do 
you know what is so unfortunate? There is an expectation that the Minister of 
National Security will oversee the deployment of the vehicles. I smile because 
some of my colleagues might themselves see police vehicles parked and they 
would call me and say: "Ah see ah police vehicle parked here overnight." Do you 
know what I would have to do? I cannot be 
impolite, so I would say: “Give me 
the number.” I would then have to call somebody and say to them: “It has been 
brought to my attention that a vehicle has been seen overnight there and it does 
not look as though something is wrong with it.” Mr. Vice-President, I cannot talk 
about that.

There was a time when we used to talk about the fact that police officers were 
not being properly paid. Just for the record, again. Between 2002—2007, the 
basic salary paid to constables, increase of 66 per cent—I am not talking about 
overtime; I am talking about basic salaries—from $3,091 to $5,123; corporals, 
increase, 47 per cent, from $4,583 to $6,745; sergeants, 47 per cent, from $5,592 
to $8,205; inspectors, 60 per cent, from $6,091 to $9,735; assistant 
superintendents, 57 per cent, from $7,325 to $11,535; superintendents, 61 per 
cent, from $7,689 to $12,397; senior superintendents, 67 per cent, from $8,432 to 
$14,111; and assistant commissioners of police, 92 per cent, from $9,004 to 
$17,319. I am just talking about the basic salaries; I am not talking about the 
question of overtime. Are you saying that this is a Government that is not 
committed to making sure that law enforcement is provided for?
We have been talking about repairs to police stations. So far, five police stations have been opened. We complained about the length of time it took us to open five police stations. We are now talking about providing contracts to 19 police stations that are due to be delivered by January 2011, for the latest, as far as that is concerned. There is no sparing of effort and resources, as it relates to ensuring that the facilities are provided.

The Police Academy: We have shifted from a police barracks to a police academy. We have upgraded. We have spent millions of dollars. Because it is an historical building, it was necessary to do renovation. You will be pleased to see what the Police Academy is like now. Recently, we graduated 100 and “something”. We just had an intake of 200 and “something”. It is a state-of-the-art facility with modern classrooms. The last thing we have done—apart from the fact that we have, over the years, increased the qualifications necessary to come into the police service to five O levels—is that you now need to do a polygraph test, pass a psychometric and do psychological and drug testing. You would not believe the challenge that we face, as it relates to being able to recruit people to come into the police service, because of their not being able to meet the entry requirements.

The icing on the cake, as it relates to the curriculum changes and the new requirement, is the coming on board of a provost to run the Police Academy; someone with years of experience running police academies. This is not an academic; this is someone who has run a police academy in a developed society and has helped in Singapore and other places, coming on board to make sure that the recruit training is now in keeping with modern policing. In-service training would also now be enhanced. I am convinced and I keep saying it, that, as we put these measures in place, we are going to make sure that this country will be provided with police officers in keeping with law enforcement in developed societies.

Sen. Seetahal SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I thank the Minister for giving way. I want to get two answers, if you may. What is the number of such police officers in Trinidad and Tobago? Secondly, the Police Academy, which academy is this, is that the one located where the previous—

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: SAUTT has a facility that trains police. I would get to that just now. The Police Academy which I am talking about is what was normally referred to as St. James Barracks. With respect to your question as to
how many police officers, there are 6,420 uniformed police officers; 476 civilians; and 255 on contract. They are also supporting the police. There is a non-uniformed cadre of 731 persons and then there is—[ Interruption ]

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** When you say uniformed, I thought you meant non-detective. Is it that 6,420 are police officers, as distinct from uniformed?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** When you use civilian as opposed to uniformed, I am not taking about police officers in plain clothes, et cetera. When we talk about uniformed it is a generic term and that 6,420 would be *toute monde*.

**Mr. Vice-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. C. Enill*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** Mr. Vice-President, I now have to make some shortcuts. One of the areas I must touch is the area with respect to the activities of the Acting Commissioner of Police, because he asked me to say something. He said he is now charged with the responsibility of cleaning up his police organization. We have passed legislation that has now given the Commissioner of Police more authority to run his police organization. I smile because I am always reminded of a former commissioner, God rest his soul, who once referred to commissioners as toothless bulldogs. I would never forget that. Because of the way in which things were done, a lot of the disciplining and everything else were taking place in other places. I do not wish to characterize those other places. One of the things that we did was that we brought legislation with the support of the Opposition, even though they were saying: “Dis legislation eh goin tuh solve crime.” We go support it, but it eh go solve crime.” We are saying if you want good law enforcement, you must have good law enforcement officers. When I did basic economics I never knew what a “wigget” was—[ Interruption ]

**Sen. Browne:** Widget.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** You see, I had the wrong word. I had an economics professor who used to say: if you want good widgets, you must have good widget makers. We are crying out for better law enforcement and I do not think they expect the Minister—the Minister is not a law enforcer. The Government does not enforce law, because if we do that they would then accuse us of political interference in law enforcement and they would then use it for all
kinds of political means to get mongoose gangs to do all kinds of stuff. The best we can do is to make sure that law enforcement is up to the task. I keep making the point. Hon. Senators, we cannot have good law enforcement just for now. The environment continues to change.

The last time I made that comment and said that on the horizon is cyber crime, the media carried the thing “ah cyah deal with my crime now, but ah talking about cyber crime”. It is not about a law enforcement for now; it is a law enforcement that must be adaptable. They must be able to see what is happening in the environment, where the changes in criminalities are likely to be and how they can remain one step ahead of the criminals. When we have to invest in training and development, et cetera, and the fact that it takes some time, it is because they are being called upon, I keep making the point—through no fault of theirs—to operate in an environment that has changed and they have not been prepared for that change. I am not criticizing. The next thing would be that the Minister criticizes the police. It is not. Do you follow what I am saying? The commissioner is saying: I now have to deal with some of my rogue elements. Every time he discovers something, somebody calls him to explain what it is.

My understanding right now is that there are 29 police officers who are suspended and there are 249 who are charged. I have my own views with respect to how, in this particular area, I would like to see things done. I have my own views, as far as that is concerned, but my own views have to be my own views. They have due process and there are certain other kinds of things, et cetera. For example, I have heard people complain: Why transfer? Like I have said, I have my own views as to how I would have liked to have seen things done. Then, as I have said, in this instance, my views do not coincide with the—[Interruption]

**Sen. Rahman:** What does the law say to do?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** He has to adhere to the law. There is something else.

**Sen. Browne:** The Police Service Commission.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** The ultimate challenge is the relationship between police and citizens. We are coming out of an environment in which the relationship was almost adversarial. Part of the challenge is to change that. A lot of it has to do with our colonial past. That was the reason, recognizing that, Policing for People Initiative in the model stations represented an important step towards getting those things in place. Of course, I had gone through that already here. I identified those five police stations where the model police stations are
being implemented. We have had police advisors, because it is a new way of dealing with the citizens. At the end of the day, we are convinced and we would ensure that the type of relationship allows policing to be a whole lot more effective. Policing cannot be effective without the support of the citizens. We have some challenges with respect to witness elimination and all those other things. We have to take all those things into consideration.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, we also have to deal with displacement. As you put measures in place in area A, there is the likelihood that they are going to go to area B. How do you anticipate? I maintain that Trinidad and Tobago is too small for displacement to take place as it would take place in the wider geographical areas. So, we have our challenges, but I am convinced that we are starting, as I said earlier on, to see some of the little gains that we are making.

There is also the question about the reduction of the inflow of guns and drugs. I saw the People Meter last night and the question asked was: Do you think the authorities will ever be able to stop the inflow of guns and drugs? Mr. Vice-President, 34 per cent said yes and 66 per cent said no. We cannot eliminate, but what we have to do is reduce the inflow. The assets that we are acquiring—the 12 interceptors and the three offshore patrol vessels—when all these things are put in place we are going to see a reduction. There are still those who do not see the connection between the acquisition of these assets and crime and violence in the country. Well, they will never see it.

We are on the right track. Are we disappointed that it is not happening faster? The answer is yes. Are we doing everything necessary? I am saying that the Ross Report and the review of the entire security sector will provide us with the means where we will be able to move a little faster. I have identified the pieces of legislation which we talked about like the Omnibus Security Bill and amendments to the Defence Act, et cetera, and when all these things come together, I am convinced that we are going to see an improvement in the security arrangements in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate. I did not say anything about immigration; I did not say anything about our machine-readable passports. We are well on the way as it relates to providing our citizens with machine-readable passports. Almost half of the 425,000 persons, who are required to have machine-readable passports have
them. In fact, let me take this opportunity to appeal to the 23,000 citizens who have their machine-readable passports piling up at the Immigration Department to go and pick them up. It is creating problems for immigration as it relates to storage, etcetera.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Dana Seetahal SC:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. This is an opportune time for me to respond in this budget debate. Although I did not intend to start on crime and national security, seeing that the Minister has just opened the door, so to speak, I would venture into that realm immediately.

The Minister said that the murder rate in 2008 was “unacceptable”, and by that statement he invited us to consider: Is there any rate that is acceptable? Is 546 persons in one year acceptable? Is it 500, 400, 200 or 100 that is acceptable which used to be the number in 1999 and years before that when it was static?

I really wish to start my contribution by referring to an allusion by the Minister of Finance in the other place when in a dismissive statement the Minister said these words:

“We will not waiver from our zero-tolerance posture towards criminal activity: from the traffic violator to the kidnapper, from the white-collar criminal to the drug trafficker…The Government will act to eliminate criminal activity…”

These statements appear to be really rhetoric. I am glad that the Minister of National Security went on today and explained what his Government has been doing and what it plans to do in terms of eliminating criminal activity. However, as he very well recognizes, one can never eliminate criminal activity, which is another error the Minister of Finance made. One could control crime, but one could never eliminate crime. If one were to eliminate what is designated as crime today, then a simple traffic violation would assume the proportion of the greatest crime.

The Minister said: “We will not waiver from our zero-tolerance…” not this Minister, but the Minister of Finance. I have to wonder whether or not that Minister knew what zero tolerance meant. Zero tolerance is not that we will not tolerate, but we will go after all crimes. We should deal with the very minor crimes, and if enforcing order in the society through these minor crimes, then it
follows that serious crimes would be controlled. This brings me to a question that I need to ask of the wider community and, in particular, the Government. If the Government practises zero tolerance, why did it break the law during the 5th Summit of the Americas?

We all know that there were so-called “red zones”, “yellow zones” and so on around the Summit conference area. What laws were passed to permit these areas? All we had were notices issued under the hand of the Ministry of National Security, identifying “traffic arrangements” for the 5th Summit of the Americas which were preceded by a pull-out by an unknown body stating that Port of Spain would have an exclusion zone.

Minister, through you, Mr. Vice-President, I am sure you know that the only law in this country that authorizes temporary traffic restrictions on roads is contained in the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, and that power is not granted to the Minister. I am suggesting that the Minister took it, and some unknown body under the rubric Minister of National Security took it. The power belongs to the Commissioner of Police.

Under section 68 of that Act, he, the commissioner, is required by order to publish subsequently—it could be published before in the newspaper—and enlighten us as to what roads he has prohibited the use of, and he can only do so if the road is liable to be thronged or obstructed. The commissioner is allowed to temporarily prohibit or restrict the use of a road. The commissioner may require traffic to proceed in a particular direction, prohibit parking and prohibit the use of roads among other things. In short, the Commissioner of Police has the power to do many things which persons purported to do in and around the time of the 5th Summit of the Americas and other places like the airport area where people were coming through and in the hotel where the Summit was held. However, there was no order—from my investigation, I could tell you that it was thorough—made by the Commissioner of Police to facilitate any of this during the time of the Summit and, therefore, the establishment of the so-called security exclusive zones and the widespread traffic restrictions were all illegal.

If this Government intends to pursue a policy of what is called “zero tolerance” in relation to minor criminals and traffic violators out there, then I would suggest that it get its own house in order when it seeks to do things as they were done earlier on this year.

I move now to traffic violators. The Government has announced an intention to increase fixed penalty fines—by that we are talking about tickets—in an effort
to maintain order and safety on our nation's roads and to deter road offenders. These fines are increased by as much as 10 times. One would think that it was the intention to deter offenders and, yet, the Minister blithely said:

“This measure is expected to contribute an additional $40 million to Government's revenue...”

If you are saying that you are increasing fines, presumably with an intention to deter offenders—well, you are increasing penalties so offenders would be deterred and they would offend less—how can you say that you are expecting to have an increase in revenue of $40 million? This means that there is complete expectation, if not, a hope that the law would be breached and that no better order and safety would be achieved. In other words, the Government is dependent on the breaching of the law and, therefore, the penalty fines were not increased in an effort to maintain order and safety on our nation’s road. [Desk thumping]

What should we have expected if that were to be the case? We might have expected that there would have been some issues dealing with bad driving through defensive driving. I do not know of other measures such as having more police officers on the streets to detect offenders. I know the Minister of National Security has said to us that every one of his colleagues came to him at some time and said: Do you know I saw a police car parked overnight there? Or words to that effect? Well, I was just coming down St. Vincent Street and I saw a car parked in the middle of the road in front of the Central Police Station—for those who do not know it is the police station on St. Vincent Street—engaging in conversation with plain clothes police officers who looked as if they could be, in my estimation, criminals themselves—but they were not. I know one of them. I blew my horn for the police officer to move out of the road, and in response I was told certain things about using a cell phone. I was using it for urgent business, but nevertheless it is not against the law unless it is contributing to inconsiderate driving.

So, I am pointing this out to say that we do not really have, in my view, police officers trained or capable enough of dealing with the public or maintaining order on the road. If they are, they are not doing it. Police officers would drive past you and persons would be breaching the law right there. Of course, sometimes they join in when they drive on the left and overtake. Sometimes it is clear that they are not going anywhere in any real pursuit of anybody, because there is no one in front to pursue and the siren is on, and all the traffic must move, like Moses parting the Red Sea, because there is a police officer driving by. That is something that we need to address if we are to deal with maintaining order and safety, rather than have this sudden increase in fines.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Tuesday, September 22, 2009

[SEN. SEETAHAL SC]

Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you have noticed the increase in road
deaths in Trinidad and Tobago during the last month, and it is all through bad
driving. So, when you are talking about these penalty increases here for driving
on the bus route and parking and so forth, and if we really want to do something
about drivers, let us look at some measures that could actually achieve this. Do
not say that we want to make $40 million so we would increase the fines by five
times the amount. If that is the intention, keep it quiet. To come and say on the
one hand that you intend to do this and then talk about making money is just
offensive.

Mr. Vice-President, this brings me to one of my pet subjects, as Sen. Prof.
Deosaran said, and it is the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago
(SAUTT). I have spoken about this unit at least one dozen times and about five
times in this Senate and the need to legalize that organization.

3.10 p.m.

Now, the Minister would say—if he does not ask to intervene—that
legislation is on its way. Mr. Vice-President, I do not know if you recall, but in
2007, we were told this, and in 2008 we were told this. Until I see that legislation
laid, I am not going to move from my position. My position is this, not only have
I said it but others, the United States Department of Justice has joined in to
emphasize the need to bring legislation to give legal status to that organization. It
is not good enough for the Minister to say it is not illegal. It may not be illegal,
but it is not legal.

Sen. Joseph: Thank you. I know you do not want to hear me say it again. Mr.
Vice-President, hon. Members, it slipped me, I guarantee you, SAUTT legislation
is going to be before the Senate before the end of the year, January for the very
latest.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: I am not sure if I understood that. Is that before the end
of the year, by January or February?

Sen. Joseph: I was saying before the end of the year, but I wanted to give
myself a little more space, so I am saying January next year, for the latest.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Well, thank you very much, through you, Mr. Vice-
President. SAUTT is supposedly an elite law enforcement agency comprising, I
believe, three groups: police, defence force and civilians. Many police officers
and others try to get in because, from what I am told, the pay package is much
more, and the pay package is more than what the Minister related to us. It is also
said that your special talents are more easily recognized within that organization. It may be true, it may not be true, but those who work in that organization seem to be much happier—that is all I can say—in terms of whatever they do.

The point is, it is not right to have an organization which has no legal status, hiring persons, as they advertise themselves to do. It may well be that the Ministry of National Security does so, but the advertisement on the Internet and elsewhere is: "SAUTT...This is What We Do. This is What We Are", and you see a group of men lined up with very professional looking guns. Now, that might be all that they do but I really do think it is kind of offensive to have that, and in the circumstances.

Another point I wish to make. The Minister, through you, Mr. Vice-President, gave us a figure of 6,420 police officers in Trinidad and Tobago. I am told that there are 300 SAUTT officers. I looked through the budget and of the $4.1 billion recurrent expenditure budget, 4.79 development included, of the Ministry of National Security, $1.25 million goes to the police service and $388 million goes to SAUTT, which is more than 25 per cent, it is about 30 per cent—not 30 per cent of the police budget, but about 30 per cent on their own. They get $388 million themselves, which represents an equivalent of 30 per cent of the police budget.

Now the police, if you look at 6,000, their number is about 20 times the number of SAUTT officers, but their budget is only about four times. So, is it any wonder that you have a disincentive for officers. I am saying that is their own perception in the police service, so, more has to be done for the police officers to make them feel that they are better regarded, they are respected. Those are things that matter to them.

Also, make SAUTT an organization that they, the police, could aim for as a natural progression, so you would not have that competition that exists now, so much so that it affects matters in court, even so far as the quality of the training that is offered in the two academies and the equipment available. That is what is being touted and that is the kind of thing that is creating—whether or not it is admitted—dissension within the police service.

On a connected note, in the last three weeks, there have been a number of arrests and charges made in relation to serious matters involving police officers. Whilst on the one hand, the public perception may be that many police officers are engaged in corrupt and other activities, I think that it is something to be viewed as a positive thing and it is something to be seen as such, because police
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[SEN. SEETAHAL SC]

officers, as is often said, reflect the society. If you did not have police officers doing wrong things, it would be very odd. If you had no police officers charged or brought before the courts then it would indicate that there was corruption from within.

The fact that not only do you now have that but it is being pursued actively, as is evident from what is happening, even in today's newspapers, which we would not go into the details, but "cop charged with X murder". These indicate that there is very real self-examination within the police service and therefore, action is being taken with respect to police officers, who are not quite as they should be, to put it in a very mild way.

In relation to the Omnibus legislation, which as a member of the Crime and Justice Commission I commented on, I just want to ask one question. All support is given, of course, to the anti-gang legislation, which I have talked about previously, and the Interception of Communication laws but the Security of Information Act. I really did not understand and do not understand the need for that. Is it that we have spies in our midst? When I read that bit of legislation it almost struck me that we are talking about James Bond 007 or 008 kind of action. There is really no explanation or any rationale given why there is need for that, and I still have not figured it out. I hope someone would, at some point, make it clear what all of that is about.

So, moving away from crime on to a matter that has caused the public plenty concern, and that is the property tax. This morning at some ungodly hour, I think it was before 6.00 a.m., somebody called me to tell me—it might have been Deep Throat—"do you know that when this property tax is increased that it would affect water rates?" I did not know it would also cause a ricocheting effect in increase in water rates, because of the fact that if the annual rental value of your property is increased, water rates are based on that and something that my friend was calculating—Sen. Ali here—led me to think that I might be paying anywhere—I hope he is wrong—around $30,000 in water rates. It must be that he is wrong. If that was so, then I would have to take a placard and go somewhere and protest.

This Deep Throat also asked me: Did I know that with the new Revenue Authority collecting all taxes, if they collect property taxes from Port of Spain, which is now collected by the Port of Spain City Corporation, the City Corporation will now increase its rent of properties which it owns and persons who now lease properties from the City Corporation would have to pay increased rents, and it will have a ricocheting effect? That is another thing which was not
mentioned and I have to thank that person, although I do not advise calling me before six in the morning or even after six. The thing is, those were matters I had not thought about or that had not even come to my consciousness. I thought I should bring it to the national community. [Interruption] It might be small to some of us but it is very large to some of us.

If we are talking about commercial properties, having just ventured forth into that arena, having saved up for years to be able to purchase a commercial property, Mr. Vice-President—and I see a little worried look on your face too, Mr. Vice-President [Laughter]—I am concerned about this 5 per cent plan. I understand the percentages are not so much off what it was before, it is the fact of the new appraisals of our properties—“our” as in the national community—and those persons who own commercial property.

If it is, for example, that you have a property that because of the sudden, unexpected or unreasonable increases in property prices between 2002 and 2008, you now have properties that may have cost, or—when I did not buy it—I would say $1 million, and now it was $4 million or so, you have to pay taxes in the tune of $25,000 a year. I was trying to work it out with Sen. Ali, but I think his computer was not working, but by my estimation it is about that amount. I can speak from experience. If you are talking about a $4 million or less property, you had to pay $245,000 in stamp duty.

Sen. Browne: With respect, I am not certain why you are going down the road with regard to the capital value. We are talking about annual ratable value, which seems to be the rent capital, as distinct from the capital value of the property, unlike Barbados for example, which has improved site value taxation. So, the improved site value taxation is based on the increase in price. On that basis, if you are talking about the change in the delta position in terms of the capital value and marketable value, then that would make a difference. Now, we are talking about the rentable value.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: And I actually do appreciate that. You know, Mr. Vice-President, when people start using terms like fiscal this, macroeconomics and accumulative service, to me it is like a jargon to disguise what the whole thing is about. What is a budget after all? A budget is expenses and income, right. And if you do not have enough of one you have to borrow. [Crosstalk] What is expenditure? You are borrowing money which you have to pay back. So, it is a simple basic; basic, that is what it is. This is a budget on a more elaborate scale.
When I talk about the capital value, if I pay that for a property, then I would presume—unless I am a real fool—that it means that the property would rent at higher rates. You see, Mr. Vice-President: he is nodding because he knows that. If it rents at a higher rate per month, annual rent would be higher and therefore, I will pay more property tax. It does not take a genius to figure that and by the way, I was very good at math and arithmetic. So, I do know that: coming back to common sense.

I was saying that having paid my $245,000 in stamp duty, 7 per cent, I do not see why I should be made to pay anything ranging from $10,000 to $20,000 a year for a property that I work hard for. We pay 15 per cent VAT, the only country that is higher than that is the United Kingdom with 17.5 per cent. We pay income tax, WASA, telephone, T&TEC, everything. I mean, what is it? Blood? [Desk thumping]

What am I getting for this? When I look outside there is rain right on St. Vincent Street; right outside on the street you cannot cross; you have garbage coming down the street. I have to say that when I call the Port of Spain City Corporation they are usually quite good at coming and cleaning, but the fact is, it is always happening. I have to put in a tank for water. I have to put in a burglar alarm and a response for crime. Then now I have to go and pay that property tax. You cannot be serious. Tell me what you are offering for it—it is a barter and bargain system—then we might contemplate it.

Mr. Vice-President, you know those 200,000 people who are currently not paying—according to the Minister, 200,000 people are not paying—and we know that you can go on the computer, I cannot do it but my niece can do it, and find every property in Trinidad and Tobago. You can even see Sen. Dr. Saith outside his own property, if you look very clearly. The same way you can find those properties and make them pay, why do they not do that, get that money and then talk about the increase? [Desk thumping] [Interruption]

3.25 p.m.

I do not know about doing it in the future, I am talking about now. Do it now! Collect your how many million dollars and then come back and talk about an increase in property tax.

Everyone will tell you, and I have a number of friends—by accident—who are traditionally supporters of the PNM and I also have friends who are supporters of the other side. I stand alone in the middle, unfortunately, but many have said to me, “why do they not”—meaning their own party—“raise it by even 300 per cent
of what it is now and we will pay that? But do not come and tell me you want me
to pay a second mortgage in my declining years”. Meaning after a number of
them have been out in legal practice—25 years and so on—you want to make
them pay a second mortgage. It is unreasonable and it is something that needs to
be rethought—

Sen. Browne: How did you arrive at a second mortgage?

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: I do not know, some people have lower mortgages than
others. Maybe if the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry
of Finance is paying his mortgage it might be anywhere next to $30,000, but other
persons’ mortgages are $2,000; $3,000. Other persons bought properties when
they were cheaper and now they will have to pay more. [ Interruption] I am not
sure I am hearing a voice crying in the wilderness there, but some persons might
have to pay more now than they ever paid for their mortgage, and we all know
that, so it is really a matter to be rethought. [ Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President, I move on to the question of independent institutions. I
have to say that I was a bit taken aback to be designated among a “bunch of
political opportunists”.

Sen. Mark: Ooh, that is Jerry Narace. That is Jerry Narace. [ Desk thumping]

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Now there is a Legal Profession Act, 1986 which
requires that all lawyers in Trinidad and Tobago to practise, or if you want to
practise as a lawyer, you must be a member of the Law Association. I am a
member of the Law Association by virtue of being a lawyer and there are over
2,500 of us in this country.

When a certain release from the PNM under the hand of a Minister who sits
here says “The Law Association is a bunch of political opportunists” which is a
very extravagant definition—One may have those personal feelings, one may say
that to one’s friends—but apart from the error of the Law Association—I believe
it must be an error, because I cannot see that 2,500, no less, persons could be said
to be a bunch of political opportunists—which would include the Attorney
General, who sits on that side, because he is a member of the Law Association as
well.

So, I really take strong objection to that statement. If it was meant to be the
Council of the Law Association then the Government would have to look within
itself as well. Because, you know, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is
elected in a free and fair election, and this has been said to be so in the last
election that I know of, 2007. In that election whether 25 per cent of the persons, or 50 per cent or how many persons voted for the Government they won in a first-past-the-post system and that Government is a duly elected Government; power has not been seized. You cannot say that the country is being “held to ransom” by this bunch of political whoever; you cannot say that it has been hijacked. So, in the same vein the Law Association has a council and every year there is free and fair election in March and anyone can enter, just like any political party, any candidate can contest an election here and persons attend, and if you have fewer than 50 persons you do not have an election. Once you have a quorum you have an election. People attend and they vote and that is a democratically elected council.

So I cannot see that there is any basis for that unfortunate statement. I hope it was made in a moment of excessive zeal, and probably, emotional outburst. I can frankly only see that, because really and truly there is no excuse for it otherwise. I am sure the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago, every 2,500-plus member of them—except I cannot speak for the Attorney General—would feel offended by that.

**Sen. Narace:** Thank you, Senator, through you, Mr. Vice-President. I should not be speaking as a public relations officer here, but suffice it to say that I am of the understanding that the statement was directed against certain members of the council, and a number of members of that association called for that matter. I mean it is no secret where it came from, and therefore, it is okay when a few people interchange and do wrong things and then when it is pointed out then it is not okay. I just make that point. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. D. Seetahal SC:** Mr. Vice-President, I thought the Minister was actually going to apologize. I am not sure if there is a further clarification or a refining of that, but they are still two different things; there is the council and the Law Association and the statement that I read that was quoted said “The Law Association is a bunch of political opportunists and that the Law Association had been hijacked and there is a failure to recognize that there was an election.” Nobody went and hijacked! There was no coup. Nobody staged a coup, so that is something that is fundamental to the misunderstanding as to what comprises the Law Association, and I would not go there except to say that I think that these are matters that one would expect when things are brought to the attention of whoever made them, that they would be clarified, but—

**Sen. Mark:** Contemptuous of the institutions.
Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Moving along, right along, the next point I wish to make has really to do with—somebody stole my paper—independent institutions.

Sen. Browne: Who would be stealing on that bench?

Sen. Narace: That maybe is a sign. [Laughter]

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: I have another copy. I think I must have mislaid it. It really had to do with independent institutions and I talked about the Law Association, the other of course is the Judiciary, and I do not need to repeat what was said, in a more effective and articulate manner than I can, by the hon. Chief Justice in terms of the separation of powers and the independence of the Judiciary and the need to maintain that.

Now what I want to clarify, however, is that a Minister of Government said that the Judiciary was not the only “Ministry” that took cuts, that all other “ministries” took cuts in terms of the budget. Now as I have cleared up before—I do not think that I have cleared up—that in truth the development budget of the ministry was only cut by $5 million. It was $42.5 million this year and last year it was $48 million. So we need to get that clear, if I did not mention it before.

So the Judiciary may have asked for $300-odd million, but they were granted nearly as much as they were granted last year. But to talk about the Judiciary as a “ministry” is a failure to grasp that there are three branches of law. There is the Executive which comprises ministries, there is the Judiciary and there is the Parliament and to say not once but at least twice that the Judiciary was treated like another ministry or is another ministry is really, in my view, not appreciative of the separate role of the Judiciary, which in a democratic society is to create a balance against the Executive and a check and balance on the Executive.

So I think that it is important that we grasp that and citizens grasp that there is something called the Latimer House Principles as well to which the Chief Justice referred, which emphasizes the difference—we are signatories to those principles which came into effect in England during the 1990s and subsequently we have endorsed them up to last year in Scotland. As a Member of this Parliament I attended there and chaired one of the sessions emphasizing the need for the independence of this Judiciary and this Parliament endorsed that.

On that last point of independent institutions, there is a point that needs to be made. This morning we were circulated with a reply to a Senate question in relation to vacant posts in the Ministry of the Attorney General and it is stated in
this that one post of Chief Parliamentary Counsel with effect from February 18, 2009 has been vacant, that there is another vacancy of deputy, but let us deal with the top offices. The Solicitor General’s post has been vacant since February 2006 and the post of Director of Public Prosecutions has been vacant since January 5th.

Mr. Vice-President, we all should appreciate the precarious nature of acting appointments. In the office of the Solicitor General there is not even an acting Solicitor General. So if we are trying to find out who is responsible for that debacle of failing to gazette the commissions in the Commission of Enquiry—that is said to still be a Commission of Enquiry—then one might have a problem in that investigation. But moving along, so we do not have a Solicitor General, we do not have a Chief Parliamentary Counsel, we do not have a Director of Public Prosecutions and in at least two of those posts we have acting appointments. Insofar as the Commissioner of Police, we have an acting appointment.

Mr. Vice-President, I think that the Government needs to realize that if the citizens of the country are to have confidence and trust in this Government, as indeed any government, then the filling of those posts is paramount. I think it cannot be by any rhyme or reason good for the post of Solicitor General, the head of the civil department for three-plus years to remain unfilled. Persons are coming into the department and leaving without ever having known a Solicitor General. Can you imagine that?

That brings me to an important point which I think the Government may not necessarily want to hear but I think it is important for the country and it is that in the last couple of years there have been things that have occurred which have sort of generated a lack of faith in the Government at various levels. In this country where this Government is to last for the next three years I think it is important in the national interest that the Government do something about it. The Government must do what it can to build or rebuild that faith in it by the people of the country. One of the matters is, as I have just said, the fact that we do not have persons filling those key posts and there is talk of veto and challenging the veto.

The next significant issue, I think, is the different messages that we have been getting about the economy. We are told, first, the international recession is not likely to affect us, within a few weeks we are told that it is, then we have to do over the budget; then we are told we are to “loosen our belts”. Now I do appreciate that statement was a newspaper headline but there was that talk about, we could start loosening our belts and within about two months, wham, you are given a budget where you have so many new taxes, clearly, to fund the expenditure. So you have these different messages that are being given. When you have contradictory messages how can you have trust?
The next point is the draft Constitution and what it has created in terms of a feeling by the populace and uncertainty as to what is going on and a general kind of anxiety that certain posts within that draft Constitution, certain bodies would have much too much power and that we might be going down the road of what has been termed by a judge sitting in another arena, to be a creeping dictatorship.

I am not saying that this Government by any means is engaging in that. I am saying that certain measures in that draft Constitution which seem to empower certain bodies much more than they were ever empowered could lead to that conclusion or that perception. And just as in the case of bias, perception is an important thing. Perception can become reality.

Mr. Vice-President, we have those issues as well as, of course, what happened within the Integrity Commission, although it is not at the feet of the Government, but that is another thing that people see—there is no Integrity Commission perceived as keeping a check on excesses.

3.40 p.m.

But Mr. Vice-President, in my view, the most significant issue that is creating rampant distress and concern in the citizenry is this UDeCott business. It started off with the commission of enquiry last year, if you would recall from April, and then there was this thrust to have a joint select committee, and then we had a commission of enquiry. There are many things which have caused concern. Not just the revelations in the hearings, not the questions of the amount of money that has been going into it of course, not the billions of dollars, not just the fact that the buildings are there—and from my enquiry last week, there was one ministry on one floor of 27 floors of one building. It might have changed since last week, but that is what I was told on my enquiry. Not just that, but the obvious failure to gazette the commission or the commissioners. There is no clear indication yet as to what is going to be done about it.

And finally, what we have read in yesterday's papers, compounded in today's that UDeCott, a state body, a state company, is taking the commission to court. Now is that not ludicrous? It is ludicrous because not only we heard otherwise previously, but you have a commission made up of commissioners, selected by the Government of the day, because it is the President who appoints these commissioners on the advice of the Government of the day. Okay? Now in that Cabinet would be the line Minister responsible for UDeCott—

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senatorss, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Tuesday, September 22, 2009

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Thank you very much. I was speaking of UDeCott and the fact that this is, and has been, a commission of enquiry set up by the Government of the day, and now what are we having? We are having this state body falling under a Minister—who is not here today—which is now challenging that commission and including among the matters, the basis for that, the validation issue.

The non-passage of the Validation Act. One would think that if that body falls under the Ministry and the Minister is part of the Cabinet that has to decide on the validation, then how can that body challenge as one of its bases, the non-passage of a Validation Act? It seems to me like people are saying himself to himself, and the people of the country would want answers because the perception of the people of the country, UDeCott is Government. Government has set up this commission and Government has failed to make the commission work, and now UDeCott is paying lawyers a lot of money I think—this is what they perceive, I do not know if it is true—to sue effectively, the Government or a creature of the Government.

Mr. Vice-President, these are matters that cause me concern and it causes concern to a lot of people that I know. But overall, what is the greatest concern is the fact that combined with the other things that I have mentioned, it is creating a sense of unease and mistrust in the Government. People may not want to tell you, the Government, so to your face, but a lot of people who are supporters of the Government, who have been for years, feel that way. I am not saying to use this by any other means to unseat the Government, but I point out that there is a time now to be more transparent in certain things in terms, for example, of the Validation Bill, a time to work at creating a trust or recreating, or getting it back and it is now. It is now, or it might never be.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Sen. The Hon. Arnold Piggott): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. A few days ago in this honourable House, indeed the one downstairs, the Minister of Finance presented to the people of Trinidad and Tobago this administration's budget for the year 2010.
As I rise to speak in support of the budget under the theme, "Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges, Vision 2020", I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance in that regard, as well as Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, for his presentation on the Appropriation Bill, 2010.

Mr. Vice-President, the performance of the economy in spite of the difficult economic times, is certainly not as a result of divine intervention, or mere happenstance, as some of the hon. Members on the opposite Front Benches, downstairs and upstairs would like us to believe. But it was as a result of the responsible leadership, as well as prudent and astute management of the economy by this administration, ably supported by the commitment, drive, enterprise and resourcefulness of our people.

Over the last two years, the Government has been able to infuse new life into agriculture, new dynamism indeed, propelled by our efforts to transform the sector, which had not experienced positive growth since 2003. The sector has recorded positive growth rates of 2.6 per cent in 2007, and 8.6 per cent in 2008. The sector is now poised to register its third consecutive year of expansion. According to the Central Bank’s Summary of Indicators Report and I quote:

"The sector experienced positive growth during the first quarter of 2009 as well. The outlook for the sector going forward to the end of this year is for positive growth; and increased agricultural production is predicted.”

Clearly, our efforts at transforming the agricultural sector have begun to bear fruit, not only figuratively, but literally several fruits. It is to be recalled that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has developed a Transformation Plan for the agricultural sector, to move the sector from agriculture to agri-business, enunciating strategies for increasing agricultural production for food and nutrition security and competitiveness in Trinidad and Tobago. This Government is totally committed to the goal and would continue to strive tirelessly to achieve the best outcome.

I do not know if Members opposite have seen this. [Displayed book] It is our Transformation Plan for the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know whether my colleague across there, Sen. Ramkhelawan, has seen it as well. But I want to say that it is available online at www.agriculture.gov.tt, and the contents can easily be seen and viewed in there. But I believe that Members opposite, in the Opposition, have in fact read it. They seem to have a number of things that we have been doing and proposing, and they seem to be parroting a number of them from time to time.
Our Transformation Plan was developed, having listened to the concerns and recommendations of the farming community and other stakeholders, so that I am happy to hear the hon. Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, downstairs recently, in his budget contribution last week, affirm that the Government knows and understands what is required by the farming community. We disagree with him, however, on one fundamental issue, that is, he claims that the Government is not doing anything to respond to these requirements. But, Mr. Vice-President, if you review the list of things which he claims that we are not doing, you will find that they are all embedded and embodied within the transformation plan that we have developed for the agricultural sector.

Mr. Vice-President, take the small farmers. Full credit must be given to them, especially the 19,000 small farmers, for the continued dynamism displayed within the agricultural sector, which resulted in a continuation of the growth momentum during fiscal 2009. These small farmers have been and continue to be the backbone and provide yeoman service to the agricultural sector and to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, contributing to the promotion of greater food and nutrition security for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The small farmers will continue to have pride of place in the country's agriculture sector.

We envision an expanding role for the small farmers and family farms in our efforts to promote greater food and nutrition security. Currently, small farmers are mainly engaged in primary agricultural production, providing food from farm to plate. Our plans, however, call for them to expand their operations along the entire agri-value chain, whereby they will be engaged in some agro-processing value added activities, which will provide them with greater income and profitability.

The Government’s support to the small farmers has been unwavering. Under the Agricultural Incentive Programme, small farmers benefit from a wide range of incentives including financial assistance for the purchase of farm vehicles, machinery and equipment, and for the installation of irrigation and drainage systems. Some $13 million have been paid to farmers in fiscal 2009, in this regard in terms of incentives. We are currently reviewing the Incentive Programme and we hope to be able to include in that programme, incentives for the dairy farmers among other farmers in the sector.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is an important source of seeds and other planting materials, which it produces and sells to the farmers at heavily subsidized prices, substantially below that which obtains on the open market. After all, we understand that you must have land to plant; you
cannot plant if you do not have land. We understand that you must need inputs to plant the land, and therefore, you must have seeds and seedlings among several others. So to share with the national population and this Senate, some of the prices at which we sell some of our products, let me tell you this. They are:

- Corn: 500 grams, $2.50; 100 grams, 40 cents.
- Bodi: 100 grams, 50 cents; 500 grams, $2.50.
- Hot pepper: 10 grams, $1.80.
- Melongene: 10 grams, 40 cents.
- Ochro: 25 grams, 50 cents.
- Pigeon peas: 500 grams, $2.50.
- Pumpkin: 25 grams, $2.00.

Mr. Vice-President, I can go on and on and on. I have pages of that which we sell to the farming community as inputs for them to grow, cultivate and produce food for the nation, for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, additionally, in irrigation infrastructure, a lot has been said about water management by a contributor in another place. But over the years, we have been providing invaluable assistance to the farmers in the development of irrigation systems, without which farmers would be totally dependent on rain-fed water systems. In an effort to reduce the reliance on such an unpredictable water source, we have been constructing ponds on farmers’ plots. In 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources constructed 85 ponds in the food crop projects located in areas such as: Plum Mitán, Kernahan, Moruga, Cunjal and Guayaguayare. Demonstration drip irrigation systems have been established on farm plots at food crop locations in Los Iros, Cunjal, Moruga and Guayaguayare.

Drainage/flood control. During fiscal 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources also undertook extensive drainage works on agriculture lands throughout the country. Approximately 170 kilometres of drains were desilted to the benefit of farmers. Improvement works were undertaken in such areas as Penal—Mr. Vice-President, I am calling out the places so they can tell us, they can check them—Fyzabad; Carlsen Field; Felicity; Chandernagore; Aranguez North and South; Bamboo No. 1; Orange Grove; Maloney; La Compensation; Plum Mitán; Fishing Pond; Madras; Joyce Road; Dyer Trace; Pierre Road; Guayamare; et cetera.
3.55 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, in addition a number of works have been undertaken at farmers’ crossings and bridges in several of the food crop areas. Collaboratively with the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government, we shall continue our focus on drainage issues for the farming community.

In terms of cost of agricultural leases and the time it takes to process them, so that farmers could get tenure, the Government has recently undertaken a number of initiatives to reduce the cost of production to the farming community. One of the initiatives included the reduction in rents to the farming community. Under one hectare the farmers only pay $200 in rent; one hectare to two hectares, $400; greater than two, but less than five, $700, and between five and 10 hectares, $1,000. These rental values would continue to hold good going forward from the previously higher rate of 2 per cent of the assessed market value, which could have been as high as $2,500 in some cases.

Additionally to facilitate the lease preparation and the issuance of leases, the Cabinet has recently eliminated stamp duties on standard agricultural leases for state land, in respect of small and medium parcels up to 10 hectares. The Government has also decided that registration fees payable on standard agricultural leases for similar parcels of land would be discontinued. We had also decided to streamline the process for registration of standard agricultural leases, so that leases could be expedited and the registration process could take place within a month, instead of the previous three months to physically register the land.

An increasing number of our small farmers have now been provided with guaranteed market, as a result of contract farming arrangements with the Trinidad and Tobago Agri Business Association. This arrangement is truly a win win situation, as consumers would benefit from stable prices, while farmers would be assured of markets and income for their produce.

Additionally, we have undertaken a survey and have identified some food basket areas in Trinidad and Tobago. Let me say what we mean by "food basket". By food basket areas we mean communities where there is a relatively high concentration of farmers on separate parcels of land within the same location or a single large area under agricultural production.

Our Land and Water Division has conducted a survey, and we have made an assessment that some 800 kilometres of agricultural access roads within various food baskets qualify for special attention. Our Government is acutely aware of the
critical importance of access roads to the farming community and is developing a programme for construction, upgrading and continuous maintenance of these roads.

With the best will in the world, no government could build eight hundred kilometres of access roads in agricultural districts in Trinidad and Tobago, within a very short period of time; so we must, with proper planning, engineering and funding, deal with the issue of access roads. We are committed to that. Indeed, the hon. Minister of Finance in the other place, when she delivered the budget speech, did indicate that some 500 kilometres of roads would be looked at, subject, of course, to funding, engineering support and other resource allocations.

Mr. Vice-President, we have taken a number of initiatives for the sector; we are doing this all for the agricultural sector to produce more food; to produce greater production amongst them; to reduce food price inflation and to reduce overall inflation. What did we do in this case, in terms of another input for this sector?

Farmers have been screaming to high heavens that one major cost of their operation is the issue of fertilizers; they have said that the price of fertilizer skyrocketed. Having listened to them carefully, what did this responsible, caring Government do? It decided it would engage in conversation with a major fertilizer company in Trinidad and Tobago; that fertilizer company is YARA Trinidad, producing ammonia as well as mineral fertilizers. We had discussions with them and they agreed that they could bring in, at cost, some tonnes of fertilizer so that the Government could distribute it to the farming community, at cost. Therefore, we accepted an offer from YARA to bring in initially 2,000 tonnes of packaged blended fertilizer, on behalf of the Government, for resale by the National Flour Mills.

Mr. Vice-President, before I go further, lest someone raise an issue of us producing fertilizer in Trinidad and Tobago, exporting and then re-importing it, let me clarify. The fertilizers produced in Trinidad and Tobago are not blended; that which is being produced is raw fertilizer; it has to be blended. The fertilizer is exported and we earn revenue from that; we earn foreign exchange. Somebody runs a business—they blend fertilizer, not just from raw fertilizer that we make, but from others. We get a blended fertilizer, which the farming community uses. That is the kind of fertilizer we are seeking to bring in, and we are going to be selling it at cost, not at a profit. [Interruption]
Sen. Rahman: Could the Minister tell us, Sir, whether the cost at which it is going to be given to the farmers, excludes VAT and other duties? In other words, when the goods come in, is the National Flour Mills going to be paying VAT and other charges, because those are funds that go into the Government's coffers?

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: I am not aware that this attracts VAT, Sir. I do not see the issue of VAT arising in this matter. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance is telling me that clearly there is no VAT in it. Agricultural products are not attracting VAT.

Being informed that fertilizer constitutes an average of 40 per cent of farmers’ costs, that the local retail prices had gone up between 125 per cent and 200 per cent, and the escalating trend in price generally, we took this action to intervene in the market, to bring relief to the farmers and to keep the price of food in this country at a lower level. Our proposed intervention in the fertilizer market is just one element of a comprehensive strategy involving monetary, fiscal and supply side initiatives being implemented by this Government, led by the hon. Patrick Manning.

We are seeking to take care of our people. We are seeking to ensure that there is food put on the table. We are seeking to see that food put on the table is at reasonable prices. You would know about the initiative between the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Consumer and Legal Affairs, who went out and spoke with the entrepreneurs about that import, the importers of food, with a view to bringing relief to the consumers of Trinidad and Tobago, and we did see some price movement, in this regard.

We are seeking to ensure that food price inflation and overall inflation are contained and reduced. Our efforts to contain and reduce inflationary pressures in the economy have already begun to bear fruit. According to the latest data released by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), food price inflation, which has been the main contributor to headline inflation, declined significantly. Whereas in September 2008 food price inflation recorded a high of 34.6 per cent, it was reduced to 16.5 per cent in June 2009; to 10.1 per cent in July 2009 and to 5.2 per cent in August 2009. This is the lowest level of food price inflation since July 2004. [Desk thumping]

I can sense the chagrin of those who doubted the commitment and resoluteness of this caring and responsible PNM administration, [Laughter] to address this inflationary problem.
I wish Sen. Mark was awake while I am making these points, so that he would understand what the Government is doing in terms of controlling food price inflation in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of them have questioned the efficacy of our policies. Their disappointment today is the joys of many citizens whom we have pledged to support. The decline in food price inflation, as anticipated, has had a positive impact on headline inflation, which is now its lowest since January 2005.

Since Sen. Mark is up, perhaps, if you allow me, Mr. Vice-President, I will restate the movement of inflation.

Sen. Mark: I heard you already; you do not have to repeat it.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: I will start from April: 25.2 in April; 19.6 in May; 16.5 in June; 10.1 in July; 5.2 in August; downward trend for food price inflation in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Mr. Vice-President, much has been said by the naysayers about mega farms. [Interruption] You could come on this side; we will show you the way; we will show you the light.

Sen. Mark: Call elections.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Much has said by the naysayers about our mega farm programme. Remember last year, Mr. Vice-President, a lot of noise, a lot of ruction on that side about mega farms and that we promised to deliver mega farms and, “Where are they?” This year, silence from those who dared to heap scorn on the programme post budget 2009. [Crosstalk] It was not only you; there were professionals outside as well who were saying that we delivered nothing. [Crosstalk] Now we have delivered.

Do you know why they have been silenced? Because now they could see, feel, touch and eat the produce from the very farms that they hastily criticized last year. This is a government with a vision. We cannot wait to see, touch and eat a tomato or green pepper or sweet potato before understanding that we have to sow some seeds to reap some produce. We cannot wait for that; we have a vision. That is not what good governance is about: Waiting for results not derived from any plan. We have a plan and we are moving with our plan. This plan says where we are going; it is a road map and we are going down the road with it.

As we seek to transform the sector for increased food production for food and nutrition security in Trinidad and Tobago, we have embarked, and will continue with our programme, to facilitate growth of the commercial mega farms. We seek
to encourage the use and adoption of modern technologies for farming, new farm management techniques, new and advanced equipment, and good agricultural practices on agricultural farms.

So we have set a target for the establishment of somewhere between 12 to 14 mega farms over a period of time. We are targeting, for the next four years or so, six to eight of those farms, fully operational, in full production. Implementation of the mega farm programme is at various stages of development. The status of the programme is as follows: 200-acre commercial farm at Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas, already in production; 75-acre private sector led and owned by PCS Nitrogen at Exchange, Couva, already in production; provisional licences have been provided for entrepreneurs for four farms at Caroni, Edinburgh I, Orange Grove and Picton; and an additional allocation of 200 acres of land at Orange Grove to the Cunupia Farmers Association.

Cabinet recently agreed to the establishment of a state-owned and operated model small ruminant sheep and goat livestock farm, with forage production as part of their deliverables, on the state-owned 400-acre Mon Jaloux Estate.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, we are moving along, we are not just producing root tree crops, we are moving now into the meat business as well. We import a substantial amount of our lamb from New Zealand, but at extraordinary prices and we are seeking to fill that gap and to be able to produce some ruminants locally for local production at much lower prices.

Mr. Vice-President, I heard an absurd enquiry recently from someone who should know better asking what is meant by agribusiness as if to scoff at our plans for its success. Another doomsday approach, yet clamouring for the diversification of the economy using the agricultural sector.

If I may digress a bit, we have had plans to diversify this economy for some time now and we are working the plan; we have merchant marine, food and beverage, and the yachting industry among several others. Moving along the agricultural value chain, we are diversifying into agribusiness. So we are well on track, well on our way to getting our things done.

How will we diversify if we do not move into agro processing? How will we diversify if we cannot produce feedstock for food manufacturing plants? How will we diversify if we do not engage in agribusiness, if we will not take primary agricultural products and convert them by value added processes to get finished foods? Can you understand that, Mr. Vice-President?
They just go about and parrot things they hear, they do not consider properly what they are hearing; they just question everything that is proposed or we seek to execute; they are devoid of new and good ideas for execution and they are jealous of this administration’s performance in Government. That is what it is.

Another question I heard asked recently by a Member on the opposite side is, what are the activities that are going to take place to develop this new range of new value added products to meet domestic and international standards? Mr. Vice-President, the answer to this question, and to sensitize the national population, I say the answer lies through a combination of a structured, well-organized group of small farmers engaged in contract farming and agroprocessing, coupled with our mega farms’ output and our visionary programme for agribusiness, that this Government will deliver on its commitment to develop a new range of value added products to meet domestic and international standards. The output, Mr. Vice-President, of the commercial farms will be an important source of feedstock for the agribusiness arrangements; for food processing. For food manufacturing, the increase in the reliability of supply of feedstock resulting from the operation of the commercial farms would provide a significant impetus for the growth development of downstream industries along the entire agri value food chain.

What else is this Government doing? We have the interest of our fisherfolk at heart. We are aware that they require facilities on land before they go out to sea, we are aware that they require facilities on land when they return with their catch and their harvest of fish. We have therefore undertaken a survey of our fisheries infrastructure and have identified the need for the upgrading of eight of those fish landing sites in Trinidad and Tobago. We propose to designate them “designated fish-landing sites”. We shall commission preliminary designs to obtain indicative budgetary estimates for two prototypes which we will use as models for moving the process forward and they will have all the amenities and infrastructure required for such fish-landing sites.

Meanwhile, Mr. Vice-President, preinvestment activities are well advanced for the construction of two modern fish complexes at Las Cuevas and Moruga. In Las Cuevas, the project is being implemented in two phases; phase I, design of onshore facilities, that is completed; phase II, design of offshore facilities currently being executed. The facilities would provide for repair sheds, wholesale marketing facilities, cold storage facilities, garbage disposal, car park, food courts, fuel facilities, jetties, finger piers and slipway.
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In Moruga, the evaluation tender has been completed. A main feature of the complex will be a 250-metre long causeway into the Columbus Channel to reach deep waters providing shelter for 175 small and medium-size fishing vessels. The facilities will include a whole range of infrastructure inclusive of a 1.5-metre jetty for the loading and offloading of vessels.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of our vision for providing sound infrastructure and the environment in keeping with our Vision 2020 objective, we envision that the country will in due course, have as part of its infrastructural base ten (10) modern aesthetically pleasing and environmentally-friendly and compliant fish-landing facilities in full compliance with international sanitary and phytosanitary standards in accordance with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP).

Land tenure: Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan is not here, but I want him to know that we understand that land is the most essential component for farming. I said it earlier: No land, no farm. And, therefore, that is why it is the number one priority for us in our transformation plan—the distribution of land and we are working and staying with that. I heard the hon. Senator say earlier something about 1,200 acres of land is what is being proposed for our large farms, or for farming generally. I do not know where he got that from.

We are saying that we are seeking to bring 20,000 acres of arable land under productive cultivation, and we have to do this not by one fell swoop that you will wake up tomorrow morning and see 20,000 acres of land cultivated. It just cannot happen and he knows. We are working our programme; 20,000 acres of arable lands are what we are seeking to bring under cultivation.

The distribution and regularization of land cannot be undertaken if boundaries are not clearly delineated or marked out. In this regard, our efforts to distribute lands to farmers have been severely stymied by the sizeable backlog of surveys to be undertaken as a result of an acute shortage of land surveyors in the country. That is no secret; land surveyors are in short supply in Trinidad and Tobago.

What did the Government do recognizing this? To expedite the distribution of land, Cabinet has taken a decision to recruit thirty (30) land surveyors from Commonwealth countries including the Caribbean. It is expected that the employment of these land surveyors will clear some of the backlog in the surveying of agricultural land and will assist in fast-tracking the distribution of agricultural lands in Trinidad and Tobago. Survey plans are a critical part of the process in the setting out of boundaries of the lands to be allocated. It is not like a pencil, a pen, or a glass where you just move it around and put it somewhere else.
Land is land, it is fixed, it is finite and, therefore, in order to ensure that boundaries are clearly marked and that people know where they should operate, then we need to get the surveys done and we are moving to fix that.

Praedial larceny, we are moving to fix that too. Somebody is asking what is Agricultural Rangers Squad? Are they going to be rangers? What are they going to be? We are establishing an Agricultural Rangers Squad comprising 32 members in the first instance on a pilot basis. It is rude to suggest, or it may be—well let me not go there. But to think that we will establish an Agricultural Rangers Squad with 32 persons in County Caroni to serve Trinidad and Tobago would be really disastrous and anybody who suggests that or thinks that way, then they are not able to help manage this country.

We are managing this country, we know that we are managing this country very well. We said we are going to establish a Rangers Squad on a pilot basis in County Caroni that will patrol areas in Couva and the Caroni districts and we shall operate from a place in Caroni. As that squad begins to operate, and we see what results can be derived, we shall determine how and when we shall roll out to other districts.

Mr. Vice-President, let me say that it is not everywhere in Trinidad and Tobago that praedial larceny is a problem. It is in some districts, and we have already identified the districts so we know where the problem is and where we have to roll out our praedial larceny squad or the Agricultural Rangers Squad, which is what we are calling it.

Mr. Vice-President, I wish to take the opportunity to correct an unfortunate misinformation which emanated from some Members on the opposite side during the budget debate in the Lower House last week that the Agricultural Rangers Squad is simply a redesignation of the Praedial Larceny Squad which existed within the police service. It is not. It is a misrepresentation of the reality.

Mindful of the increasing and heavy demand being placed on the police service and would continue to be placed on the fight against crime which we are all committed to, and with a view to providing a more focused attention on the problem of praedial larceny, we are establishing a dedicated entity outside of the police service. The squad will work in close collaboration with the police service, the primary law enforcement agency in this country. The Agricultural Rangers Squad will work with the police service in the enforcement programme.

The resources for dealing with the problem have therefore been augmented. The Agricultural Rangers Squad is just one of several approaches being pursued
to reduce the issue of larceny of farmers’ produce. Praedial larceny robs farmers of their income and profitability; we cannot afford to have that continue.

Another measure which is under consideration is the Farmer and Vendor Registration Programme to supplement the Agricultural Rangers Squad Programme. A key in all this is traceability, to be able to trace the produce, the product, the crop, or livestock that was stolen and we are working with other initiatives to get a proper system in place for traceability of farming produce and two of those would be the farmer registration and vendor registration among others.

What are we doing for households to help us in our campaign to grow more food? Last year, Mr. Vice-President, you would recall that in a caravan we took off along the East-West Corridor from Barataria to Arima distributing seeds to households along the way and in the marketplace in Arima. We developed this programme with a tagline: “Sow your seeds and reap”. We launched the programme to encourage households to grow what they eat and eat what they grow thereby producing some portion of what they consume by establishing kitchen or backyard gardens.

We have given out seeds in this Senate, many of the Senators in this Chamber can attest to the fact that they got seeds, they cultivated them, they reaped the product and distributed the product. [Desk thumping] This year, the caravan moved to the southern districts and we went through the areas of San Fernando, Pointe-a-Pierre, Marabella, Pleasantville and the environs. Through this direct distribution of seeds and using the daily newspaper, in excess of 30,000 packets of seeds were distributed to households in the southern districts.

Additionally, Mr. Vice-President, this Minister has a strong view that every householder should have at least two fruit trees in his/her yard to the extent that you have land and I know my colleague, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance is a wise man. He already has more than two fruit trees in his yard including avocado which he distributes. He has products, he produces.

I feel that we must have at least two fruit trees, therefore, this year we distributed 350 fruit trees in the southern districts of Trinidad and Tobago and I told the people there as you plant, as it grows and you reap, use it to become neighbourly again, share it with your neighbours, give some to your neighbors, do not keep it for yourself and your family, give some to your neighbours.

My colleague, Minister Manning, has also planted some stuff and she has given my wife some fruits and some of the crops that were grown in her backyard.
4.25 p.m.

So we are moving along. All of us must pledge to grow some of what we eat and eat what we grow. That way we can help to reduce the food price inflation and overall inflation. You do not have to eat all those imported stuff; there is stuff here that you can eat and we have enough of it. [Interruption] There, we have Tobago saying, “Yes, that is the way to go.”

Agri-business development: I just came back from a meeting in Guyana and before that I was somewhere else, and the issue of agri-business comes up all the time. Somehow, in some of our minds we have been stuck with primary subsistence agriculture; we are stuck in a position that we need to move from. We need to encourage all around us to begin to think about a value chain, not just growing the product but beginning to process it; beginning to get engaged in some other activity so that the farmer would become more sensitized and would be able to derive greater income because he has added value to that which he has planted.

He must not just plant it and then a wholesaler comes, buys it and goes and retails it at a higher price. The man who has gone out to sea, when he comes in with his catch, he ought not to immediately sell it to somebody who is at the landing site waiting to buy it at reduced prices and then going off to retail it at a higher price, he must be able to do something else with it; add some value to it; derive the benefit from his labour.

That is our plan for the agri-business operations. Sometime soon, before the end of the year, I will launch one of the agro-processing plants of Trinidad and Tobago which is under the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association, a programme which is endorsed by the State to add value to products as we go along.

Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association has already established a number of commodity associations and farmers’ associations as they engage in developing a number of products for value added content. Today, I believe you may have tasted—well, maybe not you, Mr. Vice-President, but some of us in the dining room would have had some guava drink; we would have had some pommecythere drink, among other drinks, and every Tuesday we come here in the Senate we get some drinks of local production.

I do not know whether Members have taken heed, but we are moving along; we are producing things and we have to go with it. For those of you who like the pommecythere drink, you would drink that; for those of you who like guava, you would drink that. Even carrot drink today, I believe, was also on the menu and I
saw many of you drinking the carrot drink. So that we are moving along with our agri-processing endeavours and you are enjoying and you are being nourished very well. Good nourishment you are getting.

Upgrading of our marketing infrastructure, NAMDEVCO is an agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and it has been upgrading and developing market infrastructure throughout the country. Seven farmers' markets have been established at strategic locations in Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate the farmer selling his produce and deriving greater income. Farmers' markets have been established in Macoya, Diego Martin, Sangre Grande, Valencia, Chaguaramas, Debe and Point Fortin, making it much easier for farmers to bring their crops to market and for consumers to go there and buy the produce.

With a view to providing suppliers, households and industry with analysis and up-to-date information to facilitate more informed decision-making, Namdevco has employed a range of information dissemination techniques to make information more easily accessible to stakeholders. These include the Internet-based National Agricultural Market Information System, called NAMIS-TT; electronic boards at public locations and monthly newspaper reports. I have asked NAMDEVCO as an agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to seek the installation of two new electronic boards at two new gateways, one to the city of Port of Spain and one to San Fernando, providing product and price information on a current basis and I know the one into Port of Spain is near completion for installation.

Mr. Vice-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. C. Enill]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Vice-President: Before you continue, it is now 4.30 p.m. and I think it is a good time to take the tea break.

Sem. Mark: Thank you very much. We needed it. [Laughter]

Mr. Vice-President: This Senate is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Thank you very much, Vice-President. Before we broke, I was speaking about the issue of the National Agricultural Marketing Development Company (NAMDEVCO) and the work that it is doing providing
reliable information on product and price on a current basis to the national community by way of its electronic board at Macoya and the proposal that we have now for two more to be installed, one in Port of Spain and one in San Fernando and I was going to go on to say that such an impression has been made on our Caricom colleagues and officials that efforts are underway to adopt the NAMIS system to provide information such as we provide for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Jamaica is very interested in it; Guyana is also interested in it and we expect that we will collaborate with them to help them with that issue.

Priority is also being given to upgrading and developing infrastructure for warehousing fresh produce by NAMDEVCO. A major focus in this regard is the developing of warehouse infrastructure to keep the produce under chilled conditions at five degrees centigrade, thus maintaining the cold chain to the supermarket and the household refrigerator. The fresh produce will be transported by way of vehicles equipped with chilled storage capacity.

I come now to the issue of financing for agriculture and to say that the Agricultural Development Bank has been provided with adequate funding to ensure that financing is available for all bankable projects within the agricultural sector. In order to facilitate the maximum use of these resources and mindful of the constraints experienced by small agri-business investors, the Agricultural Development Bank has developed a special micro-credit loan product called Agri-Development Portal (ADP). This product is to assist agri-entrepreneurs who may have a sound project idea and a commitment to entering into the agri-sector business. ADP entrepreneurs categorized as pre-bankable can benefit from this first step financing mechanism on soft credit terms.

I turn now to the king, cocoa as king. In terms of the cocoa, a king passed, with an offspring now a prince with a lot of promise to become a new king; it was in March of this year that we hosted the second Roundtable for a Sustainable Cocoa Economy (RSCE2) right here in Port of Spain. Some 300 participants from 29 countries around the globe spent some four days discussing elements of the way forward, having shared experiences for the growth of the cocoa industry along the entire value chain.

It is a well-known fact that Trinidad and Tobago ranks among only 14 countries classified as producing fine-flavoured, aromatic cocoa. This very high quality cocoa is much sought after by international chocolatiers, chocolate manufacturers and manufacturers requiring cocoa beans as paste for input into various industries, including cosmetics and the food industry.
Interestingly, fine-flavoured aromatic cocoa as is produced in Trinidad and Tobago attracts US $5,000 per tonne on the international market. We have some 1,700 cocoa estates comprising roughly 3,000 acres in Trinidad and Tobago which previously was under cocoa cultivation. Only 800 of these cocoa estates are under meaningful production at this time. Our total annual production of cocoa beans is estimated at somewhere between one and two million kilograms or 1,000 to 2,000 metric tons, with an average production of 400 kilograms per acre.

However, experts in the field advise that within the next three years, Trinidad and Tobago's production can be as high as 1,000 kilograms per acre compared to the current 400 kilograms through a programme of replanting as distinct from rehabilitation and with the use of improved technologies. This would result in an additional production of one to two million kilograms or 1,200 to 2,400 metric tons from these estates. There are enormous opportunities for income generation from the cocoa production of some US $14.8 million annually if production of cocoa were to come close to 3,000 tons from the revitalized cocoa estates.

The point I am trying to make is to the extent that we can get entrepreneurs involved with these cocoa estates and to have them replanted and to use new technologies, we can have a tremendous amount of new cocoa production and revenues can be earned to the extent of US $14.8 million, thus bringing substantial amounts of foreign exchange to Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally, TTABA, the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association, can become involved in further processing of cocoa and to be able to make drinks and beverages out of the cocoa beans. You would be aware—and my friend from Tobago will tell you about chocolate tea. Now it is said that is a contradiction in terms; you cannot have chocolate tea. But my friend, Sen. Annette Nicholson-Alfred, would tell you that there is nothing better that a good cocoa tea; you grate the bar; you boil it in some milk and you stir it with some sugar and you have a good roast bake and black pudding and buljol to go with it, and you could not want a better meal for the day. So I am sure our good friend, Sen. Nicholson-Alfred would be happy to have us over to share some of the goodies in Tobago with us.

We have 200 acres at La Reunion Estate where we produce a fair amount of cocoa ourselves. While this Government shall encourage the farming community to increase cocoa bean production to facilitate export and be competitive, we would like to use some of this cocoa in our Agri-Business Development Programme in Trinidad and Tobago and from those cocoa beans we can get pure cocoa which can be used to make cold or hot beverages, cosmetics, chocolate...
bars, as in the case of Doves in Tobago and the exotic Caribbean Mountain Pride in Sangre Grande, it is our expectation that Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association will step up to the plate and ensure that they can deliver on products derived from cocoa.

There is the issue of agri-business and export trade, I will just touch on this slightly. For us to be competitive in the international community and regionally, we must improve our sanitary and phytosanitary conditions of growing the plant, growing the food, rearing the animal and taking it to the point of readiness for the table. We are actively working on a plan to establish a National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (NAHFS) in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not one of those agencies that would exist in any single country, but under Caricom governments would be establishing a National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency in each of their countries and the overarching agency, CNAHFS, would be resident in one of the Caricom countries. In order to facilitate the free movement of goods under the CSME and as well to be able to be competitive regionally and internationally, we must step up to the plate with our sanitary and phytosanitary measures and we are working on that as well.

Protection of the forest as well, we have a national reforestation and watershed programme going and we have to date established some 6,196 acres that have been reforested; 15,413 acres have been protected by fire traces and 200 miles prepared and maintained to date in aid of fire control. Complementing these measures we have identified, or intensified efforts to address the indiscriminate cutting of our forest trees and illegal logging. We are looking closely at indiscriminate cutting of our forest trees and illegal logging.

5.10 p.m.

This undesirable state of affairs simply will not be allowed to continue and we would be putting measures in place to take control of that practice. In order to provide the basis for more informed decision-making with respect to the management of our forest reserves, the Ministry of Agriculture has been collaborating with the US Forest Service in preparation of an updated forest cover map based on satellite imagery. This map will provide the basis for a national forest inventory which would in turn provide baseline data for reliable assessment of changes in our forest cover. The forest cover map is expected to be completed by 2010.

As I move along and to ensure that I stay within the time frame allotted to me, while there are still several challenges to be overcome, the agricultural sector is clearly well poised to enhance its contribution to the national economy, thus
providing increased impetus for the attainment of our Vision 2020 goals and objectives. The process of transformation within the sector has clearly begun. We are mindful however, that transformation by its very nature cannot occur in a single moment in time.

Hon. Senators can rest assured that the Government will continue to remain resolute in its efforts to accelerate the pace of transformation of the agricultural sector. In this regard we will continue to accord the highest priority to the following: ensuring that the population has adequate access to the supply of nutritious food at affordable prices; the control and reduction of food price inflation will continue to be a major priority in this regard; accelerating the implementation of the upgrading and modernization of the infrastructure base serving the agricultural sector, that is agricultural access roads, water resource management and fisheries; reducing the incidence of praedial larceny; accelerating the distribution of lands to farmers; substantially increasing the amount of arable land under productive agriculture; expansion of acreage under cocoa production and increasing productivity levels to the industry norm of 1,000 kilogrammes per acre.

We will continue to work in collaboration with all the stakeholders and to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago can be well nourished; can get nutritious foods at affordable prices; we can continue to reduce food price inflation and we can continue to make a contribution to the overall inflation in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Dr. Sharon-ann Gopaul-McNicol:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this national budget debate. I have always longed to see and observe if it was humanly possible for a government, especially given the crisis that we are facing, that will put forward to us a budget that is about the people, the poor people in particular. It is against that interest that I have decided to entitle my contribution today, “Sharing the Wealth: A Dream for a Poor People's Budget”. Listening to the Ministers, I was wondering if we are residing at this point in time in the same country because so many glowing reports of successes that were outlined today, brought to me the reality that this administration is not in touch with what the average person has to undergo everyday, the struggles and suffering of the average person.

A comment was made by the former Senator with respect to those on the opposite side being jealous of the Government. I must tell you that there is no such thing as anyone being jealous of anyone. What is there to be jealous of?
When you think about the astronomical problems that we are facing in this society at that time, this Government is overseeing a dysfunctional system in every sense of the word [Desk thumping] ranging from an explosive situation with the UDeCott matter; a runaway crime of such epidemic proportions and yet, you sit here and act as if we are okay. Trinidad and Tobago, for those citizens who are viewing this today, your country is in trouble like no other time that it has ever been. [Desk thumping] This is a serious time.

Sen. Piggott: No gloom and doom now. “No gloom and doom, we moving forward.”

Sen. Dr. S. A. Gopaul-McNicol: Excuse me. This is not a time for us to be divided, not when it comes to our country. We are in trouble and we are in serious trouble and we need to begin from that standpoint and get out of the psychological denial that we happen to be in at this point. [Desk thumping] To pinpoint a situation here with eight days left to go to the end of this fiscal year, when I review the Review of The Economy 2009—which by the way was not made available to those in the Lower House, and the excuses that were provided made no sense at all, but nevertheless—it is clearly an indictment against this administration. [Desk thumping]

If you were to imagine what we saw in the Review of the Economy 2009 document, the document not only reflected a decline of as much as $19 billion between 2008 and 2009, but also just about every sector in our economy is in trouble. [Desk thumping] I want to state up front that having reviewed this year's budget and the Review of the Economy 2009, listening to the Minister of Finance's speech and the Opposition Leader's response, I cannot support this budget. [Desk thumping] This budget is a flagrant disregard for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and quite frankly, it is a slap in the face of the poor; the working class; the middle class; the disenfranchised and the vulnerable. In fact, quite frankly, it is a war against the poor. [Desk thumping] I am insulted and very concerned that this Government and the Minister of Finance could actually come to the people of Trinidad and Tobago with such a shameful budget and expect us to accept it.

To understand why I cannot support this budget, one has to understand what is the purpose of a budget presentation. Presenting the budget to the nation is a serious matter and certainly, it is not something to giggle about as our Minister of Finance giggled her way through this budget presentation this year and even last year. A budget is for a government to have the opportunity to show that it is taking into consideration very seriously, the well-being of citizens of Trinidad and
Tobago. What must be understood though, is that a budget is not an entity by itself, but rather it reflects the philosophy of the administration. By that I mean a budget is a manifestation of the philosophy of a political party or a philosophy of a governmental administration.

There are mainly two types of political practices or political philosophies that help define a budget. The top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. If a political party has endorsed a top-down model of governing, it would be reflected in the budget by the manner in which funds are distributed. Usually, a top-down approach benefits those at the top, the rich and the leaders. In other words, the top 10 per cent of persons in a society will primarily benefit from this top-down model of governing. If a political party on the other hand has endorsed a bottom-up model of governing, it would be reflected in the budget by the manner the funds are distributed, whereby those at the bottom, the 90 per cent who live from pay cheque to pay cheque who do not know at any given moment what can happen to their lives, will benefit. Those at the bottom who will benefit are usually the poor, middle class, disabled, disenfranchised and vulnerable. Those are the beneficiaries of a bottom-up model of governing.

Having made a distinction, this is why I have such an adjustment difficulty in this Senate, the amount of joking that take place. I am sorry. I think that this is such a serious place to be. We are overseeing our country's development, children's future and the next generation, so forgive me, Minister Narace, if I do not share that joke with you. I find it not funny at all because this is a serious time in our country's development. [Desk thumping]

Having made a distinction with the types of political philosophies let us explore what is the philosophical practice of the two mainstream political parties. If time permits I would even explore the political practice of my political party, the Congress of the People.

The PNM whose political philosophy is manifested in the governmental practice of this Manning-led administration is undoubtedly a top-down model. This can be seen in its obsession with practices that are rooted in a colonial tradition. For instance, this administration rather spend our money, and it is our money, on big buildings and hosting international summits than helping to eradicate poverty among its citizens. This administration rather hands over our patrimony to foreigners, as you saw they did in the reverting of the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago to the Royal Bank of Canada. [Desk thumping] Most of us watched with horror as this Government took many steps backwards in that unfortunate negotiation of one of our main banks in Trinidad and Tobago. Yet,
there was no emotional pain that wrenched at the heart of this Government as such a backward step was taken much to the psychological detriment of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Government is driven to impress foreigners as we can see by how they spent our money over the past year. They hire foreigners over citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in the construction industry creating a vacuum in employment and then they have the nerve to say we do not have an employment problem, because they happen to count URP and CEPEP as gainful employment, when in fact, people cannot even support their families on those kinds of salaries. [Desk thumping] All this obsession with foreigners is rooted in colonial tradition and it is this that speaks to the top-down model of governing. This is why the budget was so scandalous and insensitive to those at the bottom.

Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, you need to understand that when a government makes a wrong assessment of a situation, the diagnosis would be wrong and the intervention to address the problem would be equally wrong. This is why you hear glowing reports of people saying we have done this and we have accomplished that, but yet the result of a society that that should be showing a decrease in crime and other social problems, we are not seeing it. We are not seeing it because you are using wrong assessment tools.

In fact, I will make reference to that when I am discussing national security because the Minister of National Security said here today that certain tools, psychometric assessment, and so forth and so on, are being used to assess the state of the police officers and so forth. Wrong tools that were not standardized on our population.

One does not have to be a social scientist like myself to identify the social trends. I am not engaging in any act of sedition by pointing out what I am about to say now. This budget is the last straw that broke the camel's back as far as the people of Trinidad and Tobago are concerned. [Desk thumping] Ministers, you are driving the people of Trinidad and Tobago to the brink of despair with your callousness, heartlessness and recalcitrant approach to the legitimate concerns of the citizens of this country. You are provoking the population by the manner in which you are squandering our money.

The pattern is there; every 20 years you see some kind of uprising in this country. We saw it in 1970. This is not an act of sedition. I am a social scientist and I am saying to you that in 1970, we saw an uprising. In 1990, we saw an
uprising. I am telling you as a psychologist, I stand before you to say that you are provoking this population and you need to be careful of what you are doing. Next year is 2010. [Desk thumping]

It is my hope—people can take only so much—that this administration will discontinue this practice of a top-down model of governing and engage like the Opposition UNC while they were in government, a more bottom-up approach where the small man, the poor and the middle class benefited from their budgets that they put forward. [Desk thumping] I am not trying to be facetious here. The difference between UNC-led administration, the Opposition and the Government is that the Opposition has always been a bottom-up as evidenced by the very fact that they were born out of a working class population, the sugar cane workers; as evidenced by their commitment to small business development, as you saw during their reign during the 1995—2001 period, the commitment to recognizing that every home should have a computer. This is not the case at this time in our development.

This bottom-up approach was a commitment that the UNC had, as evidenced by their recognition that the geniuses of all our citizens, the sportsmen and so on, must be treated no differently than the geniuses of the doctors and lawyers and certainly, as evidenced by the sugarcane industry and the commitment to not dismantling the sugarcane industry, as we saw so flagrantly and callously done by this administration.

5.25 p.m.

This is why when the UNC was in Government, if you look at their budgets—I went back as far as 15 years—you saw a focus on the small businessman, children, families, the poor and vulnerable and the disenfranchised. That is what a budget should be about.

Let us now examine this budget in its various categories as was presented by the Minister of Finance and then I will show what a dream for a poor people’s budget would look like if the Government had taken into consideration the needs of those at the bottom.

In this three hours and ten minutes budget presented by the Minister of Finance, some four and a half minutes were allocated to the social sector. Imagine a country facing so many social ills, to the point where it has crippled the development of this society, politically, socially, educationally and otherwise, these four and a half minutes were allocated to the social sector reform. The Minister spoke of a first-class world social sector programme which, according to
her, is supposed to reflect a decent standard of living for all of our citizens, especially to the most vulnerable. The Minister also emphasized that this Government would reduce poverty and reduce the number of socially displaced persons. She did not state how this would happen. She spoke about a one-stop shop, that we have been hearing about for the past few years and which was supposed to be established in 12 regions for the longest while. Up to this date, this has not really taken root.

The Minister spoke of an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System (ISEM) to manage the range of social services. Whatever you want to call it, ISEM, social sector reform, the bottom line is that this Government does not have a clue how to eradicate the social ills in this society and it is just wasting our money. If you look at the overlapping social programmes in different ministries, they are not going to produce enlightened and improved social sector in our society.

The Minister of Finance also proposed that the Government is working to eradicate abuse among children and spoke about establishing assessment centres via the Children’s Authority. Yet we heard the Chief Justice say that he had only received a budget allocation of $42 million after asking for a budget of close to $400 million. He was clear that there would be no assessment centre since there is now no money in the budget for such. So there is conflict between what the Minister of Finance said with respect to the assessment centres and what the Chief Justice said.

What is so outrageous and ridiculous is that here we are funding a Caribbean Court of Justice costing hundreds of millions of dollars and there are only three cases, but our own office of the Chief Justice cannot get the funds to ensure that the assessment centres for our children are enacted.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Will you give way on that point?

Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: How long will you be because I have to move on?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Two minutes.

Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: Mr. Vice-President, the bottom—

Mr. Vice-President: Are you giving way?

Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: No, I am not. I really need to finish what I have to say. The bottom line is that a lot of money is spent on the budget, a lot of cost overruns, but they have generally not benefited the people at the bottom, the poor and the disenfranchised.
The Minister went on to say that people must lift themselves out of poverty through employment, yet there is an attack on those seeking to do just that in the construction industry, which now favours foreigners. My dream for a poor people's budget will take into consideration the small contractors in Trinidad and Tobago since under this administration big contractors receive about 90 per cent of the government contracts. It is my hope that contracts will be fairly shared among small and medium-sized contractors so that the state resources will be appropriately shared among the poor and middle class. It is also my hope that a poverty eradication bank would be set up to provide very competitive loans for all sectors of the society and the introduction of a micro credit system.

The Minister went on to say, in this social sector reform area, that there ought to be continued work towards reducing the number of people who live below the poverty line, yet we have the middle class people, who we can safely say are classified as the working poor and the working hungry, showing all indications that they will be living well below the poverty line in the very near future, just by the difference of one pay cheque. In fact, the middle class will tell you that if they happen to lose their jobs, they will definitely be facing an economic crisis as anybody who is currently living below the poverty line.

My dream for a poor people's budget will take into consideration support for family life. Family life has been affected as people are strapped for funds. More single families exist now, so I had hoped for a budget that offered greater family support such as day care, after-school support services, et cetera.

Mr. Attorney General, at this point I can stop. If you want two minutes, that is it. I have no intention of interrupting my train of thought with all this jumping up that you all engage in. Two minutes.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you cannot determine how long he has. Once you give way, he will make his point.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I come in peace. You were going so well that I did not want to interrupt you. You spoke of falsehood. The Government is not committed to funding the Caribbean Court of Justice beyond the start-up fund, which was, I think, US $100 million. That court has a board of trustees whose job it is to invest those funds and carry out all the expenditure necessary. That funding has nothing to do with our budget this year and the funding the Judiciary is allocated is completely separate from that. That is the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The commitment is a commitment of the Caricom. I just wanted to make that point clear.
Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: Thank you for clearing it up and for enlightening me that we spent $600 million in start-up funds at a time when there are poor people in this country who do not have any money. [Interrupted] Whatever! Our priorities should be the poor people of this country first.

Now let me get into the business of property tax reform. What a hoax on the people of Trinidad and Tobago! The Government has squandered the money, now they want the poor people to suffer the consequences. Instead of facing their vulgar and wild spending, they have opted to impose a tax on the population. There is no question that this property tax will increase the expenses among the poor and middle class. I am cautioning this Government yet again that these punitive measures, such as this property tax that is now being meted out to the people, has already led to resentment. If you were reading all the articles and listening to the news, the people are internally strived over this and this is how civil unrest occurs in a society. [Interrupted]

This is not an act of sedition in any way. I am giving my experience as a social scientist and a psychologist. You just have to look at the temperature of the people. You are wearing them down. People cannot take it and this is why your wild and loose spending ought to be dealt with because we have to deal with the consequences of it.

Imagine the Government spent $1 billion on the Fifth Summit of the Americas and plans to spend $500 million on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, asking the poor and the middle class to assume the cost by an increase in property taxes.

Sen. Browne: The Government has not spent $1 billion on the Fifth Summit of the Americas.

Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: There are so many different figures being presented.

What is to be expected from this increase in property taxes that will again affect the poor and middle class is that landlords will raise their rents to offset these increases in property taxes. Who will be affected? The poor and middle class yet again. Imagine pensioners whose homes were built years ago will now be expected, as my colleague Sen. Dana Seetahal SC said earlier, to pay an increase in taxes when they are making an extra income by renting out part of their homes to supplement their low pensions.
People who retired over 20 years ago and received $1,000 as their pension like the people in Woodbrook, those communities where they see an opportunity to rent out part of their houses to supplement their incomes, will now have to deal with this hike in property taxes.

Whether you are a property owner or tenant, you will feel the effect of this tax hike because landlords will have to shell out more money to pay these taxes. They will raise the rent on poor people who cannot afford to buy a home; students at the university will more than likely have to pay more rent; WASA will increase water rates because the property tax has increased; any increase in tax on industrial plants will result in an increase in the cost of manufactured goods which will be passed on to wholesalers, retailers and then the consumer. Who will suffer? The poor man. Who will suffer? The small businessman.

Any increase in tax on commercial properties will cause an increase in rent to small business owners, who will increase their prices. Again, who suffers? The poor man, the consumer. Any increase to a grocer will result in his increasing the prices of his goods to recover the additional taxes, thus causing an increase in the price of food. Who suffers? The small man; the poor.

The tax increase will result in an increase in what we are seeing now as the working poor and the working hungry. People are living from pay cheque to pay cheque and cannot survive if this tax goes into effect. It is a heartless and callous action and will result in undue suffering to the average person. In fact, more people will shy away from wanting to own property and will opt for renting. The middle class will be faced with becoming homeless and there will be more working poor and working hungry.

I am emphasizing this because there are people who work every day and yet do not know if they will have enough money to buy food for their families for the entire month. Imagine that there is now very little incentive for people to own a home.

I just want to share with you an experience that Sen. Oudit and I had when we were working with youngsters in a community. This has nothing to do with the budget, per se, but it is something we need to be aware of because it will be hitting us, given the fact that these youngsters said that they rent homes but they are not allowed to bring their children in their homes. I was not aware that there were landlords anywhere in this country or anywhere in the world who tell people they cannot bring their children. We need to look into this and we have taken the responsibility to do that and will bring it to this honourable Senate to examine in terms of a Bill.
Let us deal with housing. While in the budget the Government boasts of the intention of constructing 8,000 houses per year for 2010, for the past two years—of course we have heard this for the past two years—few houses were built in spite of the promises made in the previous two budgets. Even more so, I note that the houses built are one-storey houses and owners are not allowed, according to what was explained to me—if I am incorrect, I stand corrected—to expand without going through a whole rigmarole from the HDC. What I think may be good in terms of a poor people's budget is if we built houses with upstairs allowing house owners to be able to rent the downstairs part of the property to bring in additional income, assuming we do not have this property tax increase, allowing more opportunities for houses to be rented and for people to get places to rent. There are many young couples who do not have a place to live. This will reduce the need for housing by hundreds of thousands of people because there will be more opportunities for homeowners to rent.

I must use this opportunity to mention that this low-income housing that the Government is building has not been easily accessible to poor families. As such, we propose that the houses be distributed on the basis of need and not political affiliation as is the case at present.

5.40 p.m.

In addition, an equal opportunity clause should be inserted, since this would allocate houses to newly married young couples to facilitate the development of their families. A right start is that financial assistance should be offered to low-income families, to ensure that they are able to afford the minimum down payment to secure a home.

Let us look at health. In the budget, the Government claims that it is undertaking a fundamental shift in policy in the health sector, in that they are proposing a comprehensive health care system that would be placing greater emphasis on preventative services or primary health care, rather than after-treatment care. This is quite interesting, because this is what we should be about. If this is the case, that is indeed good, but this was proposed in last year's budget as well and it did not happen when money was flowing. What are the chances of a preventive health care happening in this era, during the economic crisis?

In our society, preventative care is usually considered secondary to after-treatment care. While there are 103 health care centres, according to the Government, the emphasis on health care is after the illness occurs, not on prevention. In any event, the economically poor cannot afford basic preventative
health care, much less primary treatment-oriented health care, according to the United Nations Development Programme 2006 report. As such, it is my dream for a poor people's budget that the Government will expand the health care programme that will facilitate low-to middle-income persons in accessing free health care, free medication, and so forth, in both the community clinics and hospitals.

We recognize that we have free health care in that there are the public general hospitals and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. I have to say what people go through. Two weeks ago, I visited the emergency ward at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and what I saw was so saddening to me and this validated what we heard all the time; the way people have to sit in the corridors and wait for beds. This should not be happening in a country that has money. In spite of our economic crisis, this was a rich society. It is a question of how you choose to spend your money.

As I examine the health aspects of the budget and as I read the achievements of the Ministry of Health in its 2008 report, I have to say that the 2009/2010 budget for health care was just, in my view, all due respect to the Minister, a cut and paste list of the same old rhetoric from last year and the year before. I have heard nothing new. How many times have we heard that this administration promised hospitals in Arima, Point Fortin, the completion of the high-priced Scarborough Hospital, the dialysis machines and all of this? My dream is indeed for a poor people's budget for sharing the wealth and it is time now to deliver on these promises in the health care. We are too rich a nation to neglect the health of our people, in spite of the economic crisis. We have money in this country. No one should suffer because they get sick. We have elderly suffering from Alzheimer's and they cannot afford the medication. These are people who served our country all their lives and now they have to die or face the last years of their lives in an undignified manner.

I just spoke to the Minister of Health, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Health, about a retired man whose leg was amputated and he needs a prosthetic leg. He cannot afford it. This person served this country well and today he is facing this situation. The Minister took his number and called him personally and said that he will look into the situation. I hope this will occur, because he is certainly counting—that call was rather provocative and so he is expecting the prosthetic leg. Thank you, Minister.[Interruption]

Sen. Narace: For that, you have to give way. Through you, Mr. Vice-President, I am not going to attack anybody. I am just saddened when I see good people going down a particular road. I know that you know that you would have seen the debate and all that we have achieved. Only this Saturday we had almost 10,000 people around the savannah trying to get people to change their culture
and the ethic. There are always areas where we can do better. I think you have a
great contribution to make, but to say that we must close down Caricom, we must
only deal with poor people and we are not dealing with poor people and all those
things—[Interruption]

**Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol:** I did not say close down Caricom.

**Sen. Narace:** That is what you are saying. You are saying you do not want this and that. The point I want to make to you is that I know that you know what we are doing in health. Therefore, your credibility will not be valid if you do not treat with it with some level of—[Interruption]

**Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol:** To address the latter part of Minister Narace's statement, my credibility stands strong nationally and internationally and I can tell you that. It is all a question of priorities, my dear. Do you spend the people's money on the people, or do you impress foreigners and build buildings? It is my view that it is a societal imperative to improve the health care and provide programmes for the poor than to have them suffering and not have beds in the hospital. I could not care how many times you go around the savannah; the bottom line is do you have beds in the hospitals when people go to the hospitals? That is the bottom line. You can go all around the savannah if you want. When they fall from around the savannah, do you have beds? This is the bottom line.

**Education:** Let us deal with education, please. The Government, in its budget 2010, recognized that a sound education system is the strongest catalyst for national development and poverty reduction. Yet, this Government continues on its pathway of promoting the academic elite, primarily in that the free education at the tertiary level benefits only those who could afford to go to university. This Government continues to confuse the difference between equality and equity. While there is, indeed, equal opportunity for all to go to university, because it is free at the tertiary level, there are those who are so poor that it is not possible for them to even muster up the money to pay their passage to go to university or to buy food on a daily basis, much less attend university.

My husband was one of them who had to leave university because he could not afford his passage from St. James to the university. He had to leave and work for years, in order to save money to provide for his family and to go to university later. Do not tell me that there is equal opportunity for all. There are some people who need additional support. The bottom line is, with the free tertiary education, there are some people who still cannot benefit even if they are accepted into university. For me, it is reprehensible when you see a government engaging in
such loose spending practices and so recalcitrant to the legitimate concerns of some of its young people and some of the poor people who do not know where the next meal is coming from.

The Government also speaks in this budget about a seamless education and vocational system. I have to ask: How seamless is it, when there is no intellectual equity? What do I mean when I say intellectual equity for the youngster who may be viewing this? I mean that our education system has not fully recognized to this day, the genius in all our children. The genius of the sportsman and the genius of the artist, tailor and the mason should be no different than the genius of the lawyer and the doctor. This is not the case. Moneys are not allocated, taking into consideration equal abilities of all the geniuses in our society. More money is directed each year to tertiary education, which is good, but what percentage of our population goes on to tertiary education? [ Interruption]

**Sen. Manning:** Forty.

**Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol:** Fourteen? [ Interruption]

**Hon. Senators:** Forty.

**Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol:** Forty per cent go on to tertiary education? I would like to know where you got that statistic from. That is bogus reporting. Most of our children are left unfulfilled in this society and that does not validate the genius of all and the genius of the less academically-oriented. My dream for a poor people's budget—sharing the wealth, will take into consideration the wonderful strengths of all our children, so that those who are talented in the non-academic areas will be respected and the funds would be allocated to enhance their talents and ensure they reach their potential.

While I recognize that the Government has allocated much of its budget to the construction of early childhood centres and the construction of primary and secondary schools, what about the construction of the pan factory, which we have been hearing about for the past 30 years? In fact, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs recently received cutbacks to the tune of about $8 million and the allocation that was set aside for the pan factory went to zero, I am told. Imagine, the pan, the musical instrument of the 20th Century; our musical instrument, to this day, we do not have a pan factory, yet this Government allocated last year, for the Prime Minister's residence, about $200 million, $60 million of which I am told was for furniture alone and $3 million for curtains. Are we for real? What are we talking about here? Is this for real? Do you realize what could have been done for the poor people in this country? We have our priorities totally wrong in this country.
My dream for a poor people's budget, which is about sharing the wealth, is that this Government could recognize that only 12.6 per cent of people in Trinidad and Tobago own a computer, according to the Guardian Business Edition of April 2007 and 15 per cent have access to Internet services; some of them through the Internet cafe. Since this is a critical component in the development of the country, we did a costing and found that developing countries that are willing to purchase a large number of computers each year could secure them at the rate of US $100 per computer with the accompanying basic Internet services. This means that an additional TT $100 million could purchase approximately 160,000 computers per year, so that within seven years, every family in Trinidad and Tobago would have their own computer. My dream, indeed, for a poor people's budget is about sharing the wealth.

With respect to sport and youth affairs, I do not have as much to say, given time being the element, but I also noted cutbacks were made in this area. Sport has never been taken seriously as equally as you take the academic areas by this administration. In fact, it is viewed, in some cases, with contempt; ask the footballers and the swimmers, they would tell you. My dream for a poor people's budget is about focusing on sports, seeing the value of sport which requires a lot of discipline. It helps reduce the social problems among communities, if you have a vibrant sporting industry.

Let us look at the community, infrastructural and cultural development aspect of the budget. In the last budget, the Government promised the national community to construct a National Cultural Centre to replace the Grand Stand. To date, nothing has been done, so Carnival has gone back to the streets and this is an inconvenience, to say the least. In the 2008/2009 budget, $250 million was allocated to this National Cultural Centre, but by the end of August 2009, only about $613,000 was spent. I have to ask: Where is this Government's priority? Carnival is a national festival and it is particularly unique to Trinidad and Tobago in its present format and this Government destroyed the Grand Stand with a legitimate plan, but yet has not moved to build this national centre. Now we say we have no money, but we have the Tarouba Stadium, which is overpriced by about $800 million and this Government is still bent on talking about the Tarouba Stadium, when we have seven stadia in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another disappointment in the community development section of the budget is that the Government, in 2008/2009, promised a convalescence home for TU CO, so that our retired calypsonians could have somewhere to live, since it is reported that many of them are homeless or strapped for cash when they reach the end of
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their careers. The Government allocated $5 million for this, but because of its squandering and collapse of the oil prices, the convalescence home was cut back by $4 million. It must be noted that by the end of August, not a cent was released for the calypsonians and these are the cultural icons of our country. This is heartless and callous.

Another disappointment in the budget is the establishment of the pan chroming factory to produce our own pan, considering that it is our musical instrument. According to the 2008/2009 budget, $5 million was allocated for this, but because of the cutbacks, only $1 million was left in the vote. It must be noted that as at August 2009, not a cent was spent. This is a flagrant disregard for the pan fraternity. Even worse yet, here we are limiting the development of the exportation of pan, which would indeed bring about a lot of foreign exchange. That is not all with respect to the disregard for the pan fraternity. What about the completion of Pan Trinbago’s headquarters? Pan Trinbago has begged the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to complete the headquarters on the highway. Since the UNC exited office in 2001 they have been begging for this.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, $10 million was allocated to this, but with the economic cutbacks, only $2.6 million was left in the vote. As of August 2009, only $1.4 million was released. Just look at how they treat the pan fraternity and the calypsonians in our country, and these are our cultural icons. We ought to be treasuring these people.

Another failed promise is the Sugar Museum. This is where the artefacts for the whole processing of sugar would be kept, and $1 million was allocated but with cutbacks of $900,000 only $100,000 was left in the vote. So, again, as of August 2009, $21,000 was spent, so the project was not done. While we are on this, let us look at the projects that were to be of benefit to the small man.

Mr. Vice-President, $3 million was allocated to the terminal malls where most of our small businessmen house their businesses. There was also a cutback of $1.7 million. Who was affected? It was the small businessman. In like manner, the National Social Development Programme (NSDP) was allocated $40 million, but endured a cutback of $20 million. It must be noted that as of August 2009, only $18 million was spent. This is the unit that helps the average person with services such as water and electricity. Again, the unit that benefits the small man and the vulnerable, cutbacks were made in such an important unit. It is clear to me that the caring toward the poor is not part of the agenda of this Government, yet we have money being spent on international summits that are, quite frankly, of no benefit to the people of this country.
Let us look at tourism. We continue to spend money on the same traditional approaches to tourism which is not bringing us the returns that a tourism industry should. There is a lot of waste in the tourism industry. I recommend that we use our communities to increase and, by extension, reduce the dependency in the inner city areas, and this is called community-based urban rebirth. I would like us to consider that in the interest of a poor people's budget.

What is community-based urban rebirth? Community-based urban rebirth refers to a process of solving the problems of underdevelopment by revitalizing communities within the urban areas through community cooperation and collaboration; local government reform; community economic development; building community resilience; cultural regeneration; infrastructural reform; replacing criminality with creativity and poverty eradication and social development. This is a well documented programme in developed countries, and countries were able to reduce crime; build communities to bring about community empowerment—

**Mr. Vice-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. Dr. A. Nanan]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol:** Mr. Vice-President, how will community-based urban rebirth benefit the urban areas? It will improve the physical environment and increase property value and revenues. We will immediately begin to see a reduction in gang warfare and improved community relations. It will increase economic activities; empower communities; enable communities to document archives and their historical and cultural heritage for future generations; it will establish a safer and cleaner environment and, most of all, it will bring about a healthy interdependence on each other, thus restoring family, cultural, social and national pride.

Let us look at who would benefit from community-based urban rebirth. It is the small businessman; the community icons; the NGOs, the CBOs; the residents, because theatres and community museums would be formed; sport and entertainment; culture and tourism; and agriculture and its downstream industries will all become a viable undertaking that will benefit the community residences.

When we did our research in the inner urban city areas, we found that there was so much rich cultural history in Laventille that people are not aware that they can become tourist sites. Port of Spain, Belmont, Arima, Princes Town, Point
Fortin, Woodbrook, St. James, Couva and Tobago will all benefit. They are communities that we can target and they will later become feeder centres to the national centre and will revitalize smaller communities.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources talked about the agricultural projects, and I have to ask: Did any of these projects benefit the locals? Did any of these projects benefit the small businessman? I think we have talked about this before and that is where URP and CEPEP workers could be redirected into agriculture to own their own small business and get involved in small enterprises and so on. Persons who make less than $2,000 a month are folks who can also benefit. In this budget, the Government boasted about an attempt to provide water for all—

Sen. Narace: That was the UNC. You are getting mixed up with your parties.

[Laughter]

Sen. Dr. S. Gopaul-McNicol: Okay. This Government has talked about providing water in last year's budget and in this year's budget, but after 47 years, not even 30 per cent of the population has water every day. The majority of people get water twice a week, once a week, and some of them get none.

Now, let us get into the business of national security. After two hours and 15 minutes into the budget came the much awaited national security which took all but five minutes to discuss. What did the Minister say? Nada! Nothing! She said she left it up to the Minister of National Security who came here today and presented a wonderful effort—Minister, I commend you, Sir, for the efforts you said that you all are embarking upon, but the bottom line is, our country is in a crisis. Where are you seeing the results that are reducing the murder rates and the road carnage? In fact, we have seen an increase.

On this note on security, about two months ago, our Prime Minister encouraged members of the PNM to wear red which is the colour usually worn in the PNM, and I am wondering how prophetic that request was, considering that it seems to me that we are really seeing red in this country, particularly in the last two weeks. It is a sad thing. It breaks my heart, and I am sure that it hurts everyone to think of the bloodshed that is taking place in our country. Even by our own standards we are in trouble. Five people were gunned down in a bar; a family accident left one person dead; and two foreigners were brutally murdered and burnt to death in Tobago. The murder rate is so astronomical. The Ministry of National Security is missing a real component which is the social aspect. Mr. Minister, it is not all about blimps, it is about social reform. This is how you can address the crime situation. You have to look at social reform.
This Government has used the services of foreign consultants. You heard the Minister talk about Mastrofski. We had somebody from the United Kingdom before Mastrofski; and now we have a Canadian, Major General Ross. What benefits did these guys bring? None! I am not impressed with these foreigners. You, my colleagues, might be impressed with these foreigners, but I am not impressed with them at all. We have qualified persons right here in this country. [Desk thumping] Sitting in this very Senate is Prof. Ramesh Deosaran who has headed the Criminology Centre at the University of the West Indies and who has shown tremendous research on how to go about transforming and changing things, and you have him sitting here—a psychologist, to say the least, a social scientist and a criminologist—and you have brought in Mastrofski and Ross and so on and we are not seeing any benefit. We have to reform the social agenda and put money in the budget and use our own people. We have to target at-risk families, community programmes and work more closely with social development NGOs and our own local people.

With respect to this issue of psychometric tests, the Minister of National Security made reference to the use of psychometric tests which have been used to determine the psychological status and intellectual capacity of our police officers. That is what psychometric tests do. Let me tell you that those tests are foreign based. They were not and were never standardized on our population here in Trinidad and Tobago. I have written books in this area, so I speak from a place of authority. They should not be used in the first place, because if the assessment is wrong, the diagnosis will be wrong and the intervention will be wrong. This is why, in spite of the many efforts you have made and have put forward, today we cannot see the benefit because your assessment tools are wrong. [Desk thumping]

With respect to the budget as it pertains to Tobago, I want to just take a minute to speak on that. The cost of living in Tobago—I am sure my colleagues from Tobago may highlight this in more detail—is about 20 per cent above the national average. Tobago has to pay more for foodstuff, building materials and so on. On average, my colleagues in Tobago tell me that they spend about $1,000 more than we spend here just to exist with the different costings for things in Tobago.

It was hoped that we would have seen a greater budget allocation to Tobago. Several Tobagonians converted their homes into guest houses, and this was in order to supplement their income. This is a good thing. We are not supposed to
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[SEN. DR. GOPAUL-MCNICOL]

have property tax increases that will affect persons who are trying to make a living and adjust to a standard of living that is even 20 per cent higher than the standard of living here. I think a fairer and equitable distribution of the funds should have been allocated to people in Tobago in this budget.

In general, I want to be clear. I look forward to the day when all elected Members of Parliament have their own budget to work with, even those in Opposition, so a Member of Parliament could run his or her constituency and not the Government. This is what independence should have brought to us.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to discuss, in the context of the budget, how the political philosophies and the political practices have crippled our society and limited us from reaching our potential. First of all, the PNM has been in existence for 53 years; 42 years of which they have governed this country—from 1956—1986, and 30 years were uninterrupted years. They could have put in place any programme that they wanted to benefit the people of this country. Therefore, this PNM-led administration has no moral authority to be questioning an administration that was in government for six years, and comparing them to that administration. It is a flagrant insult, quite frankly, to all of us. You had the ability to correct any problems that you wanted in this society and you did not.

When a country is under colonial rule—this is exactly what a top-down model is all about, and this is exactly what you have done by including all of these fascinations with foreigners. You have taken us back into a colonial place with colonial masters and the focus being on a few persons at the top and the majority at the bottom do not matter.

The focus is also on foreign control. So, we hear about importing food. We were told today that when we go into the tea room we are going to have locally produced juices and this was not the case. This was probably a joke the Minister was making. [Interruption] He spoke about carrot juices. The person said that it is not locally produced. The point is this fascination with foreign things. The Government has a fascination with what is foreign. We have top contractors and yet we hire foreign contractors. Who built the Twin Towers? Our local people did. The Government practises a top-down approach. This is what has crippled the society. It is time that we decolonize ourselves psychologically and assume our independence both politically and psychologically. The money belongs to the 1.3 million people; not parliamentarians. We must begin to look seriously at sharing the wealth in this society if we intend to eradicate poverty.
I would have liked to see a greater budget for our seniors and the poor, instead of all this smelter and so on that is of no use and which could only bring harm to our people. Let us spend our money on eradicating poverty and securing the well-being of our children and our elderly.

Mr. Vice-President, we are piling huge debts on the next generation, and maintaining the status quo is not acceptable. Our country’s character is at stake. It is about education, health, national security and food for the poor. Let us chose, for once, to be on the side of the people who need us to save their lives; the poor and the disenfranchised. I want to take this opportunity to thank the UNC Opposition for something that I have in my own research as I study through the writing of my books and so on.

6.10 p.m.

As I looked at your policies, it warmed my heart quite frankly—Wade, I want you to convey this to the Opposition Leader and certainly I will—when I looked at the fact that there was at least one administration in this country's development that took into consideration the people at the bottom. My life's work has always been about the bottom; it has never been about the top, and this is why I fundamentally could never fit into certain social and political organizations, because my life's work is all about the people at the bottom. [Desk thumping]

I want to commend the UNC for its efforts in the six years that you were in government. [Crosstalk] [Laughter] You were able to demonstrate something that they did not in their 43 years of governing this country. It is against that background that I want to say today, that given my contribution and all the research that I have done, I could never support this budget.

Mr. Vice-President, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to take part in the debate. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Helen Drayton: Mr. Vice-President, thank you. Very quickly, I want to open by following through with an item in the budget, which is the increase in the motor and vehicle traffic fees. Now, quite frankly, this has no place in the budget; it is not a fiscal measure; this is a penalty for breaking the law. Are you going to tell me the next time around, the fees or penalties for smoking marijuana or something like that would be put in the budget? It is not a fiscal measure. I understand why it has been increased, to deter crime, but it should not be seen in the budget as a revenue generating device. So, I think the budget should actually be amended to remove that.
With reference to Sen. The hon. Martin Joseph, I was pleased to see that they are working on the various pieces of legislation that would facilitate initiatives with respect to the crime situation, and with specific reference to legislation to outlaw gangs. I imagine that he is referring here to criminal gangs and therefore, I do not think they should unduly delay any action to such legislation, with respect to consideration of not infringing rights.

To the matter of rogue forces in the police service, I had hoped that the Minister would have driven home a little more—the Minister of National Security and by extension, the Government, cannot constitutionally hire, discipline, promote or fire police officers, and therefore, it is evident that the system, whether it is the Police Service Commission system that was put in place about 50 years ago, needs to be revisited in a very objective and impartial way.

Whether we speak of training, retooling or re-skilling commissioners, that is one thing, or it needs to be overhauled entirely, but clearly the current system is not serving our citizens. I winced a bit when the Minister was calling out the salaries for certain ranks of police officers, because even after a 60 per cent increase to the lower ranks, and considering that now they would be paying more property tax, it was much less than a cleaner in TSTT or T&TEC is taking home. So, when we speak of crime and we speak of matters within the police service, I think we have to get real with the issues.

The only other matter in this regard, is the recruitment of a commissioner of police. I hope that the authorities are concerned that their first priority is to find the best possible candidate, and that the compensation threshold that would facilitate recruiting the best candidate, would be reviewed. A $25,000 basic salary for a police commissioner in this day and age, is much less—Let me put it this way, the head of major security companies in Trinidad and Tobago is earning twice that. It is a matter that warrants serious consideration. Be that as it may, I move on.

There has been much criticism of the budget, as there has been in previous years. There is an old African saying that: "The path is made by walking" and indeed, we have entered a path which we have traversed before. Since we know the pitfalls, I hope that we have the confidence and the wisdom not to go too far down that path. It is a path, a process where citizens experienced many hardships.

I was reading a headline in the newspapers, I think it was yesterday, where the Hon. Prime Minister made mention that there were those who believe that the administration is leading the country down a murky and treacherous path, and he
sought to assure us that is not so and we need not have fear. What I am about to say is with full recognition that our very young country has experienced much progress. We see this in the pioneering spirit of many of our entrepreneurs in manufacturing and others in business generally, who emerged in the 1950s and 1960s.

We have seen these business concerns grow from strength to strength. They moved from being local players to regional players, and in some instances, international players. I speak of manufacturers and innovators such as Angostura, Fernandez, Associated Brands, Neal & Massy, McAl, Century Elson, KC Confectionery and many other companies. And of course, you have many small businesses in the agro business sector that employ thousands of our citizens and who have made and continue to make an excellent contribution.

So, the contribution of our manufacturers, although it still represents a very small percentage of the GDP, 7 per cent to 8 per cent, and it has been stagnant around there for some time, I do not think that we can underestimate that contribution. Also, we have seen the growth of a competitive and robust banking and financial sector.

I just want to speak a while with respect to the financial services sector, especially as the Government continues with its initiatives with respect to the International Financial Centre. Four years after Trinidad and Tobago, in 2005 T&T Mutual Evaluation Review with respect to anti-terrorism and money laundering issues, we are still largely non-compliant with the 40-plus recommendations, and the legislative framework that is supposed to be in place.

Urgent action is now required to prevent Trinidad and Tobago from being shortlisted in the Caribbean Anti-terrorism Task Force Plenary that is to take place in October. The likely fallout, if we are blacklisted is, increased cost to the country in international borrowing, decreased foreign investment, a negative impact on the country's IFC plans, the pressure on local banks, correspondent banking relationships and the potential long term reputational damage.

So, I am urging that the Government give serious attention to this. Time is very short, it has to update the legislation to the Proceeds of Crime (Amdt.) Bill, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the financial obligations regulations. As I said, that plenary is in October and the Government has to ensure the adequate financial, human and technical resources are in place to set up that Financial Intelligence Unit.

I cannot recall seeing anything with respect to that in the budget statements but we have made mention of the plans for the International Financial Centre. So, that is a critical issue.
PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. In accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the contribution of the next two speakers.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

Sen. H. Drayton: Thank you. Just to make reference to the public sector. There has been growth and development of a vibrant energy sector which continues to dominate the industrial landscape. I think it is fair to say that the Government has put some of the national revenues to good use with respect to education, social programmes for children, the youth and the elderly, and in health, more specifically medication, and of course, the low cost housing. I think these things need to be recognized.

I am not going to be harsh on agriculture and the little space given to it in the budget, because I think there is a genuine renewed interest in agricultural development. You have been promoting greater food security. In fact, in 2008, the sector reawakened, it showed some growth of about 10.8 per cent. We lost momentum because of the climate conditions. Also, we had seen about a 50 per cent decline with respect to several produced items in the period 2004—2008.

Certainly, the will is needed to continue to implement with urgency, the plans in the budget to improving access roads, drainage and praedial larceny situation. I find your little task force, whatever rangers you call them, sounds a little too clichéd and “Mickey Mousey”. You probably need to enhance the whole name of that force. It is not just a name but give it some substance, also, the facilities to develop acreage.

The fact that so many citizens are skeptical and many of us feel that we have entered a threatening path, is not without merit. When the deficits projected for 2009 is 6.3 and for 2010 is 5.3, which is well over the 3 per cent guideline of the IMF, there is cause for concern. It is okay on one hand to use international benchmarks to highlight our good performance, we cannot then turn around and ignore the benchmarks that if we adhere to them or follow those guidelines, it would keep us in good economic standing. There are some of us who believe that we should not be here at all, not so soon, not with the windfalls we have enjoyed over the past few years.
There is much merit in the feeling of skepticism when the gross public service ratio climbs to 31.3 per cent for 2009, again, which is well over the IMF guidelines of 25 per cent. In the Government’s own words, the contraction of our economy actually started way back in 2007. So, it was the time for reflection. It was the time to begin to prioritize and to review our 2020 plans and see how we are moving from there.

Deficit financing is the route that we took when the economy contracted in 2008 and we had to pay dearly in terms of repayment and structural adjustments in the 1990s. We have to remember that there has been no change since then in the structure of the economy. We are still totally reliant on the energy sector, which contributes 41 per cent of GDP, 57 per cent of our revenues, about 88 per cent of our exports, but only 4 per cent of the total employment.

6.25 p.m.

The significance of this is our continued vulnerability to shocks. I think Sen. Ramkhelawon made mention of the energy sector prices. I will just speak very briefly with respect to the projected gas price of $2.75 and we have to recognize that the price is below that at this point in time and we have seen that past predictions—

Sen. Browne: Above that.

Sen. H. Drayton: It is above that? It is just that? When you consider that there will be an increase in the future supply with discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico, in Africa, in Egypt, there is an equal possibility that prices will remain fairly depressed as they are likely to increase to the $3, $4, et cetera.

I paid close attention to what the experts at BG Trinidad were saying in their recent presentation and one thing is clear, that there will be different opinions among experts. I was reviewing another expert analysis which was in the Explorers edition that “natural gas reserves are no longer considered a serious constraint in satisfying the global needs. This is due to the changes in technology, the policies and strategies in gas exploration risk management and the investment decisions.” The report went on to say that “North America is the only area where reserves have gone down, and in any event there is a 90 per cent replacement ratio.” But Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America have strengthened reserves well beyond the cumulated production.

“Technology has facilitated assessing large quantities of less expensive and high quality data which result in great increases in productivity at lower cost”, and the driving force behind natural gas exploration is the reduction in finding cost.
So are we being very optimistic with respect to the $2.75? If that is not based on some concrete understanding then there is no reason to believe that projected deficits for 2010 will, in fact, not increase. The deficit financing itself is not a bad thing if we are not going to be crowding out the private sector and in any event, one should not be too pessimistic. This shock that we are experiencing is long overdue to rein in the waste that was taking place.

Mr. Vice-President, my issue with the budget is that given the state of the economy, I think that more emphasis should have been placed on more stimulant measures for the private sector, especially our export manufacturers. That is on the one hand, and on the other hand using what I term basic household common sense guidelines with respect to placing emphasis on the priorities and what I would term the quality of life spending. The stimulant for the private sector of the increase in the incentive, the capital acceleration relief of 75 per cent to 90 per cent is not really going to benefit our export manufacturers in this economic climate with falling sales. Their need is to maintain current capacity.

Sen. Browne: Just in response to that, if I might point out that approximately 70 per cent of the manufacturing sector exports. Almost 70 per cent of the output is exported, so that any form of stimulus package in the domestic sector does not help it. The reality is, if it is already driven on the basis of export growth it has to find additional market and that underlies the argument for giving them the opportunity to retool in a much more competitive place and a competitive space which is exactly where we are, and also to take advantage of the larger markets as they exist outside, because ours is too small for us to have long lines of debt in terms of quantum reproducing for the domestic market. So there is always going to be built on an export principle for which we have to be more competitive.

Sen. H. Drayton: So, I concur with what you are saying, and the next question—in fact, I was going to ask, given their need for retooling, really, what initiatives have been taken with the sector in terms of exploring new markets. The manufacturing sector was once net earners of foreign exchange.

Sen. Browne: Still are.

Sen. H. Drayton: Yes? They are now net users of foreign exchange? Are there initiatives in that direction? As you rightly said the answer is in finding larger markets.

So I just want to get back to my point that what they need is to remain competitive, they need to continue to use their planned capacity, their need is to maintain their levels of employment. So I appreciate the fact that there are no easy
answers, but I feel that greater initiatives must be taken in that regard. Of course there is a major question to be asked. We keep talking about economic diversification, and just today I saw a headline where the Central Bank Governor was talking about a stronger business culture and speaking to the fact that we need to do something about this in our education system. But where you have a situation of 40 per cent to 50 per cent of our graduates migrating, it is a matter of serious concerns, and a question has to be asked, where is the new generation of entrepreneurs? Where are the new pioneers, the sons and daughters of those pioneers and professionals of the '50s and '60s that I referred to earlier on?

This is a time for reflection; it is a time for consolidation; it is a time for maintaining and making proper use of what we have. There were other excellent initiatives with respect to increasing the mobilization fee for small contractors from 10 per cent to 30 per cent and of course the expansion of the NEDCO financing for small business.

Now, I also should acknowledge the fact that there is an array of incentives for manufacturers currently in place, but I think we need to sit down; you need to put your heads together and look at the relevance of those incentives in today's business climate. Even more so, from year to year when we get the Review of the Economy, of course you get a historical perspective for the past four or five years. You get an idea of the next year, but you are not seeing any targets, any projections; what is the expectation of the Government with respect to the productive sector? What is the expectation with respect to its contribution to GDP over the next five years? Because it is only if you set certain goals you could develop the relevant strategies to get there. So what I am basically saying is that there needs to be greater coherence with respect to planning so that we can make more meaningful strides. I think we have to focus on priorities, and as I said, there is reason for skepticism.

I have to ask the question, we have implemented a Water Taxi Service to give citizens an option—excellent, fine—and we have spent $250 million and over the past year we have achieved 2,500 passengers over eight round trips. I know it is still very early, but on what basis are we making a decision to implement four more water taxis? What are the revenue projections? What is the cost of maintenance? What are the overheads? So from the perspective of planning there are serious concerns. The Government is planning for a deficit of over $7.7 billion for 2010. I have to ask—it comes down to household—if you are projecting a
decline in revenues then one is looking to place an emphasis on the priorities. So I have to question. I have gone through the budget and I did not look at the big items, I looked at the small items, because I know when you add up the small nice things to have, it totals hundreds of millions of dollars.

A website for the Customs and Excise is nearly $2 million.


Sen. H. Drayton: You say it is necessary—$2 million—I do not know if we would spend that in the corporate world to put up a website, so you have to ask yourself many questions. A Diplomatic Academy, $5 million—


Sen. H. Drayton: Okay, that is great. Perhaps we need a Diplomatic Academy, but surely in the current circumstances can that not be aligned to the university, school of international relations?


Sen. H. Drayton: Well, whatever. But really do we need—we are looking at priorities. You are taxing citizens to raise revenues. There needs to be a balance between priorities and the great things that we want to have.

When you see $17 million for the Ministry of Information and included in that is $4 million for digitization of NBM media collection for access as a cultural heritage material via a government portal, you ask yourself: are we dealing with priorities? With respect to the rapid rail allocation of $30 million, we spent almost $105 million in 2008; $80 million in 2009; $30 million for 2010, and I am sure that I heard the Minister of Finance saying that this will be put on ice for the time being.

I too have a concern with Maracas Bay, if you talk about developing tourism. Maracas Bay is domestic tourism, and the plant that you have there you have not been maintaining. You have not been enforcing the law. You cannot enjoy Maracas Bay with the big boom boxes, with the litter, with cars parked all along the roadside, not in the car park, but under a no parking sign. The public utilities smell. So why not maintain? The low hanging fruit we spoke of earlier on. What you have and you are going to invest more money and you cannot maintain—partly because you do not have the resources—what you have.

Millions will be spent on roadworks. That is fine, but nobody ever looks after the pavements. Then I have to say that Port of Spain has returned to the pre-summit state, after all the moneys that were spent in cleaning up. So it is back to
being a big urinal, the vagrants, the rubbish, the stench, and that is a slap in the face, because a great deal of money was spent to improve Port of Spain and it took a matter of weeks—it is like when you spend so much money on a Carnival costume, you jump up Carnival Monday and Tuesday, and Ash Wednesday it is on the roadside, and that is the way Port of Spain has been treated.

Then you have the Academy for the Performing Arts building which dwarfs a savannah slum. The Princess Building Museum, a tourist attraction, but it is a big embarrassment. Then there is the construction or proposed construction of a National Carnival Centre. I suppose we all would love a National Carnival Centre. One has to ask is it a bread and butter issue with a projection of $7.7 billion deficit. There is reason for people to be concerned and to be skeptical, because we are walking down a road that we have been before.

When I say a need for reflection, if you go through and you look at the amounts that are being spent on projects such as the Performing Arts Centre, what concerns me, in each case I am seeing conference facilities. Conference facilities in the performing Arts Centre; conference facilities that will go into the National Carnival Centre, new conference facilities at UTT, O'Meara Campus, San Fernando Technical, John Donaldson, Valsayn Teachers College—plus current plant—Queen's Hall, hotels and other private plant such as Movie Towne.

6.40 p.m.

Has anyone stopped to think whether we will be using that capacity, or whether the income Queen's Hall, for instance, is getting now will be lost? Has anyone stopped to think whether we need all those conference facilities that will result in excess capacity, high maintenance? It simply does not make sense. Then when you speak of the Tarouba Stadium, okay, it is there, it has been talked and talked about. So let us say that comes to pass; but has the Government also considered the overcapacity? Because you have current facilities in terms of the northern stadium which is underutilized; you have Queen's Park Oval which is underutilized; you have lots of stadia around the place, like the Manny Ramjohn, the Ato Boldon, all underutilized; and a number of these venues, to raise revenues is Carnival fete. So you ask yourself, are we looking at needs and whether there will be an overcapacity? Who is going to use it? We are not using now what we have, and when we speak about the sports academy and regional initiatives, all the islands in Caricom, you name them, they have either upgraded their sporting facilities or built new facilities—their own little academies.
So I ask the question, whether we should put things like a Carnival museum and all these facilities before the continued aggressive expansion of the family court, the Children's Authority and building a state-of-the-art correctional facility for the youth because when you bring your anti-criminal gang legislation, you would need to rehabilitate them. So the question is a balance with respect to our priorities, and we should not be focusing on the things that we would like to have. I understand that there has been some dragging of the feet with respect to the Children's Authority. I know that we have put in place the board members, but I could say without contradiction, that there are two children’s homes at this point in time where children are at risk and need the focus of the Children's Authority. So I hope that all stops are being pulled out in that regard.

Reference is made in the budget about deepening the industrialization process, and mention of a steel plant, but in the Review of the Economy on page 25, it states that iron and steel products declined by over 58 per cent, October 2008 to 2009. So is there a study to suggest that in the foreseeable future, there will be a great international demand?

I will speak briefly with respect to the property tax, because I too have a problem with this tax in terms of the size. I agree that it needs to be reviewed. I agree that we need to update the system, but to jump from amounts that are $100 a year in some instances to $5,000 and $7,000, I think that is unreasonable and it is unfair. And to use the argument that the current law it is 10 per cent and this is only 3 per cent, it is really a non-starter in the debate because there is no comparison between what expected rentals were 40 to 50 years ago, and what they are today. So you are taking a system that was devised as you have said 40-something, 50-something years ago and you are looking to impose it in a different way, in a recessionary time.

So what in effect the Government is saying to us, is that those who are already bearing the bulk of taxation one way or the other, that is where the burden will be placed. What the Government is saying is that we failed to address the matter for 47 years, so now pay for the inefficiencies, pay for the mismanagement of these affairs for the last four decades and for the future.

**Sen. Browne:** With respect, there are parts of Trinidad where the rates are levied at 10 per cent at current rates. San Fernando is one of them.

**Sen. H. Drayton:** So, I do not think to address that imbalance and that situation is to now, in this time, implement it in this manner. I do have a problem with it. All this talk about international best practice, although we know it is as
old as Moses or whoever, if we look at what is happening internationally, there are one or two countries that are now updating that and using different methodologies, and you are not there yet delivering the service that we can expect after we have paid this tax.

The Town and Country Planning, whoever it is, again, we have been paying people who are supposed to administer certain laws—we the taxpayers—and they have not been doing it. So that in one area you could have two houses the same size, the same number of rooms; one could rent for $10,000, one could rent for $2,000. Okay, you say you are doing it on an individual basis, but it is hard for us to have confidence when you have not been collecting, as low as it is, you have not been enforcing the existing laws and as I see it, Peter will be paying for Paul here. In reality there are over 350,000, 375,000, somewhere there, dwelling units, and if there are reasonable rates and if there is enforcement, there will be equity. And since that annual taxable value is based on the expected rental value, I want to be assured that the rental value in making the assessment, the expected rates with respect to expatriates, will not be a factor with respect to certain communities because that market has a very transient profile.

I have not really heard what measures will be taken to alleviate the burden on pensioners who are on fixed incomes. So really, I am urging that the Government reconsider the extent of this tax, how it is going about it, which will have an effect of sending up prices in virtually every area. And too many variables existing across individual circumstances which really will render the situation grossly inequitable. In our market there are always many, many distortions. Just getting back to international systems, you will see that they would exempt charitable organizations, they exempt private and public educational institutions and they exempt institutions such as the homes for the aged and other types of charitable institutions. So I feel that what the Government could do here is simply look at the tiers again, and where pensioners are concerned, they should not be trying to select one group of pensioners, as against the others.

In Trinidad it is very difficult to determine what real income is in certain situations, and I am sure that the Minister responsible for housing has already experienced that in terms of the distribution, also with respect to the Smart Card. So, one wants to be reasonable. I think that the Government should reduce that property tax average percentage for pensioners. I think that the Government has to
look at the difference between the property tax to be paid by persons who are owner/occupiers, viz a viz the people who are renting their homes, and as I indicated already, exemptions for our charitable institutions. I think that is reasonable. I am aware that when you make exemptions which are fully justified, the burden somewhere down the line is passed on.

However, I want to submit that this need not be so with less waste and greater focus on priorities. I think we could find a lot of money in the budgets of a lot of those departments. One glaring example why this is so unfair and I want to touch up with it very, very quickly, and that is the example with respect to individual’s safety and security. I heard what the Minister said, but it is the middle class who spend millions of dollars annually on security. You have to put up the burglar proofing; you have to put up your burglar alarm; you live in an area where you have formed communities, so you are paying $2,000, $2,500 in fees for your community for security; and all the other money that you are spending for security for you and your property, that is not tax refundable and that is not fair. Because whatever reasons exist for the crime as it is today, the first and foremost responsibility of a government is safety and security. [Desk thumping] And since it does not exist to the degree that it should exist, and we have to bear the burden of security, then it makes sense.

It makes sense that these amounts you spend on security systems for your property, be tax refundable because if that is going to encourage citizens to put in more systems, then that could only redound to the safety of the country, generally.

So that you want to tax income, you want to tax property, and then you tell me pay for security because that is what I have to do, and that is unfair. So I urge the Government to factor that in its considerations. You want to put the property tax, then refund the individual, because we must spend on security, because that is your job and we are paying you to do it. We are paying you through income tax. That is fair and it is reasonable. And remember when the Government says that it is providing all the wonderful social programmes, all the housing for the less privileged, the squatter resettlement, it is we, who are paying for that. We are paying for all those social programmes.

So when you squeeze the middle class like that, and the only thing between the criminal and you, is us, what that means? It is we who are paying. It is we, the citizens, who are paying and we are paying dearly, and this is the reason why the Government is talking about 2020—[Interruption]

Sen. Browne: All of us are paying.
Sen. H. Drayton:—and talking about a business culture, but our people are migrating. The best minds are migrating. I speak of our university graduates, and do a study. Let the CSO, who sit down in ivory towers—and we pay for them too—find out how many of our businessmen run their businesses here from Miami—they are not bringing their children here—or Canada, or Barbados. They have gone. So when you ask where are your entrepreneurs, where you are going to get the growth, they have gone, and until the Government could restore that trust and confidence, 2020 will be a shell. We will have the physical, whatever you call it, but we are not going to have the quality of life that you are looking for, for your citizens.

The pace of change is frenzied, and I agree with Sen. Ramkhelawan, that the buoyancy of the past years that we are looking for in near future, that is not coming back. It was false. It was built on all the shadow banking. It was built on greed. All that has come crashing down, the system has to adjust. So that to say we are not going down a certain path, I think the only saving grace here is that we have walked it before, and we ought to have the wisdom to handle it better than we handled it in the ’80s and ’90s.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to close by urging the Government to reconsider its initiatives with respect to the manufacturing centre, how you are going to deal with our brain drain—that is important, the property tax, our pensioners, and of course, you need to nurture your middle class and not squeeze them out of the system.

Thank you. [Desk thumping]

6.55 p.m.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Vice-President, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for being afforded the opportunity this evening to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2010) Bill, and like my colleagues on this side of the House, I want to convey the same sentiment to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, for his equally brilliant presentation. Both presentations focused on stabilizing the economy; they focused
on the fact that we needed to achieve optimum growth and efficiency in the various sectors. Both presentations called on the Government and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to strengthen efficiencies and to address challenges to optimize growth and development of this country.

Mr. Vice-President, I was a little taken aback by the Member on the other side, Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol, who did not seem to remember that somewhere in 2001/2002 when this Government took office, we were also very concerned, at that time, about optimizing growth and development. When this Government looked at the information and the statistics, as it took over, it became very alarmed.

When this administration resumed leadership in 2001, the available data at that point in time indicated that 35 per cent of the population was living below the poverty line. The country began to recover slowly from a period in which absolutely nothing took place. Nothing was done, by the very callous UNC administration, to assist the poor; the statistics showed it. Maybe they were too busy with their airport scandals and with entertaining their short pants men, et cetera; maybe she was not there at that time. Within a few years, under this Government, the 2005 report on the survey of living conditions, revealed a poverty rate of 16.7 per cent. We moved from 35 per cent in the year 2001 to 16.7 per cent in the year 2005.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Where is the budget? [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: I am just responding to what was said on the other side. All this is part of the budget.

So concerned were we throughout that time that we deliberately developed a special document to place before Parliament annually, as we reviewed the economy each year. This document spoke to the social sector; this is it; [Sen. Manning displays document] the Social Sector Investment Programme for this year, 2010. This did not exist in 2001; the concern was not there in 2001. It is in this document that we take the time every year to put in context our Social Sector Investment Programme.

We started this year speaking about the Caribbean, putting it in the regional context, the Caribbean social situation, a regional economic development, regional integration, and regional social development. As you go through the document, we speak, as we have spoken in others, about education, labour and unemployment, poverty assessment and reduction, health and crime, et cetera, because as leaders of the Caribbean we are all concerned about poverty. We are
all concerned about what is happening in the region, and the leaders get together, the heads get together annually to ensure that they put the programmes in place to alleviate poverty in the Caribbean.

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** Tell us about it! [Interrupt]

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** That is chapter 3; you have not read your document. Chapter 3 talks about Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the Caribbean. It is in chapter 3 that you would see the movement from 35 per cent to 16.7 per cent, and the things that we are putting in place to ensure that not many of our people fall below that poverty line. The document exists. I want to recommend this document to the Members on the other side—the National Situation, chapter 4, an introduction, Pillar I, Developing Innovative People, Education and Tertiary Education.

We are ensuring that all our people, from nursery to tertiary, get free education. That is part of alleviating the poverty issue. We are ensuring that we provide skills, so that our people could use their skills to take them out of poverty. That is what we are doing. We have moved from 9 per cent, when they were in power, to over 40 per cent now entering tertiary education. It is better late than never. They did not do it when they were there. I am sure she does not have a sense of what existed at that time. She was not there then.

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** I was here; I lived in this country.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** We looked at nurturing a caring society; go through it. We looked at health issues, HIV/AIDS, infant mortality, road safety. All of them we study, we look at the needs and we do the analysis and attempt to find solutions to the problems. I really want to recommend this document to the Members on the other side; I am talking about the Social Sector Investment Programme 2010.

At the Ministry of Local Government we have spent the last seven years also attempting to address challenges, to strengthen our efficiencies. I am glad I am coming after the Member on the other side, because I want to say to everyone that when you are talking about starting at the bottom, you are talking about the Ministry of Local Government. [Desk thumping]

When we talk about local government, we deal with the man in the street. We deal with all our burgesses one by one and we listen; we listen to them. As we listen to them, we put structures and systems in place to eradicate the irritants that they have been identifying for us.
To make sure that we have it right, we have gone back to the MORI polls of 2003 and 2008. Those scientific polls have been able to highlight for us some of the challenges that the man in the street has been saying. There is a call by the citizens for improvement and better maintenance of neighbourhood facilities. These are some of the challenges they have; it is what they have been calling and asking for: improvement and better maintenance of neighbourhood facilities. Citizens were more dissatisfied than satisfied with their local government bodies; we listened.

Most of our citizens did not feel informed about local government and were most likely to describe it as providing slow and poor service; that was what they said. Those are the challenges that we have to face. Citizens expressed satisfaction with several individual local services such as street lighting, garbage disposal, street cleaning, but they were not at all pleased with the state of our infrastructure, notably our drainage and local roads. Our customer rating declined between 2007 and 2008. Our citizens wanted local government to be reformed, but many were skeptical about whether the Government was interested in listening to the people.

Mr. Vice-President, this Government has been listening. In this Government's opinion the concerns of the citizens were, and still are, a challenge to be addressed and tackled. Therefore, we have begun to strengthen the institutions and strengthen the systems, to ensure that we bring about effective, efficient and quality delivery of services.

These challenges identified, again in the MORI polls, were also underscored in the comments by citizens. During public consultations between 2004, when the previous Minister was there, and 2008, when I became the Minister of Local Government, we were outside there holding public consultations. We met more than 14,000 persons; the man at the bottom, out at the little community centres, school halls, under homes listening and talking; the man at the bottom. There were 14,000 of them in all, representing 400 stakeholder institutions and organizations.

We have been told that there were more attendees than any other public consultation that any other government has been able to hold in this country. We were able to listen to the poor, to the middle class, to the working poor and to the rich; they all came and we listened. [Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol exits Chamber]

It is a pity that the hon. Member is walking out. But Members of this Upper House, we have attempted to address these challenges in the context of the
overriding government policy. We have been guided by the goals of the two pillars in Vision 2020: Promoting Effective Governance and Investing in Sound Infrastructural Environment.

Again, I want to go back to the polls. The MORI polls in 2008 said that 66 per cent of the same population we are talking to, the man at the bottom, did not know much about local government. Therefore, we thought that it was our responsibility to empower the citizens of this country to be able to participate in the decision making process. In this regard, we involved and engaged our key stakeholders in the decision making process.

One of the things we did in the Ministry was to put in place a project management board. We went to Cabinet and got the approval, because we identified our clients. We put them on a board and we meet with them twice monthly in the Ministry, the members of all the trade unions, they represent the workers who work with us.

7.10 p.m.

We also have on that board, village and community councils; we have on that board the Association of Local Government Authorities. We have on that board, members of staff of the Ministry of Local Government. “We embrace all”; we even use that phrase as our motto. We embrace all, we plan with all and that group will help us to monitor what is happening, and therefore, that board meets twice monthly and all projects are discussed and approved before they are implemented.

Mr. Vice-President, this process saves time and money; it is collaborative and sets the foundation for the efficient implementation of all projects. At this point in time there are 12 projects before that board. And so, we are building a platform of participatory democracy and in doing that we are using electronic media, information communication technology and we are using that to empower the citizens and the communities.

You see our aim, Mr. Vice-President, is to put in place what we are calling a virtual City Hall or a virtual Town Hall. And, therefore, in that way again to empower those at the bottom, to empower all of us to ensure that our citizens can access information, we are putting that information outside there using the new technology. The goal is to enable them to download minutes from council meetings, to be clear about the decisions that have been taken by council, to apply for rent. For example, you may find that members of the community may want to rent a park, the community centre, they may want to rent the Town Hall, or they...
may want to conduct business or events. So that they can through that system, to
do exactly that and to obtain information too, to access property taxes, to pay bills
et cetera and do business on line.

This I-City plan for local Government has two main focal areas; first it is
citizen-centric providing electronic services to citizens, removing demographic
limitations so somebody can stay in Piparo where a new centre has been opened
up and access information from somewhere else. They do not have to come to
town; they do not even have to go to Princes Town, the main centre, to access
information. And the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Social
Development are working really very hard to ensure that the system is up and
running to deliver services over the electronic media.

The second focal area, Mr. Vice-President, is to create a robust infrastructure
that facilitates the integration of information within the municipalities. So
therefore, within the Ministry of Local Government, we can meet online with
other agencies and do business. And right now we are doing that with our
companies and our regional corporations. This approach would allow the
correlation of efforts and the sharing of information to improve decision making
and policy information. So we are using the Internet, we are using the network to
be able to talk to each other.

A successful example, Mr. Vice-President, of this collaborative approach is
when 20 agencies came together to be able to solve the problems of flooding,
waste collection and disposal and of beautification of Trinidad and Tobago. And I
am sure when you look around that you will notice that the country seems to look
a little cleaner, a little more beautiful, and I am hearing the concern for downtown
Port of Spain by the Senator on the other side. That is a special challenge we have
and we are working with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of
Works and Transport to ensure that we get that particular challenge removed.

I am sure you will realize that the floods are less in duration and intensity, and
when the floods are there the runoff is quick because in conjunction with the
Ministry of Works and Transport, URP and CEPEP, we have identified the seven
main drains in downtown Port of Spain and have been able to clean them.

We have been able to use the gulley sucker in Port of Spain to work
effectively and efficiently to remove some of the debris in those drains. Right now
that gulley sucker is moving from region to region as they attempt to clean the
drains in those other areas.
According to MORI poll 2008, 55 per cent of persons felt that the local
government wastes taxpayers' money, another challenge that we have. Over the
years, successive Auditor General Reports have highlighted certain types of
inefficiencies within the corporations and we thought it imperative that we
modernize the financial system, financial management and the accounting
systems in keeping with international best practices.

To do this, we know that we have to change the basic accounting from cash to
the accrual method, where we have new accounting rules and procedures and we
have to computerize the accounting system.

Mr. Vice-President, we are working to put all these new systems in place. This
will allow us to adopt a cost accounting system that will enable a more effective
implementation of output budgeting as enunciated by the Minister of Finance.
Furthermore, it will aid in the implementation of result-based management system
as again we seek to make sure that the system is more efficient and it improves
the management of the whole governance system.

And so, Mr. Vice-President, and Members of this honourable House, the
transformation of the local government system in part will be determined by the
quality of service we can deliver, by the prudent management of the resources and
by the cost management control that we are putting in place. We would make sure
that we have value for the money spent and that there is effective monitoring and
evaluation and financial accountability and transparency taking place. All of these
systems are in place.

So let me tell you what is actually happening at this point in time. The
ministry therefore, to ensure that these things are taking place, has computerized
the monthly cheque listing system which allows for the easier reconciliation to
realignment of the staff and other resources within the departments.

We are, at this point in time, mapping and accounting the processes and
procedures which will be codified as we finish, and made into desk manuals. At
this point in time, we are rationalizing the internal audit function to focus more on
comprehensive and management audit. We are rationalizing the procurement
management system with emphasis on predetermined standards and revised
criteria for selection, performance management, for monitoring, evaluating and
reviewing during execution.

Mr. Vice-President, we have established a fixed asset management system
which is currently being rolled out as we speak, throughout all the departments.
We have established and operationalized an electronic reporting format for all
departments. So we are putting systems in place, Mr. Vice-President, to ensure standardizing across the board and bringing efficiencies to bear. All these features will ultimately be rolled out to the municipal corporations so at the end of the day, we are going to be on the same financial page monitoring, and auditing to ensure that we have in place a more efficient system so that our day-to-day operations would be properly looked after.

According to MORI again in 2008, 55 per cent of our citizens disagreed that the quality of local services is good overall. Again, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Local Government recognized that we needed to change the way we conduct business to improve our efficiency, to show that we care, because Mr. Vice-President, we do care.

We cannot be running a country that is not operating well, and the Senator from the other side identified it and we are saying to her that we listen to those at the bottom and we ensure that as we hear what the concerns are, we put the systems in place and so we have adopted the deliberate policy of enhancing our human resource capacity and strengthening the capacity of our institutional systems. And we are doing that in the short, the medium and the long term as we train.

We have had workshops, consultants coming in and working with us for a short time; we have had international technical support from some of our international agencies and we have been sharing best practices. In this regard, Mr. Vice-President, under a capacity development and institutional strengthening technical support agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the area of project management, we have trained more than 300 persons in the Ministry of Local Government in Prince 2.

Prince 2 is a project in a controlled environment programme which is a process-based method for effective project management. Our aim is to projectize the Ministry of Local Government. So therefore, 158 officers are now certified in Prince 2 which is an internationally recognized certificate. And these officers work throughout the local government system; some at the head office, some at regional corporations because that is what we want to do. As we projectize, we are doing it right through; the 14 regional corporations and at the head office. The aim at the end of the day is to produce quality service within time and within budget.

Mr. Vice-President, training will continue in this upcoming fiscal year. Again, from the bottom up. Additionally, Cabinet has sanctioned a capacity development programme in collaboration with the University of the West Indies. It has given us
appropriation to go ahead and we have engaged with the University of the West Indies
to design a programme for the members of the local government system in a
certificate in local government studies.

We have also worked with them to put in place short courses in key
operational areas of practical application and in the future, we intend to put in
place a degree in local government studies so that again, we can support
everybody. Everybody will be invited to take part in this training programme;
be it politicians, management staff; be it normal staff; be it our daily-rated workers.

7.25 p.m.

A memorandum of understanding is to be signed shortly within the next week
or two with the University of the West Indies and already 40 officers are in the
process of being selected from the Ministry of Local Government and the
municipal corporations to start the first programme in October. We have over 120
applications and we have been able to select 40. This particular programme is
going to start in October at the UWI centres, one located in the north of Trinidad
and the other located in the south of Trinidad and it is a most comprehensive
approach to developing capacity in the local government system.

According to MORI again, there were more challenges. In the year 2008,
citizens regarded the top two most important challenges for local government as
lack of equity and the inability to maintain quality local services. Citizens were
dissatisfied with how services were being delivered. Sixty-eight per cent said no
equity; 71 per cent said no quality.

So in keeping with our policy of ensuring equity, ensuring financial resources
were allocated equitably to the municipal corporations contrary to whatever is
said on the other side, we started to put in place systems to ensure that there was
no basis for partisan and other discriminatory considerations. We started to look
at the information and a trend analysis over the period of 2002—2009 indicated
that the Opposition-controlled corporations received a fair share of the total
allocations and comparatively there was greater equity of the allocation among
corporations under this Government's tenure.

I just want to quote what we picked up in 2002 when we were newly there and
what happened in 2009. Port of Spain—that is the city; the most important city in
this country, got $714,000; Chaguanas got $1.5 million; Penal/Debe got $2.7
million; San Juan/Laventille got approximately $2 million. This was in the year
2002 when we had just taken over.
I want to say to you, in the year 2009, Port of Spain got $11 million; Chaguanas got $9.3 million; Penal/Debe got $8.1 million; Princes Town got $8.7 million, all in keeping with the formula of population size, urban/rural geography and all done with a sense of equity, with a sense of making sure that we did the right thing.

In 2009, when we had to cut back, again we were accused of cutting back unfairly. The cuts for recurrent were as follows: Siparia, 18.9 per cent; Mayaro, 18.9 per cent; Penal, 19 per cent; Point Fortin, 17 per cent; Couva, 14 per cent, and where capital expenditure was concerned: Port of Spain, 31 per cent cut back; San Fernando, 26 per cent cut back; San Juan, 28 per cent; Couva, 25 per cent; Princes Town, 24 per cent and Tunapuna, 21 per cent.

But I want to say what is even more important, that in spite of the budgetary reductions, the Ministry was able to find creative ways of addressing the citizens' needs within the new mandate. And do you know how we did that? It was through a new business approach of intensifying our collaboration with other Ministries. So we got together with other Ministries, other agencies, other stakeholders, other partners and we began to work collaboratively, and so we did with the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment and the state agencies like CEPEP, URP, CISL, PSAEL, RDC, the East Port of Spain company, the EMA, et cetera, just to name a few. We were able in that kind of collaborative spirit to eradicate and to minimize the irritants and the challenges of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

With respect to the citizens' concerns and the challenges, we were able to provide local services and one of our major initiatives for the improved customer service and the ultimate empowerment of the citizens to ensure that they got an improved quality of life, was the establishment of an enterprise wide Geographic Information System. So in the Ministry we now have in place the GIS and we began to collect information based on the GIS with Sangre Grande being our pilot project. Soon we would be able to use that system to respond to normal day-to-day operations and, more so, to disasters.

Again, more irritants and more challenges. Fifty-three per cent said that they were dissatisfied with roads; 52 per cent with drains. Local bodies are charged with the provision of social and physical infrastructure and we have experienced problems of making sure, especially our physical infrastructure, is up to mark. Therefore, to be able to do that, again we have had to put new policies in place.
We have gone to the Commonwealth Secretariat and we have been able, with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat, to begin the process to put in place the development of policies and programmes of action for cemeteries, crematoria, cremation facilities, markets, abattoirs, public bath conveniences, recreation facilities, roads and drainage infrastructure for local areas and regional development planning.

The development of the policies is being pursued, as I said before, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat and soon we will have the technical assistance provided at the office. We are working closely with them as we pass on the technical skills to our citizens. The Ministry's key physical and social infrastructure development initiatives over the period were implemented through the Public Sector Investment Programme. In the meanwhile that is what we are doing, using the PSIP, using the IDF funding, IRID and the special purpose state enterprises, because we know that even as we wait we have got to do it and make sure that things are happening; that we have got to do things well.

So for the period 2002—2009, we have been able to spend over the eight-year period, approximately $1.2 billion dollars to upgrade the physical infrastructure at the local level. It is a tremendous job and a job that must be done. It is more so as citizens complain about roads and the drains. For the period 2002—2005 the Ministry of Local Government was able to construct approximately 8,531 metres of drains; we were able to reconstruct 123,246 metres of roadway; to reconstruct 22 bridges. In the IRID Programme we adopted a policy of engaging small contractors from within the very communities to execute infrastructural and renewal works through the IRID Programme. So for the period 2004—2007, we constructed 74,299 metres of drains and rehabilitated 20,138 metres of roads and we constructed 97 bridges.

PSIP: we completed 1,956 drainage projects, representing 144,452 metres of drains. We completed 482 roads, reconstruction and repair projects, representing 113,712 kilometres of roadway. We completed and repaired or constructed 125 drains. A very rough back-of-the-envelope assessment shows that we would have taken care of over 84,000 metres of drains; 244 bridges and over 259,000 metres of roads, some of them including agricultural access roads.

During fiscal year 2009, a further supplementary funding in the sum of $70 million was allocated for the execution of the physical infrastructure development, including drainage projects, for three consecutive years. So we have an additional funding of $210 million for three years to again support and upgrade our physical infrastructure.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Tuesday, September 22, 2009

[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

The ongoing maintenance, upgrading and construction of roads, drains and bridges will continue in fiscal year 2010. Again, we intend to ensure that we bring efficiencies to eradicate the irritants most widely identified by the man at the bottom as the biggest challenge for local government.

We continue to work to ensure that quality service is provided and we have been collaborating with the Ministry of Works and Transport to ensure that the standards are met across the board to ensure that supervision and monitoring will be strengthened; to ensure that work is well done for our burgesses and for our local people at the bottom of the local government system.

There are other physical infrastructural works that we have done and are still doing: we have completed 82 improvement market projects and again, based on that same $1.2 billion given over the period of time, 82 improvement market projects. In addition, designs have been completed for the San Juan market, the Marabella market, the Sangre Grande market and construction would start within the next month of the San Juan market and soon, hopefully, the other markets will follow.

7.40 p.m.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. L. Rogers]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Vice-President, we have completed 336 development projects of recreation facilities. We intend to work closely with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to complete 700 recreation sites over the next few years as we again collaborate.

In addition to our four special purpose enterprises that have been with us since 2008, we have been able to develop infrastructure within communities. Notably, we propose to utilize these companies to address issues of limited technical capabilities and so to undertake major infrastructural works. We do not have the capacity within the regional corporations. We do not have enough engineers to support us to do our development. [Interuption] We do not. There are not many regional engineers in the regional corporations and we have a serious problem to get work done. They are not going into the regional corporations. Maybe, the pay is not enough and therefore we have been working with the Special Purpose Companies to do the work.
What is interesting in all that I have just said is that there has been a positive trend analysis over the period 2002 to 2010, where the development component is concerned. In 2002, 97.7 per cent of the money spent went into recurrent expenditure and 2.3 per cent went into development. In 2008, 76.1 per cent went into recurrent and 23.9 per cent went into development expenditure. In 2009, 76.9 and 23.1 and in 2010, we intend to spend 75.7 per cent and 24.4 in development expenditure. This reflects the Government's policy and focus on development in a very efficient way.

I want to equate what has happened with achieving efficiency, caring and ensuring that as we deliver services we deliver quality services because we care. We are not there to waste money.

I want to make reference to our street lighting programme. In that particular programme we have handed over to T&Tec because they have the capacity to look after street lighting. We have become more efficient in the way we do business.

We have taken upon ourselves however, waste management. Our target is to collect and dispose of 60 per cent of the waste produced by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by 2020. To do that we have been studying our Waste Characterization Programme to be able to classify the different types of waste and to colour code the different types of waste receptacles for disposal. We have been looking at the establishment of transfer stations where the waste would be stored, weighed and disposed. We have been looking at generating productive and sustainable economic activities, so that at the end of the day we would make an industry out of waste management. We have been looking at putting in place waste management legislation and we are working very closely with the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment to do that.

With this in mind, we have put in place in collaboration with SWMCOL new waste disposal contracts for three years. Before it was one year and we have moved it to three years for the collection of waste in 13 municipal corporations. At this point in time, we are negotiating for new contractual arrangements for the city of Port of Spain which was not included. We are pulling in that city and working with them. We have been able to move from about 15 scavenging contracts to over 50 scavenging contractors as the information is provided. We have zoned those contractors into small zones and we have been mandating them to keep the place clean.

We feel that by the end of this year you will see a bigger change and more improvement in how we have been managing the waste in our city. What is even
more interesting and pleasing to us is that in doing this particular exercise, we have been able to save approximately $150 million in the new arrangement, as we move to gather waste in a different way.

There are a number of things happening in the Ministry of Local Government that really are making a difference. I want to talk about property taxes and go back to the polls. We have had many complaints about property taxes. According to the MORI polls in 2008, 67 per cent of the people felt that the collection of rates and taxes should be done by Central Government. They were sure that if that happened that the operations would be more effective, efficient and equitable. This is exactly what would take place with the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, as they now will collect the property taxes. The main consideration for the establishment of a centralized authority for property tax collection would be greater efficiency and equity. There would be an economy of scale to be realized from the centralized collection due to do lower administrative costs.

It is important that this new system will allow for standardization across the board with greater equity in the annual taxable value across municipalities. What currently happens is that tax rates are different in the various municipalities in Trinidad and Tobago. These rates are high as 10 per cent in Port of Spain and Chaguanas and as low as 2 per cent in Point Fortin. These rates are between $10 and $20 per acre and 7½ per cent of annual taxable value on the buildings throughout the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. These rates are based on different property assessments, some of this from way before I was born, 1948 and 1929. One particular regional corporation did an assessment in the year 2004.

The new system speaks to standardization. The new system talks to 3 per cent for residential properties; 5 per cent for commercial properties; 6 per cent for industrial properties and 1 per cent for agricultural properties. Some of the calculations have already been done and it has been noted that in one particular region, it is expected that the citizens will pay less in property taxes. We are pulling together a standardized and a very, very efficient well-managed property tax system. What is also very good about the system is that people can now stay within their communities and therefore pay their rates at the district revenue new office, TTPost payment outlets, telebanking, ATM, online banking et cetera. They do not have to go to regional corporations to take two, three, four taxis to be able to pay their rates.

I end by saying that we have done quite a lot over the last year in the Ministry of Local Government. Disaster preparedness has been on the front burner. I am sure that you would notice that even though there are floods in downtown Port of Spain, the floods are not as bad as they were before. They are not. The water is
running off even quicker as we clean the drains. The mitigation has gone into effect. We are planting trees and cleaning drains. Water is there but running off very quickly. We are now starting to work on it as a team. I am sure that within the next year or two, we would be able to eliminate a whole lot of problems that we have.

To end I need to say that again in the MORI poll of 2008, 63 per cent or the respondents expressed some sort of dissatisfaction with the local government; 76 per cent of the citizens felt that the local government system needed improving and 64 per cent supported the Government's plan for reforming local government. The main aim of this Government is to reform the system, to improve the quality and coverage of service delivery, as well as to promote the development of sustainable communities and encourage greater citizen participation in decision-making. Straight bottom up.

We have developed a White Paper on Local Government Reform, a Draft Local Government Bill 2009 and the Review of the Local Government Boundaries document. All these documents were laid in Parliament in July of this year and they are before a Joint Select Committee of Parliament which is responding to the mandate to complete the discussions within three months. The Ministry of Local Government is very supportive of the approach of this budget. We have begun to strengthen our efficiencies in the ministry to ensure that we take care of the challenges that we have, all in a bid to ensure that our citizens are better served from the bottom up.

Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Tina Gronlund-Nunez): Mr. Vice-President, as I rise to support this Bill which has been appropriately theme, Vision 2020 “Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges”, let me start by first congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance who on September 07, presented a comprehensive package of measures which will enable Trinidad and Tobago to face these tough economic times and emerge even more resilient. It must be noted that the budget that was presented was based in a context of this current volatile global economic landscape which calls for new risk management tools to better protect against the economic instability and consequently demand new innovation especially towards financial planning, which will enable growth of one's economy, whilst ensuring a comfortable way of life for our people for this coming fiscal year. Faced with these many challenges, I would like to once again congratulate the Minister of Finance for a job well done.
Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment fully embraces this theme and our planned future projects continue to build on our existing and previous works, which sought to adhere to this Government’s commitment to maximize the use of our resources, strengthen capacity, harness potential, prioritize projects and especially improve delivery to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Before I go deeper into my contribution, I would like to address some of the issues put forward by my dear colleague, Sen. Dr. Sharon-ann Gopaul-McNicol. She had hit at some issues that directly affect the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment. I am very sad to say that she brought forward these issues which, at the end of the day, clearly indicated that she did not understand the systems that have been put in place by the Housing Development Corporation, which is a part of the Ministry with which I am associated.

In her comments, she indicated that she could not understand why beneficiaries of the Housing Development Corporation had to go through all this rigmarole to expand their homes. Senator, that rigmarole has to be done by every homeowner, not only an HDC beneficiary. Rules, regulations and laws govern the alteration of any structure, both residential and commercial and one has to, at the end of the day, develop new plans. They have to go before the Town and Country Division for approvals; they have to go before the local government institutions for approval. One cannot, by any means, pick up oneself and add a room to one’s home without going through rigmarole.

My dear, it is not 10 years and I say this from personal experience. I was the former chairman of the Buildings Urban Planning Development Committee at local government level and I can tell you, without a doubt, that if one follows the procedures according to what was laid out by law, it does not take 10 years.

What is even sadder is that the dear Senator brought up the issue that beneficiaries of the Housing Development Corporation are not those in need. That is not the case as it exists, but I will go into that much later in my contribution. What the Senator did highlight, and I have to stress on this, is that the Ministry does not operate on rhetoric, which is so easily thrown about by Senators opposite. It does not operate in a mode of doom and gloom thrown about so easily by the other side. The Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment operates in a mode of hope, sound planning, responsible judgment and decision-making based on factual data.
The Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment has responsibility—and it is well known—for three major developmental areas and as such I would like to go through as best as possible each area so that I can account to Members of this Chamber and the country as best as I can.

Housing: you are aware that housing is a subject that is close to the hearts of most people, especially those in need. A house, it is recognized, is the single most important and expensive investment that most of us will ever make in our lifetimes. Recognizing the importance of housing to our national development, this Government has invested, and please note Senator, billions in public housing over the past five years.

However, this investment was not effectively managed, I would agree, and over the last two years we have had to put systems and structures in place to ensure that further investment in this sector, through the HDC, would produce the desired results we all wish.

In Vision 2020, housing not only falls under the pillar of Nurturing a Caring Society, it is also part of Sound Infrastructure. It is an engine of growth that would enable, not only the construction sector, but other sectors so that we could ensure that productivity would thrive in this country. This institution has provided employment for contractors, small tradesmen, skilled and unskilled labourers, to name a few.

However, as much as we wish to continue with this programme, there are facets that need to be overhauled. When we started a little under two years ago, over TT $1 billion had been spent. Over 10,000 houses were started, but less than 100 persons were able to complete their mortgage transactions. Most of our beneficiaries were living in housing on the licence-to-occupy arrangements. We immediately realized that this was not a viable solution for the long term. We would like to see persons being allocated a house and, after having been assessed by a mortgage company, being able to finalize that mortgage so that funds could come into the HDC, so that there is a cycle of funding.

From early in our term in office, it was immediately evident that the business of the HDC was not being conducted in a manner to ensure delivery of its mandate. It was also clear that the required levels of governance and associated tools were either inadequate or non-existent.

One of the major challenges by the HDC, an agency of the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, with the responsibility for the housing construction programme was timely completion and delivery of these said homes.
It is also well known to us within this Chamber and to the population of this country, as one drives around the country, one will see many housing developments and, like any other reasonable-minded person, one would wonder why they remain unoccupied for such a long period of time.

It must be noted that it will be very irresponsible of us to distribute these homes if they lack the basic requirements of electricity, water connections or sewerage. We have had to do a lot of remediation works to those houses, which were started so long ago. We also had to have the many regulatory approvals completed on these said units by the various agencies charged with those responsibilities and we are now working with them to ensure that when keys are distributed to persons, these new homeowners can go to the bank and complete a mortgage transaction.

There are other challenges currently constraining the HDC from delivering on its mandate, which require significant changes in the manner in which the HDC performs its core basic processes, including changes to its management system.

The HDC-identified problems cannot be solved by way of a quick fix and require consistent application of a new set of data-centric systems to achieve these desired transformations. We have within the Ministry and within the HDC embarked upon programmes to strengthen efficiency and to enable these starts of so many years ago to be put into a status of finish. We have, therefore, commenced a change programme within the HDC.

The objective of this change programme, which was launched in January of this year and its first phase completed in April of this very year, is to transform the HDC into a performance-driven organization that could consistently deliver on the Government's housing programme and do so at a cost that makes affordable public housing a viable long-term proposition.

Mr. Vice-President, through this change programme, we are tackling issues head-on and have decided to focus on completion of the thousands of homes that are in progress and to increase our delivery to the hundreds of thousands of applicants who are clamouring for affordable housing from the Government. For your information, construction on 64 projects is in progress at this moment. Many of these units are located in Carlisen Field, Edinburgh in central, Oropune and Malabar in the east, Corinth and Reid Road in the south and even Victoria Keyes, which is in Diego Martin and St. James in the west. The construction of many of these homes crisscross this country and therefore we are attempting to reduce the number of those who are in need of homes.
We are putting systems into place that are allowing us to complete the houses on the ground and, as we go forward, we will eliminate many of the inefficiencies that have been allowed for the sake of expediency. It has allowed significant variations to contracts. The new focus of the HDC is efficiency in all spheres of its operations. With the successful completion of this phase of the change programme and as the HDC institutionalizes these new systems, we expect that gradually the corporation's dependence on the Corporation Sole for financing will diminish as the construction programmes will be self-financing and operating in the black.

Therefore, as indicated by the Minister of Finance, we expect with these changes that are taking place at this time to increase construction and completion in this fiscal year and we will deliver on our annual target of 8,000 homes to those who need.

8.10 p.m.

Sen. Narace: That is how to help people.

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: The key focus of the housing programme has always been on affordability and in this vein this Government has implemented several programmes designed to keep homes affordable for our target market, the low- and middle-income; the very said individuals which the Senator mentioned earlier. Sadly, what she contributed in the Senate earlier this afternoon was thought of and put together by this Government a while aback. Your contribution is a few years too late my dear. [Interruption]

Sen. Narace: When you were in the PNM you saw citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, now you are seeing all kinds of different things.

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: The average cost of an HDC home is in the range of $250,000—$450,000, this is with an average government subsidy of $80,000—$100,000, which represents the cost of infrastructure and the land. We, the Government and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, have taken on the responsibility of the cost of the infrastructure and the land to ensure that these units are affordable by the man on the street.

In addition, in order to make housing even more accessible than what I just stated to the low-income household, the rent-to-own programme has been put in place and offered to the clientele of the HDC who have been allocated or approved for allocation of a home and whose assessment is less than the cost of the unit being offered. Fellow colleagues, it means that if that individual does not qualify
for a mortgage to enter occupation into his or her new home, the Government is willing to offer the rent-to-own programme. The beneficiaries, in other words, are allowed to enter their homes on a licence to occupy agreement for a period of five years. During this period, a monthly rental amount is paid by the new homeowners. At the end of this five-year period, if the tenant is then able to purchase the unit, this transaction converts from a rent-to-own to a mortgage agreement. In this instance, unlike rental agreements on the open market, the monthly rental that the individual has been paying for five years is not lost. In fact, two-thirds of the rent that the individual has been paying over the last five years is converted to a down payment to that very said home. If, however, the financial status of that individual does not better itself over that five-year period, the individual can re-enter the rent-to-own programme for an additional three years, in which it is expected that after the conclusion of these three years, it will then go into a mortgage agreement.

Even in addition to that, if after being offered a mortgage and the person is unable to meet those financial obligations, if even after being offered the rent-to-own programme and once again the individual is not able to meet those financial obligations, the client of the HDC can enter into the rental programme. Because one is not financially able at this point in time, does not mean one is not deserving of a roof over one’s head or a roof over their family’s heads in accordance with the HDC.

There is also another aspect which must be mentioned. There are also additional options that are available to help the client to qualify. The clients could be encouraged by either putting on the application a co-applicant. This person must be employed. They can actually put on a guarantor. This person would be used to help to stand security for the new homes. The individual can actually put on an additional co-borrower onto their units, which would mean that this person would become a part owner of the property. All of these different financial arrangements have been put in place by the Government, in order to ensure that the man on street, the man on the bottom, can get a shelter of his own.

At present, homeowners who earn less than $8,000 per month qualify for a 2 per cent mortgage interest rate with no down payment. It must be recognized that financing will cover 100 per cent of the property valued up to $450,000, with a maximum term of 25 years. Persons, who however, do not qualify for these concessions, will still receive preferential mortgage interest rates between 6 per cent and 8 per cent.
This Government, in continuing the measures implemented in 2008, has eliminated stamp duty on homes valued up to $850,000. Let me repeat; the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has put in place in 2008, a 0 per cent stamp duty for homes up to the value of $850,000, to ensure that even middle-income individuals can go out on the open market and also get a home of their own.

At present, the fees associated with the purchase of property, including conveyance and closing charges, can also pose a challenge to the prospective homeowner. In our quest to bring homeownership within the reach of our citizens, we propose to eliminate the legal fees associated with the purchase of HDC housing units. We are going that one step further. We intend to eliminate the legal fees associated with the purchase of HDC housing units, through the provision of our in-house legal services for conveyancing and other property-related matters. This means that this measure is intended to further alleviate the financial burdens which potential homeowners face.

The HDC still maintains a rental stock of about 7,000 homes and increasing. We are also including more rental units in our new developments, as we construct throughout the country, as we continue to reach citizens of all financial means. Mr. Vice-President, all of these measures add up to make this Government’s housing programme affordable to those who need; not to those with greed, Madam Senator, to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society can get a roof.

In fact, it is sad that Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol was not here last year when I presented the new policies that was put in place in this Senate.

Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol: I was in the country.

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: She was not here in this Senate when I put forward the new policies to ensure that those who need are the ones who get. I shall summarize very quickly, the changes that took place in the allocation policy of the HDC. It was well recognized in pre-November last year, that the allocation of houses were only based on three criteria:

1. You had to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago;
2. You were not supposed to own any property; and
3. You had to be over the age of 21.

That was it.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Four party card. [Laughter and crosstalk]
Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: Sadly, in developing the housing programme, as we saw that it was needed, this Government never expected that millionaires would be on our database looking to take advantage of the programme that was being offered to those who need. [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Kernahan, you made a little remark there. I think you called the hon. Senator stupid.

Sen. Mark: No, she said party card.

Mr. Vice-President: No, after all, you turned to Sen. Mark and sent out a comment.

Sen. Mark: No.

Mr. Vice-President: Please, in this honourable Senate, I do think anybody—

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: This eavesdropping.

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: Mr. Vice-President, quickly, I would try to summarize to assist the Senator on that side. The criteria prior to November last year was only based on three criteria. One is that you should be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago over the age of 21 and that you are not supposed to own any property. However, we faced individuals in this country who have a little too much greed. We had millionaires on our database. In fact, we had individuals who were not even living in the island of Trinidad or Tobago on our database, and in some cases they did not even disguise their address. We have made many changes to the policy to ensure that those who need are the ones who will be beneficiaries. This will answer your comments, Madam Senator.

Today, in order to be allocated an HDC home, the gross combined household income cannot cross $25,000. Today, in order to be allocated a HDC home, the onus is on the beneficiary to demonstrate that they have been living within this country for the last five years. The focus today is on first-time homeowners, just like you have indicated, Madam Senator. However, this decision was made one year ago and your comment is coming today. It is also geared towards young couples.

There is also a weighting to the lottery system, because it was well recognized by this Ministry that there are many applicants on our database who have been there for a substantial period of time, therefore, there are now weights geared
towards how long ago you applied, because in the eyes of the Government there have been many who have been in need that have been shedding tears too long. Madam Senator, this Government does listen, we do hear and we do try to change the policies in order to assist those who need.

When our housing programme commenced in 2003, it was envisioned that the State would provide 8,000 units annually and the private sector would provide 2,000, therefore making an annual yield of 10,000 units over a 10-year period, to meet the stated demand at the time.

8:25 p.m.

With the increased growth in the construction sector, private housing developers have had some challenges delivering on the production required. As a result, this Government introduced the provision of a tax exemption for developers where the cost of construction does not exceed $250,000. This provision was intended to induce the private sector to close the demand gap for rental and mortgage housing units.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government has found itself having to introduce in this fiscal 2010 an increased tax exemption to a total amount of $450,000 in order to assist these private construction firms to ensure that they could meet the demand for the low and middle income homeowners.

As this Government seeks to provide comprehensive housing solutions, not only are we concerned with increasing the existing housing stock, but we are also taking steps to ensure proper maintenance of the present stock, especially for persons who are unable to financially afford the required maintenance. To this end, there are two programmes being offered and which will continue into 2010 fiscal year. These programmes are the Home Improvement Grant and the Home Improvement Subsidy.

The Home improvement Grant is a grant of up to $15,000 available to homeowners to repair and improve their homes and who have a combined household income of $5,000 or less per month. These beneficiaries must also show that they have legal title to the property in need of the repair work.

In fiscal 2009, 695 homeowners received Home Improvement Grants. The demand for the programme is tremendous and beneficiaries utilize the funds to undertake much needed repairs to their homes, particularly foundation and roof repairs, as well as the addition of extra rooms to accommodate expanding families. We propose to provide approximately 1,000 grants to eligible applicants in fiscal year 2010.
In addition, the Home Improvement Subsidy is also provided to beneficiaries to effect repairs to their homes. However, this is a matching dollar for dollar subsidy provided to beneficiaries with a monthly household income of $7,000 or less. The maximum value of the subsidy is $20,000 and the match can be a combination of either funds, material or sweat equity. In fiscal 2009, 811 homeowners benefited from this programme. It is projected that in fiscal 2010, 900 home improvement subsidies would be disbursed.

In addition, it seems that the extent that this Government is going in order to ensure that those who are in need of housing can get a roof over their heads is almost too numerous to state in this one debate however, I must mention the Beneficiary Owned Land Subsidy Programme. This programme is designed to assist persons who are in legal possession of residential land and who wish to construct their own homes.

Under this programme, persons with an annual income of $24,000—$50,000 receive a non-refundable upfront subsidy of up to $50,000 to assist them in meeting their financial requirements for a mortgage to construct their very own homes. The construction cost should not exceed $195,000. For those with an annual household income of up to $75,000, a subsidy up to $35,000 is provided to them and the construction cost must not exceed $195,000. Because it is recognized that there is a higher construction cost in Tobago, the ceiling for construction costs is $210,000.

To further assist this category of persons, the Ministry will make available approved housing plans to beneficiaries with the associated cost of construction. Models of these plans will also be on display at the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment for the prospective interested homeowners.

Mr. Vice-President, let me take this opportunity to share some further information on this initiative. These models are specially designed for incremental expansion. The homeowner can choose to build a home for which he can obtain a completion certificate and at his convenience, and as funds become available he can expand his home. The model shows expansion to bedrooms, garages and even porches and galleries.

To further assist prospective homeowners, we propose to make available a register of approved small contractors who can be utilized by those said future homeowners. We expect that this package of incentives will enable persons who at present feel that the construction of homes is beyond their ability, to realize the dream of homeownership is now within their reach.
Mr. Vice-President, I wish to now turn my attention to another aspect of this Ministry. My attention will be going toward squatter regularization and containment. Even as this Government is pressing on with the provision of affordable shelter for all our citizens, we are still faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of those who fall outside the formal housing system. These informal forms of shelter have led to many other problems which have arisen from the recognized illegal activity which has placed much hardship on the law-abiding taxpayers’ pocket, that is, the required cost to supply services such as water, electricity, street lighting, drainage and roadways, while meeting the challenges of proper public health issues.

However, we also recognize this issue as a social issue and, therefore, the LSA, through its Squatter Regularization Programme, is responsible for providing some measure of protection to squatters who have occupied state land prior to January 01, 1998, both through the provision of security of tenure and the upgrade of infrastructure. It is also responsible for the prevention and containment of further illegal squatting on state land through the Squatter Containment Programme.

Mr. Vice-President, these are the mandates of the LSA, to effectively manage squatting sites as part of our commitment for sustainable development. The work of the LSA is essential in mitigating the social, physical and environmental degradation that results from unplanned and unauthorized spontaneous human settlements. Issues which have arisen over the years are ravaging of our hillsides, overcrowding, public health hazards that stem from a lack of adequate utilities, slash-and-burn agriculture, runaway bush fires in the dry season, soil erosion and flooding in the wet season.

As part of the Squatter Regularization Programme, the LSA undertakes upgrades on scheduled sites to provide to eligible squatters a fully serviced lot which includes the following key amenities aimed at improving the living standards of these said families. I am very sorry to disappoint Sen. Wade Mark, but the majority of the works of the LSA is geared toward the small man, those who fall outside of the formal housing programme. A large part of their focus has been on paving roads within such sites; the construction of drains; the installing of water lines; and even electricity, bringing light to families.

Mr. Vice-President, for the period October 2008—August 2009, eight squatter sites have benefited from infrastructural upgrade works. This is how we within this Ministry reach the small man. We have upgraded River Estate, Diego Martin—planning and engineering design stage; Race Course Lands, Arima; Bon
Air North, Arouca; Milton Village, Couva and Macaulay Road, Squatterville; Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; Cashew Gardens, Carlsen Field and also Brazil Village, Arima.

Mr. Vice-President, preliminary planning works have been completed on the following sites during this same period: Port of Spain Squatter Regularization Phase II design; Springle Street, Point Fortin; Arena Road, Freeport; Wellington Road, Debe; and also Glenroy Road, Princes Town. These sites that I have mentioned are expected to yield a total of 3,000 lots. Each eligible occupant will be provided with the boundaries with one of these lots of land which will incorporate the structure they occupy, and excess lots will be ceded to HDC to be included in their construction programme.

Mr. Vice-President, as stated earlier, the LSA is required to provide security of tenure to eligible squatters.

Mr. Vice-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. C. Enill]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. T. Gronlund-Nunez: Mr. Vice-President, thank you. As I was saying, the LSA is required to provide security of tenure to eligible squatters who have occupied state land prior to January 01, 1998. The first step in providing security of tenure is the provision of a Certificate of Comfort. This starts with the regularization process which is followed by the infrastructure and lotification process described earlier, and finally a deed of lease.

The COC is a personal right for protection from ejection, and it must be noted it is bare licence and it is non-transferable. Mr. Vice-President, the agency has, during this period of time, surveyed 27 of the 251 scheduled sites in the Act at a cost of $145,155,088.63. These surveys involve extensive field works throughout Trinidad to identify site boundaries to complete social survey forms as well as identify lots for occupants of a site.

8.40 p.m.

This exercise will be an opportunity to update the records of clients on our very said database, capture new occupants in scheduled sites and gather vital information in respect of these sites.
As stated earlier, squatter containment involves the monitoring and patrolling of state lands to ensure no new spontaneous settlements are created. For the period October 2008 to August 2009, 923 new structures were identified and, after extensive investigation, action was taken on 303. Additionally, reports have been forwarded to the Commissioner of State Lands for action to be taken on another 443 structures.

However, to assist in achieving its mandate—that is the containment of these informal squatting settlements—the Land Settlement Agency has also set about on a public educational programme, as we see this as being important in changing the attitudes and behaviours that lead to squatting.

This public education programme is seen as a crucial component of the agency's efforts to contain squatting and increase awareness of the ills associated with squatting. The aim of the agency's public education programme is:

- To establish and publicize that squatting is illegal;
- To show the negative effects of squatting on the country's land resources and its environment;
- To highlight the alternatives to squatting; and
- To build key linkages between all stakeholders promoting collaboration and harmonization of state policies when addressing the issue of squatting.

This agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment successfully hosted a symposium in November 2008, to invite ideas from local and regional partners on ways to effectively curb squatting. I would like to recognize—even though he is not with us at this point in time—my colleague, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, who made some extremely valuable contributions at this said symposium.

The LSA has also completed phase one of a school's intervention programme, an essay competition, and has embarked on the second phase of this intervention, a secondary schools' debate competition, which has these very goals, which was launched earlier this month, both in Trinidad and in Tobago.

Future plans for the Land Settlement Agency includes the ongoing review of the agency's legislation, ongoing regularization of tenure of squatters, squatter relocation in cases where this can occur, improving squatter containment strategies, physical infrastructure upgrades and also, most important, the Port of Spain Squatter Regularization Study. This will be completed soon and it is expected to ensure that the agency has the technical ability to address squatter regularization within this area.
Closely related to all of this, both the housing and the LSA activities, is the planning function of the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment. I wish to report on some of the strides we have made in this area. This Government recognizes that there is a need for a holistic approach to development of this country. This is addressed comprehensively through the preparation of development plans at the national, regional and local levels.

To achieve this goal, in fiscal year 2009, the Town and Country Planning Division continued to successfully develop the short, medium and long term land use planning capacity, addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges of this country. In so doing, the Town and Country Planning Division has developed the St. Helena local area plan, other area plans such as Arima local area plan, the Rousillac local area plan, the El Socorro south local area plan and the Couva local area plan.

The South-West Region Tobago plan has commenced, and it is expected that completion of this item will be done by 2011. The Hillside Development Policy document has also been reviewed and updated and is awaiting approval by Cabinet to be published and the Advertisement Policy document is in its final stages of completion before being sent to Cabinet.

Of great significance is the preparation of the 2nd National Physical Development Strategic Plan for Trinidad and Tobago in fiscal year 2009/2010. This is significant not only because we are preparing our second development plan when it must be recognized that most Caribbean states are still working on their first. This strategic approach is necessary to ensure that projects move forward smoothly to ensure optimum use of financial and other resources. This plan is scheduled to be completed in early 2011 and will involve a high degree of stakeholder involvement.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, notwithstanding the success of the above, the Town and Country Planning Division has compiled all relevant documents related to the review of the legislation and forwarded to the Legal Services Unit that is actively sourcing a consultant to review and revise the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01, to make it a more robust tool to enable the development of this country, one of many actions that are being taken in order to ensure that the legislation catches up with the country and how quickly things are moving today.

Mr. Vice-President, as part of the planning of our country's development, we shall also be conducting a national census next year, and I now wish to spend a little time to discuss the works of the CSO and the upcoming census. Let me
inform all as to the organizational arrangements that are taking place. At this very moment the restructuring of the Central Statistical Office is one of the key modernization initiatives in the national public service transformation agenda, which is being funded by the IDB. The International Consulting Office of Statistics Sweden was selected through competitive bidding to undertake a consultancy to identify an appropriate model for the restructuring of the CSO and to develop a comprehensive plan of action for the transition of the CSO from its present status to that model, which will best benefit this country.

In May 2009, on the request of the Ministry of Public Administration, a consultancy was also awarded for the preparation of the regulations related to the Statistics Bill—which will be forthcoming—specifically:

- To revise the existing regulations to correspond with the new Statistics Act;
- To identify other areas of statistics that should be governed by subsidiary legislation;
- To draft the required regulations for the new Statistics Act; and
- To comment on the draft Bill.

In order to address some of the issues of the staff and the change process, in May 2008, the consulting firm, Aegis Management Solutions Limited, was contracted by the Ministry of Public Administration as a change manager.

Let me hasten to assure you that while the organizational restructuring is being undertaken, the operational works of the CSO continue to take place. In this regard, a number of weekly, quarterly and annual reports that are normally produced have been completed and some of these are:

- The Labour Force Report;
- The Index of Retail Prices;
- Publications such as the Quarterly Survey of Pig Farmers was published up to second quarter 2008;
- Poultry bulletin was prepared up to September 2008;
- Agriculture Report 2007 was published;
- The Statistical Pocket Digest 2008 was prepared and is available online;
- The Report on Crime Statistics 2007 was published.
Also, other activities such as Conducting the Household Budget Survey 2008/2009, are being compiled; as stated earlier the 2010 Population and Housing Census will be taking place soon; the National Actions, which is the GDP estimates at current and constant prices for the period 2005—2009 are being prepared and being submitted for inclusion in the Review of the Economy publication; also the Supply and Use Tables 2005, which is an integral part of the system of National Economic Accounts.

I would like to conclude with just two aspects of this Ministry. It is a very vast ministry, however, a well thought out ministry, and this is the environment and the EMA. It is sad that I am running out of time but I had to take some time to explain to Senators, the many plans that are being put forward to ensure that housing meets those who need.

Mr. Vice-President, the environment remains an area presenting severe challenges. As we seek to improve the standard of living for our citizens, development has to take place, but it has to be tempered with sound environmental management. In so doing, a number of initiatives have taken place during the fiscal year 2009, and this is the remediation of the lead contaminated sites, the hazardous waste inventory, Compliance Assistance programme, the Nariva—and we are very proud of this—Reforestation and Carbon Sequestration project and the water pollution rules, source registration and permitting process.

In closing, I would like to repeat a statement I made earlier. The Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, does not operate on rhetoric. It is so easy for members of the Opposition to criticize from the outside, and throw banter left and right without thinking of the issues. The Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment operates on sound planning, responsible judgment decision making based on factual data.

With those words, I wish to thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Before I move the adjournment, can I just share with you what the thinking is? We had 10 speakers today. We propose to begin tomorrow at 10.00 a.m. again; we would have another 10 speakers. We would basically try to go with the same time frame, if we have the ability to put more speakers in we will try to accommodate that.
The thinking is that we finish on Friday because we need to come back here on Monday or before, to deal with the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, which needs to be validated by September 28, 2009, and then I propose to come back on Tuesday for Private Members’ Day.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I just wanted to give the Senate an indication of what our timetable is on this particular matter.

I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, September 23, 2009, at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.
Senate adjourned accordingly.
Adjourned at 8.55 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Senator Wade Mark:

**Debt Service Projections**

(Interest Rates Used)

62. Could the hon. Minister of Finance state what are the annual interest rates used in determining the country’s service projections?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne):** Trinidad and Tobago’s Central Government Debt falls into two (2) broad categories:

(i) Domestic

(ii) External.

**Domestic**

Domestic debt comprises loans and bonds of tenors varying between five (5) and thirty (30) years. These loans/bonds were contracted at one of the following interest rate arrangements/terms:

(i) Fixed rate. This rate is fixed for the life of the facility.

(ii) Floating rate. This rate is based on a spread below the prime interest rate and is reset every six (6) months.
Currently, the interest rates on fixed rate facilities range between 5% and 13.9%, while the interest rate on floating rate facilities range between 1% and 5% below the average prime interest rate.

Debt service projections for the fixed rate loans/bonds are determined by applying the particular rate to the outstanding balance on each facility. In the case of the floating rate loans, projections are made on the basis of expected changes, if any, in the prime interest rate. If no changes are expected, the current effective rate is applied to the ensuing 6-month period.

**External**

External debt falls into three (3) main categories:

(i) Commercial

(ii) Bilateral

(iii) Multilateral

External commercial loans are either at fixed rates or at floating rates and in both instances are benchmarked against either US Libor or Great British Pound Libor. The interest rate on fixed rate loans range between 3.75% and 9.875% while in the case of floating rate loans, the interest rates range between US Libor plus 65 to 95 basis points and GBP Libor plus 12 basis points. The interest rates on the bilateral loans are at fixed concessionary rates of 0%-3%. The interest rates payable on multilateral loans are at adjustable rates i.e. rates as determined by the World Bank or the Inter American Development Bank based on their cost of borrowing. For the World Bank, the lending spread ranges between 70 and 120 basis points, above US Libor depending on the tenor of the loan, while for the IDB the interest rate for the current period is 4.93%. Loans contracted with the Caribbean Development Bank are also at an adjustable rate which is currently 5.75%.

As with the domestic debt, the debt service projections for the fixed rate external loans is determined based on the contracted rates and the outstanding balance on each facility. For those with floating or adjustable rates the projections are based on future interest rate expectations.

The calculations for the domestic and external debt servicing are then amalgamated to present a total picture for the Central Government debt service projections.
The following question was asked by Senator Wade Mark:

Public Service Employees  
(Status of)

82. Could the hon. Minister of Public Administration state whether the public service is over-staffed or under-staffed, and if so, by how many and in which categories?

(A) Could the Minister further state in precise and definite terms the current size of trained professional personnel in the public service and their respective categories?

(B) Could the Minister also advise the Senate of the precise size in terms of numbers on the establishment of the public service in respect of the following categories:

(i) Civil Servants
(ii) Fire Officers,
(iii) Prison Officers,
(iv) Police Officers,
(v) Teachers,
(vi) Defence Force Personnel both in the Regiment and the Coast Guard inclusive of the Air Guard.

The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Kennedy Swaratsingh): The response to the question is as follows:

(a) The Ministry of Public Administration provides advice to the Cabinet and supports the Ministries and Departments in reviewing organizational structures in relation to the mandates as determined in the portfolio of responsibilities assigned to Ministries and Departments from time to time. During the 1990s the public service decentralized many human resource management functions to the line Ministries and Departments and enhanced their Human Resource Management Divisions. This, amongst other things, gave them greater control in determining and adjusting their own staffing needs. Annually individual Ministries and Departments submit proposals with respect to their personnel needs, which are laid in Parliament and approved in the Estimates of Expenditure.
(b) All persons employed in the public service hold job descriptions which, amongst other criteria, require educational and training requirements for each position. Employees must meet these criteria to be employed. Employees have been provided also with training to assist them with developments taking place in the relevant work environment for which certification is not a prerequisite. Figures with respect to the size of the public service are provided in the response to Question 82 (c).

(c) The Director of Personnel Administration, the Chief Personnel Officer and the relevant Permanent Secretaries have advised that as at June 2009, the size in terms of numbers on the establishment of the public service comprises:

(i) **Public Service**

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<th>Category of Public Service Employee</th>
<th>Numbers on approved Establishment (Budget Estimates 2008/2009)</th>
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(ii) With respect to the size in terms of numbers on the establishment of the Protective Service and the Defence Force, the numbers are not normally disclosed for reasons of national security.

The following question was asked by Senator Dr. Sharon-ann Gopaul-McNicol:

**CXC Examinations Results (Details of)**

**148.** Could the hon. Minister of Education provide the Senate with the details, inclusive of the names of the schools and the number of students from each Senior Secondary School throughout Trinidad and Tobago, who have received a full certificate in the CXC examinations for the academic years 2006-2007; 2007-2008 and 2008-2009?
The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): With respect to the question, a full certificate is described as five (5) subjects of Grades I, II, III including Mathematics and English A. Attached at Appendices I and II is a listing of the names of schools and the number of students from each Senior Secondary School throughout Trinidad and Tobago who have received a full certificate in the CXC examinations for the academic years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. It should be noted that results of examination for the academic year 2008-2009 have only been recently released and therefore the analysis of same is still being conducted.

APPENDIX 1

Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) 2006 - 2007

TABLE 1. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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## Written Answers to Questions

**Tuesday, September 22, 2009**

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## Table 1. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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CARIBBEAN EXAMINATION COUNCIL (CXC) CARIBBEAN SECONDARY EXAMINATION CERTIFICATE (CSEC) 2006 - 2007

**TABLE 1. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English**

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### Written Answers to Questions

**Tuesday, September 22, 2009**

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# Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) 2006 - 2007

## TABLE 1. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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## APPENDIX II

# Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) 2007-2008 General & Technical Proficiency

## TABLE 2. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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**Written Answers to Questions**  
*Tuesday, September 22, 2009*

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**Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) 2007-2008 General & Technical Proficiency**

**TABLE 2. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A**

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### TABLE 2. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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Caribbean Examination Council (CXC)
Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) 2007-2008
General & Technical Proficiency

TABLE 2. Number of students attaining five or more subjects including Mathematics and English A

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<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Total Wrote</th>
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The following question was asked by Senator Wade Mark:

**Senior Counsels Appointed**  
*(Names of)*

157. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with the names of the attorneys-at-law who were appointed Senior Counsel since the Government assumed office under the leadership of the current Prime Minister on December 24, 2001 to June 16, 2009?

*The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:*

**The Attorney General** *(Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC)*: The attorneys-at-law who were appointed as Senior Counsel between December 24, 2001 and June 16, 2009 were:

1. Reginald Armour SC
2. Douglas Mendes SC
The following question was asked by Senator Wade Mark:

**Dr. Lloyd Barnett**

(Fees Paid to)

159. Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with the quantum of legal or consultancy fees paid to Senior Counsels appointed after June 01, 2005 by any State Enterprise, Municipal Corporation, Statutory Authority, Government Ministry or other State Agency from the period of their respective appointments to June 16, 2009?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): The Attorney General’s response is confined to payments made by the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago and not to State Enterprises and/or Statutory Authorities and/or Municipal Corporations and/or other Ministries which are separate entities falling under the purview of Ministers.

During the period January 01 2005 to June 16, 2009 the quantum of fees that was paid to Dr. Dr. Lloyd Barnett, Senior Attorney-at-Law of Jamaica, was as follows:

- **18th July 2005** $226,792.80 for services provided in respect of sundry opinions for the Attorney General

- **28th September 2007** $311,243.10 for services provided in AG v.Northern Construction
The following question was asked by Senator Wade Mark:

**Legal Senior State Offices**

**(Staff Shortages)**

**160.** Could the hon. Attorney General provide the Senate with:

(i) detailed information of the staff shortages currently existing at the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Solicitor General and the Director of Public Prosecutions; and

(ii) the specific steps or measures that are being urgently taken to address these critical shortages?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the Senate:

**The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC):**

**The following posts are vacant in the Legislative Drafting Department (Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel):**

One post of Chief Parliamentary Counsel with effect from February 18, 2009—an officer was recommended to act in that post. A memo was sent to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission on February 13, 2009 recommending an acting appointment.

One post of Deputy Chief Parliamentary Counsel with effect from June 07, 2002—an officer was recommended to fill this vacant post by memo dated July 01, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Three posts of Senior Parliamentary Counsel with effect from January 31, 2006, September 22, 2006 and January 01, 2008—two officers were recommended to fill those vacant posts by memo dated June 09, 2009.

Three Parliamentary Counsel III with effect from July 01, 2009—three officers were recommended to act in those posts by memo dated July 01, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Two posts of Parliamentary Counsel II with effect from September 13, 2006 and January 01, 1989—two officers were recommended to fill those vacant posts by memo dated July 01, 2009.
One post of Parliamentary Counsel I with effect from March 18, 2009—a replacement was requested from the Judicial and Legal Commission by memo dated July 01, 2009.

The following posts are vacant in the Solicitor General Department:

One post of Solicitor General with effect from February 20, 2006.

Six posts of Senior Counsel—one officer was recommended to fill one post by memo dated July 09, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Three posts of State Counsel III—three officers were recommended to fill those posts by memo dated July 09, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Commission.

Two posts of State Counsel II—two officers were recommended to fill those posts by memo dated July 09, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

The following posts were vacant in the Criminal Law Department (Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions):

One post of Director of Public Prosecutions with effect from January 05, 2009. One officer was appointed to act in this post from January 5, 2009.

Two posts of Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions with effect from January 11, 2004 and March 14, 2006—These posts are awaiting the recommendation of the acting Director of Public Prosecutions. A memo was sent on January 13, 2009.

Five posts of Senior State Counsel—these posts were recommended to be advertised by memo dated April 14, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Three posts of Senior Counsel III—these posts were recommended to be advertised by memo dated April 14, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

Two posts of State Counsel II—these posts were recommended to be advertised by memo dated April 14, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

One post of State Counsel I—that post was recommended to be advertised by memo dated April 14, 2009 to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.