SENATE
Wednesday, September 23, 2009

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS
[Mr. Vice-President in the Chair]

SENATOR’S APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, a Senator would be taking the oath as a temporary Senator so we would stand that down to a later time. Leader of Government Business.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. When we adjourned last night, I indicated that on Monday we would do the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. That was incorrect, we would do the three other motions. I am advised that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is only required to be done in the other place and therefore I am seeking to correct that, to indicate that we would simply be doing the three motions; the Customs (Import Duty), the Excise Duty, one for alcohol and one for tobacco. It is just by way of correcting what would have been an incorrect interpretation of what we had to do.


APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)
[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 22, 2009]: That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Sen. Mohammed Faisal Rahman: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for this opportunity to make my contribution on a Bill, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending the 30th day of September, 2010.

I rise acutely aware of the fact that nothing we say or argue in this honourable Senate today will make any difference to the Bill before us since it is a money Bill and we have no authority here to change anything that the Government has brought from the other place, but I am hoping that our contributions on this side may serve to give the Government pause and in its own good time and thinking that it may decide to review some of the measures which this Bill seeks to implement and institute.

I know that is going to be very difficult for the Government because once it sets its course very little can convince—it is like the captain of the Titanic, he set his course and he went and was enjoying the cruise with the rest of his passengers. Everything that he was told about the speed of the boat, about the dangers of the waters and of the risk that he ran bought the idea that the Titanic was unsinkable. [Interuption] Great is the PM, he shall prevail. It is a similar situation to that Titanic situation.

As the captain of this ship sits in his glory and the ship of state ploughs through the sea, we are heading into very serious trouble.

The budget that has been presented is, if corrected in certain areas, a very good budget.

Sen. Enill: Could you repeat that? [Laughter]

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes, you heard me right. If you remove the property tax and if you pull back on the capital expenditure, which is unjustified at this time, you cut back on the smelter and the iron plant and you started looking after the primary schools which are now falling apart and you started revising your focus on development—altering the skyline and going into capital expenditure that is dead-end street—if they started looking at the dwindling foreign reserves and the deteriorating world situation, if they started doing the things that are positive rather than insisting on the negatives, if they drew back on their ventures into hegemony in the Eastern Caribbean area and if they implemented a few other measures, the budget would be a very good budget.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: You still want him to repeat? You want him to repeat still? [Laughter]

Sen. Enill: You want to repeat that?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: You will read the Hansard and enjoy.
Mr. Vice-President, I would like to remind the Government that at the end of the day it is the population which elected the Government into office that determines the limits of the power of the Government, and without spelling it out I think that cogitating on that matter the Government would think about its course of action.

Yesterday, while we were in this Senate there was a very silent and peaceful demonstration—interesting. Grown men walking in the street with their hands before their individual mouths and holding each other’s hands in a particular way and they were in the vanguard of a protest action that started with a grain of fire. All it takes is one little match to start a conflagration given the circumstance, given enough oxygen, given enough fuel, what was a peaceful situation could become a raging inferno.

In this regard, I want to remind our friends collected here and the general population that one measure of taxation which the hon. Prime Minister of Great Britain—she was the “iron lady”. She was the lady that stood up to Argentina; she was the lady who rescued the state from certain dire situations; she is a lady whose memoirs I have read—two volumes—for whom I have the greatest admiration, but she tried to pass one law and it brought her government down. The very sophisticated, genteel, First World and elevated cultured nation rose up in revolt. There was rioting in the streets, overturning of cars, burning of buildings and general mayhem, and the very docile people who knew what it was to stand up against tyranny because they withstood the fuhrer and his onslaughts, they got together and brought down the Government of Lady Margaret Thatcher. That tax was called the “poll tax”. It was a community tax where every individual would have paid a head tax—so to say—and it was an invidious piece of legislation.

The property tax which this Government is now seeking to implement is a pervasive tax that reaches into the nooks and crannies of every sector of this community, affecting old and young, healthy and ill—

Sen. Enill: Senator, may I?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes, please do.

Sen. Enill: Thank you for giving way. Throughout the course of the debate I have heard the comment being made about the tax being introduced. I just want to clarify for the general—


Sen. Enill: Yes. That the tax is not being introduced. [ Interruption ] The tax is in fact in place and what we are seeking to do is to amend that tax. I just wanted to put that on the record. It is not a tax that is being introduced, it is a tax that is here and is being amended.
Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes, I agree it is an old measure but it is an invidious measure that the Government is seeking to invoke to the detriment of the population of this country. [Desk thumping]

I am going to show, hopefully—I hope I get my extra 15 minutes.

Sen. Enill: You will.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Thank you, Sir. I am reassured. It is a measure that the Government neither needs nor should invoke. We have had laws in this country—I am going to be dealing with aspects of taxation. Now, I will say this, I have never been challenged with what I say on these matters. I have never been refuted. I am grumbled at. People do not like what I say and a number of people do not understand the implications, because it is too mind-boggling to wrap your mind around it. Some of the concepts of taxation, money, income and all of these things; what is the purpose of some of these things? I am going to be skimming along, hoping to pry open some manholes as we go along and let us see what sort of stench we get out of those. [Interuption]

Yes, by all means I acknowledge that this is an old Bill. It is like the Hanging Bill that many countries have sought to remove.

10.15 a.m.

You do not implement measures that put yokes upon necks of the people. [Desk thumping] That should not be done. Governments are supposed to look after the welfare of the people, not to seek to destroy them by pressures. In my religion, my scripture, God says to us, "Oppression is worse than slaughter." It is better you kill a man than to torture him and keep him under tyranny, under your boot, put your foot on his neck, let him live and suffer. [Desk thumping]

Now, Mr. Vice-President, this is going to be upsetting some people. I know it is going to be upsetting some people, but I want to call a spade a spade. Do you know what this Bill is? This Bill is a piece of wickedness. It is a Bill that should have been repealed, not resuscitated, implemented and magnified in its scope. What we are having here today, is the thin edge of the wedge. You think that this is going to be the end of that percentage of rental value in five years time? This is the start of it. The longest journey begins with the first step, and this little step that the Government has taken, is one terrible step for mankind in Trinidad. I will tell you, once you introduce a Bill and the population stays quiet, next year it is no big thing to increase the tax. That is how it goes. It takes a UNC government to reduce taxes. [Desk thumping] It takes a UNC government to remove nuisance taxes and
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

Oppressive taxes. If the UNC government had not come into power when it did, the paradigm would have remained the same. They would have continued to do survey after survey, study after study, and never gotten Project Pride off the ground.

I know there is some discomfort and ill ease over the airport, but you know, a lot of people had said to me before I got into this Senate, "Production with corruption we could tolerate. But corruption without production we cannot tolerate." But I will tell you, if this Government—if the UNC government—[Interruption]

Sen. Jeremie SC: You know how long I want to hear you say that.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: No, no, no, a lot of people say this, "Doh give us corruption alone and no production." You know something, Mr. Vice-President, I stand here before you and everybody else here, and in our intestines and in our bodies we carry matter that we do not like to admit, and in every society we have good and bad, and as the Minister of National Security admits, you cannot eradicate crime. You cannot eradicate crime. You have to bring it under control. So you control your corruption and you have the production, because "all ah we tief" is what the PNM said some years ago.

Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol: Exactly!

Sen. M. F. Rahman: So we are not saying here we want a corrupt government. No, no, no. But we have to understand—and that is why we have police and judges. Although now the judges are having a bit of pressure. Those who have retired cannot even get a good pension, and those who are still in office cannot get the funds to do the work they have to do. But that is another matter. We will come to that in good order, in a way that it would not sidle into the discussion.

Mr. Vice-President, the effect of this—I am now getting back to where I was when the hon. Minister sought to clear my mind on a matter which I was very aware of. The pervasiveness of this tax is that every old man, every young man, every baby, every old woman, every young one, every little girl, the rich, the poor, the lame, the healthy, is going to be affected with an increase in the cost of living that is beyond the stage of oppressiveness.
Sen. Mark quoted a figure. I do not remember what is the figure, but the figure I had in my notes was 185,000 people in Trinidad live in conditions of income deprivation similar to Haiti, less than US $2 a day. I do not know what the exact recent figure is. [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: About 200,000.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Okay, I call it 185,000, you call it 200,000. Give or take a couple thousands. That is a huge number of people who are going to be affected further because this tax is going to affect from hovel to hotel, and house in-between. This is a tax that is worse than increasing the cost of fuel for vehicles. You know when you raise the cost of vehicles’ fuel, diesel, gas and so on, everything across the board is affected. Everything is affected across the board. This is such a tax and that is why it resembles Margaret Thatcher’s poll tax, and if the population understands—I have been to little functions in the interim since the budget was presented, and some very quiet ladies said to me very seriously, "We have to get up and get our placards out and start to protest against this measure, because it is very serious."

Let us examine some of the ways in which this tax is going to affect the people. Now bear in mind, we are not saying do not get things under control and we are not saying do not know who are supposed to pay their dues and so on, but leave well enough alone, and do not go and try to squeeze the lifeblood out of people. As senior counsel, Sen. Diana Seetahal said, is it blood you are trying to get out of stone? She did not say that part, but she said, "Is blood", well I ain’t finishing it up. You want to get blood out of stone?

Mr. Vice-President, the country is already bleeding. We are washed in a sea of blood. There is dissatisfaction, discontent, rage and anger. Do you know this thing called road rage? There is societal rage at a level that is dangerous. The psychologists and the psychiatrists, and the people who understand these things would tell you, that we are heading into a very dangerous storm. The gathering storm that Darcus Howe had written about is back again, cyclical. Twenty-year cycles, 1970, 1990, 2010—Armageddon.

I know that the Minister of Health does not like to hear these things, because like the Prime Minister, even if it is the truth, you must not say it when it is sensitive. Do not say your child has swine flu, because the poor "fella" would die from swine flu if he has it. So if he has swine flu, deny it and he would live. That is not the way is works. You should know that. What you have to do is when you see the storm clouds gathering—Why we have hurricane watch to tell you when
to batten down your doors and seal up your houses? We here, are the watchers for the hurricane and we are telling you, it "ain't" going to be easy. 2010 may be another watershed year, and we are going now to say what are the problems that this tax causes.

First of all, everybody who owns a house as you know, or a property, is liable to some degree of initial taxation subject to increase later on. Now, if my grandfather built a house 50 years ago and it cost him $10,000, that house today with the land on which it sits, or which it stands, is going to be worth about $3 million. So now I am going to be paying a property tax on a $10,000 house at the rate of $3 million at today's value. Now at my age, I am a retired man and there are many, many like myself. You have a fixed income, you have a fixed pension. Well, here we get a little compensation for the little service we do by God's grace, and I could tell you balancing my budget is not easy, because I pay a horrendous rent right now and when you take out the other deductions and so on, you are not left with very much. But everybody, whether he is a rich landowner or a landlord, or he is a poor tenant, is going to face the music. Who owns the property is paying, but he is going to pass it on. I will tell you, we do not have a Rent Restriction Board or a Rent Review Board now, to appeal to for relief against unscrupulous landlords. So rents are going to go up, which means, there is going to be an erosion of your income.

When rents go up, rental of offices is going to go up too, doctor offices is going to go up in rental too, so what is going to happen? People will have to pay more medical fees; lawyer offices, more legal fees. School buildings—I do not know whether they are going to be exempt or whether the Maha Sabha and ASJA are going to have to pay for the buildings that they have. But you know what? The free education that the Government is trying to give is going to get challenged. Every direction this thing turns out—and what is going to happen, is that those people who cannot pay will have to suffer the dignity of having to go and beg the Government, to prove that they cannot pay. "Oh God, let me live in some dignity. Ah catching me nennen to balance meh budget." I have to go and broadcast it to some clerk in a little office where everybody could hear what I am saying. "Boss, ah living at de bottom of the rung. I cyah afford to pay this." You are losing the dignity that you are supposed to have.

Mr. Vice-President, this is going to affect the tourist industry because when the hotels have to pay on the value of their buildings, 40 per cent occupancy getting 100 per cent levy throughout the year. So when the hotels have to pay more in those taxes, they have to pass it on, and the already astronomical rates
that you pay for hotels is going to jump up further and we want to encourage tourism. But tourism on its own—and I digress for a minute, but it is still within the budget—is suffering tremendously from crime. Tourism is suffering from crime in a way—I am talking about tourism in Trinidad and Tobago—that boggles your mind and we are going down the tubes. To make matters worse, we now have on the Homeland Security website that the Prime Minister of a certain country is now suspected of being friendly with terrorists, after a certain gentleman put in an affidavit, which I understand the Attorney General is condemning a certain judge for referring it to the police. Here we have zero tolerance on crime, but the Prime Minister leaves this Chamber and goes to Woodford Square for a political meeting getting together, that was not authorized or allowed by the police and he was never brought to book, and here we have serious allegations against him again, and we are saying that we have zero tolerance on crime. As Sen. Seetahal SC pointed out, [Inaudible] the Government is changing the laws—[Interruption]

Sen. Jeremie SC: Senator, would you give way?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: No, not on this occasion.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Okay. All right.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: I am now warning up, thank you. Sen. Seetahal SC says we are breaking the laws very casually with regard to parking and traffic restrictions, and so on. This Government does not hold the law sacred. It acts in manners that appear to be above the law and this does not augur well for any community. It means that the young people down in the streets could break the law, we could break the law. He could break the law in his own way. Let us break the law in our own way, and you know what, those people have no hope to live. Those young men go out and buy their caskets and tell their mother, "Mum, I want you to bury me in that." They go out and live their lives, and they are unafraid.

We are providing tertiary education free, and we are not taking any social measures to rescue the depraved minds that are wreaking havoc upon this nation. This is a serious matter, and you are giving them an example to follow that lacks in legal integrity. It is a serious matter.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, this property tax is like punching your hand into a man's body, holding his heart and saying, "Listen, you do your part as a citizen; we expect this of you.” The unfortunate thing about this is that a lot of people believe that the Government is a benign government that is looking after the people's interest.
We had an Independent Senator here who sincerely believes in her heart—I have learnt to forgive her; I cannot help it; this is her mindset—that the Government has to be above board. I am not casting any aspersions; I am not making any charges. Every action of the Government may be well intentioned, but it is dangerous to our social health. It is not every measure that comes up.

There was a time that we used to have licences for dogs, licences for bicycles, licences for donkey cart; those are relics of the colonial days, and the necessity in those days was control; you had to know how many of this and how many of that. In addition to that, there were little markers to establish who was who in the community and what was what. A "fella" comes for his dog licence; well, he is a big "fella"; a "fella" comes for his bicycle licence, well, he is a little "fella"—or in those days he might have been a big "fella" too, because "fellas" used to ride to work—but there were social indicators.

In addition to that, Trinidad and Tobago did not have its own currency; it was not the master of its own destiny. Today—well, I was going to say that we are the masters of our own destiny, but the reality is that we have a master imposed upon us and we have to dance to the tune that palatial master plays on his accordion, because we do not seem to have a say. I am hoping, against hope, that there will be a rethink on the side of the Government to say, "Should we impose this property tax?"

I want to commend the Minister of Finance on another matter, the issue of the rapid rail being withdrawn, for the moment. Although I understand that there is some study that is still continuing, but that is not unusual because this Government does study after study after study. I remember there used to be this piece of cable running across the road, and every time you pass on this road, for years and years, "budup, budup, budup"; they were checking how many cars. Every day the car population increasing, but they are checking how many cars to decide how to—"oh God, build a four-lane highway and done".

"Where yuh going? Yuh want 2020 Vision"—America has four-lane highways. "Yuh want to get better, instead of one lane, two-lane, three-lane, four-lane." Use your brains, but "doh" spend millions.

I am talking about spending millions of dollars, not only on those kinds of researches—Mastrofski was how much, $80 million? I do not know how much Admiral or General Ross charged; that might be a national secret; we do not want the criminals to know how we are coming for them. But imagine 275 recommendations—oh God, I have never been so embarrassed. It was 300. It is
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  Wednesday, September 23, 2009

[SEN. RAHMAN]

like I come to you and ask, "Well, tell me how to be a good father", and you find 275 ways to teach me, "who suppose to know", "I bring up seven children"— Of course my children could find 275 ways to correct what I did in the old days. When children grow up they always have their little beefs and they tell you, "You were unfair to me, because you gave her the cookie when I wanted it"; but it was her turn, you know. But that is all right, my children are going to lace after me, after today. [Laughter]

But the point is this: Admiral or General Ross comes and tells this Government, “Three hundred ways all yuh doing things wrong”, and “dey eh shame”. That is a national secret that you should have kept, and quietly implement it. Do not tell the world that you are so dumb, that 275 things somebody has to come from Canada to tell you how to sort the criminal situation out? Where are you going?

Sen. Browne: What do you want?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Why did you use Mastrofski? Why did you not use Sen. Prof. Deosaran? I understood from what Sen. Prof. Deosaran has said that Mastrofski lifted pages out of his work and presented to this Government to get $80 million. It is a terrible situation. As Jesus Christ said, may God bless him, a prophet is not without honour except in his own country. "He is a Trinidadian, so he eh know; he cyar know." I want to know where the Prime Minister was born; he is a Trinidadian, but he knows everything. It is a serious situation.

Starting alone with this property tax, it is terrible, it is invidious. The question is this: Why did taxation come into the picture? Let us start with the United States of America. When it was a colony of Britain and immigrants started to come from all over the world: Holland, Spain, France, England too, and all the European countries, every one of them brought their little currency with them. We could even go back further, in the medieval days in England. The king had no wealth of his own, but you wanted a king, so you have to give me some of the money to run the army. "I doh have any money"; I have to take out of your wealth. [Interruption] [Microphone feedback sounds out] [Laughter] Is it an attempt to drown me out? Anyhow, I welcome the change; I will speak a little softer.

The king needed money to equip his army, but he has no funds, so he goes to the barons, "Come, come, give me some money", we equip an army and we go and fight the infidel Muslims and run a little crusade and "ting". Anyhow, that is making light of the matter. Seriously, that is how taxation came about.
When you went to America, from whatever country you came, you brought little bits and pieces of gold. When the government started to be formed, it had no money, so they had to take from the people. You had to tax the people, as a cooperative effort, to be able to meet the expenses of the State. But do you know what the American Government does today?

Of course, they have retained taxation, and with good reason, because it is an economic instrument that is used, among other things—I am not an expert on all of it; I figured out some of it—to control population spending and to preserve foreign exchange, because if everybody has too much money, they would buy up all the US money, go away and spend it. In a very roundabout way, when you control your currency and you control your income, you preserve your resources; you preserve your foreign exchange, because foreign exchange is what you need to bring in goods from overseas, to travel overseas and to spend money.

Mr. Vice-President, TT dollars is monopoly money, even in Barbados. My God, in the old days we used to have some currency dignity; we have lost all. It has become like real play money. But to make the point, I have been talking, writing and preaching my head off for years, and as economist, Mary King, mentioned recently, I am not concerned about the TT dollar, the Government issues it. It is the foreign exchange I am concerned about.

Insofar as you have to preserve the foreign currency by restricting the availability of the TT currency, you have to have taxes, you have to have VAT, as a control for consumerism. You have to have different taxation to be able to maintain certain institutions in the social fabric, in the social structures. I am not saying that we do not have to have taxes, but we do not have to have every tax that your mind could work out and conjure up. You do not have to have taxes left, right and centre. You do not have to have taxes that cost more than the revenue they are bringing in; that is an absurdity.

You are implementing taxation that is costing more than administrative and other costs. In the old days we used to have the one cent stamp, until a bright bulb told the Government, some minister, "But you know, a one cent stamp does cost more to produce, than the one cent you are selling it for"; and then they cut out the one cent stamp.

Taxation is a necessary evil; I would grant you that, but it is not a universal necessity. The Government issues TT dollars. What is the difference between my paying you $1,000 and taking back $250, and my paying you $750 and keeping
$250, and taking out nothing? It is the same difference; there is no difference. Countries and States are run in this world without personal income tax, but it is a way to trace ill-gotten gains.

You know Al Capone, who was involved in so much terrible illegalities, was brought down because he evaded paying tax; so there you have a great situation where tax laws provided a device for social order. But this is a tax that is providing the wherewithal for social disorder. This is a taxation that is totally unnecessary. The Government does not need to collect TT dollars.

If you are saying that you have US dollars, "People, we want part of it, because that is the only way we could run your government and provide for you", I could understand that. But you are asking people to bend over and be brutalized in order to get TT dollars, that you are printing and issuing.

The United States of America got over this depression in record time, unlike in the 1920s, when "fellas" were jumping out buildings. We did have a couple of suicides, within this recent time; persons who did not understand the capability of currency manipulation. I made this point already, that the US is a very favoured nation, because it has been able to achieve the impossible: Printing money on paper, giving it to the world and they are holding it as if it is gold, and everybody holding US dollars because, "This have value." But do you know what? It is like when you buy jewellery from a jewellery shop and you try to pawn it in another pawn shop, they say, "Nah, how much yuh pay for that $10,000? I only giving yuh $500 for that." But if you go back to the same jewellery shop from which you bought it, and they pawn it, they would give you half the value, because they have to maintain the value of their jewellery in your eyes.

They cannot sell you something for $10,000, and then tell you that they would only give you $500 as a pawn value. So if you intend to buy jewellery and pawn it later, on a rainy day, buy it from a jewellery shop that you could also pawn it in. You could show them the bill and say, "I bought this from you for $10,000, how you go give me $500?" They would give you $5,000, half the value, because they have a 100 per cent margin, and if the jewelry is good, they could sell it back.

The point is we cannot do it. America prints its money and that is how—I am surprised that certain Members on the Government Benches do not understand this. We had a little chat in the tea room yesterday. I threw out a little "ting" and I got an answer, surprisingly. I do not know if they were playing a game with me, thinking that I did not know. The United States of America has rescued the
business community by giving away money; "Dollars for Clunkers". They handed over millions to GM and others that were facing collapse. The trick is this: When the government could issue currency, you and I cannot; so GM could not print money. The people cannot print money.

The only authority to issue fiduciary money is the Government. So the Government could provide for its needs by means whereby it does not have to burden the population. The property tax is an iniquitous piece of work that has no right being brought. [Laughter]

Sen. Browne: Where did you do your economics? You just print money and give it away?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: That is what United States of America has been doing, my brother, hon. Minister. I know you would laugh at it, because the very fabric of the economic structure is going to be threatened, if everybody starts to understand this. They are going to have to come back to respecting your dollar, because there is no other way that they could buy groceries. There is no other way, because it is a controlled substance. Currency is a controlled substance, and it is controlled by the Government.

If you want to have the facade of increasing revenue, take a normal means that does not invade the entrails of every aspect of the society. This may sound terrible, but "you in a jam", you want money and you really feel you have to get money from the people you are giving the money to, reduce the personal allowance, raise the income tax, raise the motor car tax or something that is specific.

People must have a way that they could control their expenditure and pay less tax, so they would not buy a car; they would let a car last three years, rather than two, and they would save. But you put a property tax where people cannot escape; people in need; people who have absolute need for their properties; people who cannot afford to repair their properties now in a dilapidated condition; no rental value; they cannot buy food—Do you know something, Mr. Vice-President? Our Prime Minister is a very, very far thinking man.

I want to tell you something. I did not get it, when he was saying it, but right now it is in my face.

10.45 a.m.

In his constitutional—well, you know he says it is not a Constitution he has; he is having a consultation about a piece of document. You know? Semantics! You give me a thorn and it will stick me, whatever you call it. His position was
that he would not put into the Constitution the right to a home as a human right. You have the right to a job; you have a right to this; you have a right to that, but you cannot put in you have a right to a home. To him, that is a no-no.

We have come to the point now where we see that the measure that is being implemented with this property tax, if it is not designed to, will accomplish the divestment of property ownership from the hands of thousands of people down the line. We are going to have a nation where people are known by their property holding, because the wealthy is going to stand up there waiting to buy the properties from those who can no longer afford to pay the taxes.

We now have a thing called reverse mortgage, where you work all your life and you pay your mortgage and in your old years you go to the bank and the bank starts to advance you money to be able to live. The financial system recognizes that people grow old and earn less and become in need. Because when you get old you have arthritis, rheumatism, kidney failure; you have all sorts of things and you have all sorts of expenses to face. And who are owning properties that are mortgage free now? Only the old people who now cannot even afford to buy the other things.

So the Prime Minister's position that property is not your right means prepare to be divested of it because you do not have a right to a property.

Sen. Browne: Nobody ever said such a thing.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Well, I heard it on the television where he was talking about the Constitution. I should not be taking you on from that side there, but I should clear this matter up. He did say this matter; I heard it and go back and get the tapes from CNC 3 where you will see where he was talking about the constitutional issues. Or was it at the PNM convention? I heard it very clearly: "You are not entitled to a property."

So the Government is working very hard; 10,000 houses with 100 given out, some ridiculous figure I heard yesterday, and the bureaucratic procedures—you know, it is a very funny thing. You are claiming that you have finished 10,000 houses but you cannot claim that you gave them out yet. I do not know what kind of a thing—it is a very, very, jokey matter. You cannot finish the infrastructure; you cannot get the completion certificates; you cannot landscape the area; you cannot put in the plumbing. And do you know what? You "go" have houses being vandalized like crazy.

Out of 10,000 houses, I could almost guarantee you that even the guards who are guarding the houses "go" be involved in taking out fittings and stuff. We "go" have a very interesting industry here. But I digress. Let me deal with the property tax.
Those very properties that you want to encourage people to buy, you are telling them, "You know, when your winter years come, you know you will have to get out in the road. So do not worry to even think about escape." None shall escape. You could run but you cannot hide. You are not going to get away from the clutches of the Government.

If 2010 comes and we pass that year and the OWTU’s protest yesterday does not develop—because what I am saying here today is going to cause the ears of the people to prick up a bit. The Government does not need TT dollars; it needs US dollars. That is why our resources are so important to us; that is why taxation has to be reviewed with regard to those companies that exploit our resources. We have to get the funds from them. We monetize it and we do not monetize it in TT dollars; we have to monetize it in US dollars, because that is the only way that we can continue to do trade with the rest of the world and import the things that we should be producing for ourselves. Because of a lack of interest in everything other than oil and gas, we have neglected to develop our economy and we are a one-product economy where you cannot do anything other than depend upon your gas and your oil.

**Sen. Browne:** It is called mono-crop.

**Sen. M. F. Rahman:** Mono what?

**Hon. Senator:** One commodity.

**Sen. M. F. Rahman:** One commodity.

**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. W. Mark]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. M. F. Rahman:** Thank you very much everybody. I must confess that I am utterly astounded at the speed with which this time has passed. I hope the rest of the national community found it was interesting as I found it was to give it. There are many, many things I have to say. Look, to tell you the truth, I brought 30 or 40 pages of notes, but you see, the issue that I have just discussed, is the fulcrum. But let us just deal with a couple of things.

I want to tell you, Sir, that the aluminium smelter which the Government is still intent upon developing, apart from being a disaster to the environment and being a symbol of the Government’s unconcern with court orders, this is one of
those things where—and remember I have underscored the need for foreign currency. We are going to get that aluminium smelter on terms from China, I think it is, and pay on a soft loan over 20 years. In other words, with gas as a commodity that is losing its lustre, for the reason that alternative fuels are on the way and are developing: clean coal; nuclear fuel; solar energy; geothermal energy; hydroelectric energy, all of these systems of developing power are coming on stream and nations are coming up with greater finds of gas and oil and we are going to have a diminishing market.

Even though our resources are enhanced by new discoveries we are going to have a reduction in revenue by a reduction in demand for the commodity that we depend upon so completely and we are going to be—you know the deficit spending that we are doing right now? Between last year and the new year coming up, we are going to be up to about, I think it is $18 billion. The debt servicing for that alone is $7 billion. That is going to erode the revenues that we are getting.

In other words, it is like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the hill. As you go up, you are getting pushed back down, because it is what Sen. Mark referred to as the debt trap; the more the years pass the greater the burden becomes and less of your foreign earnings become available to you for use in your country's development.

The smelter is a horrible idea. It has no benefit for this nation. They are shutting down aluminium smelters all over the world and we are talking about wanting to preserve our environment and we are heading into an area of disaster, not to talk about the iron and steel. You know, Caribbean Steel Mills shut down after all those years of operation. Iscott was such a disaster until Mittal. And you know the only reason they succeeded is because they have a global empire of steel and they could subsidize and they could use here as cheap labour and do the things that they want to do.

But as a little nation looking for stature, we are going in the wrong direction. It is better we grow—and you know, talking about growing and the megafarms, it is better we grow food and eat; feed our people, than to try to do the big things that impress the world.

Megafarms, on the surface, appear to be a resounding success, but the megafarms are operating at a tremendous loss and the crops that are being selected for production are not the best crops. As somebody said in the other place, you are planting root crops on prime land. That is so unwise. Imagine! It is only one megafarm we have going so far. They are talking about bringing experts
and the agricultural community in Trinidad has been producing tomatoes, dasheen and everything for years, against tremendous odds: flooding, praedial larceny—I always have a problem with that word—and all of the other negatives that pull down the agricultural effort.

The Government is proud about fixing one point something kilometres of road and boasting about that. It is a shame, you know. I want to suggest to the Government that when you are bringing another budget, get up and say, "These are the programmes that we had introduced 20 years ago and we are still on stream with them and I want to assure that we are still doing it and these are the new measures." Oh gosh, do not roll out every hackneyed, old, time-worn, antiquity—what you call it—project, that you have and repeat it as if it is something glossy and new. You insult the intelligence of the population, and this is a thing that I find so reprehensible, except for your party supporters who say, "Aye, we are going to get a new highway."

I heard in the other place where a certain gentleman said: "We promised you water taxis last year and you got it this year." Water taxis were since Dr. Williams' days. It is a shame. You do not promise—they promise and deliver on a never, never.

I am sad to say that is why when the UNC came they put some turpentine in Government's tail and they now know how to get things done. But they are overdoing it. Now they know how to get something done and they are going in a mega way. But, you know, there are dangers. Not because the other “fella” driving down the track at about 120 miles an hour, you will jump in your car and say "I could do it too." Well, you "go" be history.

The national community needs to take a look at what this Government is doing. We have to ask ourselves: What is the success of the programmes of the Government? We have only reassurances that fail on an annual basis. I think they are a perennial failure of promises. "I assure that we will not have this figure in murders again." We are within two of the quantum and that is a great step back. In the UNC days we had 91 murders in a year; now you have, what, 450-odd?

This Government has to get a little serious. We need for the national community—and I am talking about small businessmen who have a little rental place and eking out a little livelihood, now with the same tax have to pay more. I am addressing small businessmen directly; I am addressing the doctors and the lawyers. Like I said, it is a perfect budget except for the horrible flaws. It is a cancer-ridden budget, but you get rid of the cancer and you get rid of all the sores and you have a nice little budget. You cannot do very much with it, but it could pass muster.
I have so much to say. One of the things I wanted to start off my little talk today with is that a wise man learns from the mistakes of others but it is a fool who does not learn from his own mistakes. This Government made this mistake before. When I say, this Government, I am talking about the PNM. Of course, we have a lot of new faces here; a lot of eager-beaver faces that really think they are doing a great job. Well, same old, same old; you are going down the same path and you are leading us down the same garden path.

As Shakespeare said: “Neither a borrower or a lender be…for borrowing dulls the art of husbandry.” One of the things I have in my notes here is that this Government has been stricken with an illness that is called Obsessive Compulsive Spending Disorder. They have become addicted to spending. Last year we heard, "We have the money, what yuh want us to do? We have to spend it." This year: "We ain't have de money, what yuh want to do? We have tuh borrow tuh spend." So what is the common factor here? Spend, spend, spend.

That is not the way a responsible government should run the affairs of the people. We are squandering. Like I said, you need your taxation to keep people in rein and to preserve your foreign exchange, but you do not squander your foreign exchange. Government is squandering whatever little it has left of its credibility.

11.00 a.m.

The Government has an idea to get into shipbuilding. But where are you going to put it? In St. Vincent and Grenada. What is the point? "What yuh doin for yuh Trinidadian people? Is Trinidadian who elect yuh to office to look after our affairs, not to look after Grenadian affairs and Vincentian affairs." Good heavens! Now we are looking after Nigerian affairs. We want to run off and give them advice and we are getting flooded with a lot of illegal immigrants. We are having a social disaster of our making and we are not thinking about the consequences of the action that we are taking. We are not thinking about the consequences of the course that we are following. It is Titanic all over again. "We ploughing through the seas but is bright sunshine."

Everybody say, “Captain, de ship go sink yuh know.” “What all yuh know?” I know. I alone know. I think that we are in very dangerous waters. There is one simple advice that the Government should take. "Live within yuh means." Cut back! Every housewife and every householder know this. You know how many people get into trouble using credit card. That is what you call going to the IMF for structural adjustment. Structural adjustment is not going to be nice medicine. I will tell you that the Government is going to be held—maybe, this time "nobody go say dey tief, buh dey troe way, dey splurge, dey wanton wasted."
These are words to which I am asking the Government to pay heed. We cannot change the money Bill but we are asking you to sit and think. Contemplate your action. "Contemplate where yuh headin." Think about where you are taking the people. You believe that you have a line with God and he could put not only new gas in the ground for you, but open the markets to the world. It does not work so, Sir. The credit rating that this country has, Lehman Brothers had a better credit rating the day before they crashed.

**Sen. Mark:** Iceland too.

**Sen. M. F. Rahman:** Iceland. Oh yes! This is not a joke. We vex as Standard and Poor's asked to see us to get our sincere position. When I was in business we used to have, I think it was Moody's, it might have been Standard and Poor's, asking our friends and us questions and asking the bank about us. You have to tell them the truth otherwise they would blacklist you.

What I am asking here is reflection. We do not want to commit Hari Kari. You know Hari Kari where you take your sword and fall on your sword.

**Senators:** Kari.

**Sen. M. F. Rahman:** Hari Kari. I thought was Kiri. "For years I sayin Kari." Look at that. Hari Kari. Oh yeah! Hari Kiri. "I putting ah ‘i’ instead of ah ‘a’." By any other name is suicide. You know the honourable thing for prime ministers to do when they have botched up the nation is to resign and say—by the way, he will still get his pension and all his perks. I am not asking that he resign. I am asking that he review his position and course, and start to pay attention to the people who are giving him advice that he ought to heed.

I thank this honourable Senate for the honour it has conferred upon me by permitting me to speak uninterruptedly and deliver this little message that I have delivered and I hope that the nation benefits from it.

Thank you. [Desk thumping]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawans who is out of the country.

**SENIOR'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.:
Senator’s Appointment

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT]

“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: DR. ROLPH BALGOBIN

WHEREAS Senator Subhas Ramkhelawan 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, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, ROLPH BALGOBIN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 23rd September, 2009 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Subhas Ramkhelawan.

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 22nd day of September, 2009.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Dr. Rolph Balgobin took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran: Mr. Vice-President, a budget debate is one of the most visible manifestations of our democracy. It has its appropriate level of noise and criticisms all in the search for equilibrium and, of course, a certain measure of discomfort on the Government Benches. This is what I mean by a manifestation of our democratic process. The Opposition is duly entitled to express its criticisms, searching for the gaps and flaws in the presentation made by the Government's side. If it seems that there is excessive rancour, I think that it has to be taken in stride because that is inherent in the kind of democracy that we have accepted. It is an adversarial system and the Government is also entitled at the same time to use its majority as a government that has been freely and fairly elected to govern in the way that it sees fit.
Listening to the debate so far I have learnt a few things and I am quite sure others have as well, even from my Independent colleague, Sen. Drayton, Sen. Ramkhelawon and my distinguished colleague on my left Sen. Seetahal SC. I will support some of the things that they have said. Whilst I rise to celebrate our democracy in terms of the budget, I also rise to help protect that democracy by pointing out to the Government where they might be going wrong but also to lend support for the things that I believe they are doing right.

As a matter of empathy though, I am concerned about the new Members of the Government sitting there relatively new to the Senate, new in Government, trying to ask themselves, “What did I do to earn all this pressure from the public, the Opposition Benches and the Independent Benches?” That is the nature of the system. You have to accept it because each person has a legitimate role to play in ensuring, not so much moving the Government out of power or keeping it in power, but maintaining the democracy that we so dearly cherish.

The budget debate has its irony. It is a powerful money Bill which gives us the freedom to speak about almost anything we wish, mainly because of the value of the taxpayers' dollar and the need to account for the taxpayers' dollar. That freedom, historically, has been well accepted. The irony is that after you have the freedom to speak about anything, the Government also has the freedom to do nothing about what you have been saying. It is really more symbolic than substantive in that regard.

I do not wish because of what I have heard, so many people have commented on the details of the budget. I will not wish to go into many of the details because there are three major issues to which I want to refer. These are issues pertaining mainly to lawlessness, governance and touching on the separation of powers which is a very critical element in that democracy about which I just spoke. The pillars of democracy must also be protected apart from the process that we use to protect that democracy.

I cannot help but note the many excuses the Government continues to give for spending the money in the way that it has done. If this is an exercise in accountability, I feel obliged to point out and remind them that they should spend the taxpayers' money with more thoughtfulness, less haste and a better grasp of the basic services that this country needs but has not been provided with in spite of the vast expenditure. That sums it up. How in heaven's name, what makes you spend from the 2006/2007 budget, then in the 2007/2008 budget, what will make
you move from an expenditure of about $40 billion to an expenditure of about $54 billion within one year, an increase of 35 per cent? What magic can you use to generate plans and projects to absorb or allocate a 35 per cent increase of expenditure within one year?

You cannot justify that reasonably. You could politically. In terms of economic sense and being the trustee of taxpayers' money, that to a reasonable person, to a reasonable population does not seem right. It does not seem right because of the consequences in which we find ourselves. That also does not make it right. If you say we are suffering from an international collapse of the economy, that excuse can only go so far now. When you look at all the indicators you would find that we must suffer some of the consequences given our reliance on oil, gas and international finance. You will notice that while countries have suffered similar consequences, relatively speaking, even across the Caribbean, when you look at all the economic intelligence reports, the rise in our inflation is remarkably outstanding compared to those. This means that there are other things in the economy that need to be controlled, guided or even corrected, or the other way, you have contributed unduly to the relative rise in that inflation as an indicator. I will not call the inflation percentages of other countries, 3 per cent, 2 per cent, 4 per cent. We were hitting double digits at one point.

There are things in the economy that you need to examine. Food prices, I think that you have been a bit cowardly in tackling food prices as robustly as you should be. You were on the periphery. Even though you have legislation to protect consumers and invoke certain regulations, you merely pappyshow the national community again, as if you are engaged in a public relations exercise, telling them about caveat emptor, the buyer must be aware. Well if the buyer must be aware through all the legislation that have been passed by the Parliament to protect the consumer and to give the Minister in charge the authority which he has and has not been using as forcefully as he should to protect the consumer; when you have prices running away and you get on television and talk about caveat emptor, your role is much more than that, you are guilty of complicity, to put it in blunt terms, and that is why the public is so disturbed.

11.15 a.m.

I have always said, and I repeat, that you have not been planning properly in the social and economic development of the country. You give the impression that you get up one morning, decide to do this, that and the other; lend our money to a Caribbean neighbour or buy a jet or something of that sort, with no studied analysis with either reason, transparency or subsequent accountability.
I have asked you to have your multisectorial planning team. You came recently talking to the business community about trust. People will not trust you arbitrarily; you have to set the platform incrementally so that they come to you with confidence. You cannot wake up one morning and ask people to express goodwill to you and to have trust and confidence in your way of managing the country's resources, when you have not been convincing them that what you are doing you are doing dutifully and as a measure of thrift.

I have said that you should work with the private sector. I asked you three years ago to have tripartite talks with the labour movement and with the private sector and to show some leadership as a government. You have left that on the side and suddenly come to do what you should have been doing years ago. Maybe you should bring back the National Economic Advisory Council where there were people like Willie Dumas, Frank Rampersad, Barsotti; all these people getting together and helping the Government formulate its plans on a long-term measure. So the vaille-que-vaille nature of your operations will not be diminished nor will be restrained by proper analysis and the provision of data to guide different ministries.

You may not say so, but I am sure that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance might tell you that he does not have enough data to make the kind of projections and to enforce the kind of financial management that he would like to. But if you have this agency, a National Economic Advisory Council, as you had demolished and left a gap, bring back the National Economic Advisory Council or some similar body; then you will have trust in a structural sense; not asking for it as a speech, but you will have the structure to accommodate the goodwill and trust that you require because you have this professional body of experts, multisectorial, assisting you in your planning.

As I said, I do not want to speak about your labour intensive programmes, which have become quite criminogenic, upsetting and subverting your other programmes and causing you headache, which you may not admit but by sheer accountability the moneys in your social programmes have not been bringing the benefits either in terms of civility or in terms of employment sustainability. So your trusteeship for taxpayers' money to me is in jeopardy and you seem to suffer from a lack of political management skills. I hope that before the debate ends, especially since you have Ministers like the Minister of Health, the Attorney General and other Ministers replying, perhaps you will calm my concerns and that of the national community.

I said to myself: Why are you going to speak about property tax when so many others have spoken about it? But between yesterday and today, and after
listening to some of the speakers, especially those on the Independent Bench, one of them asked if you want blood.

A pensioner called me this morning. She said: “If you have to say anything, just use the word ‘disgusting’; they did nothing for pensioners.” I do not want to be overly dramatic; that is not my purpose, as our oath says, I come here “without any personal preferences or unwholesome prejudices”. I have come to help the Government do right, but I have also come under section 40 of the Constitution where the Independent Senators are chosen to perform a professional role; to make an analysis with great respect to the hard work no doubt that the Government is putting in its own efforts. But hard work does not necessarily mean good work. That should be clear.

This property tax has a lot of the country offended and I think that there are three major reasons for it. I am not saying it is a new proposal; you are merely amending the law. I am not saying people should not pay taxes. I am not saying that at all. I am saying three things. Your timing is extremely bad; the context in which you are moving with that amendment of increasing property tax, people feel terribly deprived of basic services. There are a number of other taxes which we pay — road tax, green tax, health surcharge and, in addition, there have been recent, significant increases in public utilities, especially electricity.

People seem to forget, but they should not forget because like a thief in the night, WASA will come with its own bag to increase its revenue as soon as the increase in property tax takes place. That is the basis for WASA making its charges. So, the public is duly worried. They have found that you have been collecting taxes and basic services have not been properly delivered. That is a point made by the Minister of Local Government repeatedly.

The Minister of Local Government and the Government itself, especially some of its frontline speakers, have admitted that the services are not properly delivered to the country and that is why you have this heavy emphasis on local government reform. So the context in which you are introducing this amendment is a vexatious one, as if you have declared war on the salaried class, the nurses, the police officers, the teachers and public servants. You have declared war on the salaried class time and again. You started with the gas hike, 33 per cent, and then you spoke, trying to justify the hike, that those who can afford it can pay.

This question of who can afford is becoming a diminished, continuously unjustified argument because less and less people can afford things of necessity,
apart from food prices and other things. So your political management approach in trying to justify your increases, to me, has the country in a state of increasing unrest.

I have heard it said repeatedly that other countries have such taxes. When people talk about Singapore must do this and the Asian Tigers must do that, you are really mistaken, you know. The UNC was under the Singapore syndrome, not knowing that the constitution there is very different from here. You cannot get up and say anything you want in Singapore in a public square. There are things you cannot say on radio. If you throw a box of matches on the road, they will lock you up. If you enter with drugs in your pocket, they will sentence you to death and they tell you so at the airport. So when you are comparing countries, you have to be careful that you have a responsibility to build your own country and not drop things down and make silly excuses as the one you are making that other countries have property tax, therefore, what is the quarrel here.

Let me tell you something. I was in Miami on university business a month ago. There was a headline in the Miami Herald dated July 28, 2009. The article started from page 1. The headlines go as follows: "Homeowners Fuming over higher tax notices". It reads as follows:

“The proposed tax notices arriving in Miami-Dade and Broward mailboxes in recent days have stirred a wave of protest, with dozens of homeowners taking to the streets Thursday and thousands of others dialing their property appraiser’s office.

Many homeowners, already feeling pressured from high unemployment, a tumbling stock market and dwindling property values, were angry…

‘They are going berserk,’ said Charlotte Greenbarg, a Hollywood resident and president of the Broward Coalition…”

That is what American societies do; they form coalitions. They defend their democracy articulately and visibly. They use their feet, if not their vote, and that is the warning that has been coming out quite ominously from several speakers, Sen. Drayton, Sen. Seetahal SC and some others on the Independent Benches.

Whilst you can remove some of that contention as political fare, there are other sensible statements coming with respect to the context in which you are making this amendment.
The story goes on. Do not tell me about other countries. Other countries will not take it so. The consequence of the poll tax was also described. I am telling you, as our oath says, “without personal preferences or unwholesome prejudices”, you are handling this matter badly and if you insist on being resistant to taking another course, I am not sure what will happen. You may win the election, but winning an election in this country is a peculiar thing; it has less to do with issues and governance. You know what it rests on and you know how to use that kind of ammunition, which I will not get into.

There is another headline, same Miami Herald dated August 28, 2009. “Homeowners flipping out over notices: Property tax”. When you make comparisons, there are other countries that will do the same thing quite differently. You bring it in a more reasonable way. My suggestion to you, quite briefly, is that you seem to be violating the social contract. It seems that you have taken that principle of democracy on which the Westminster System depends, the social contract, well formulated by political philosophers, like John Locke, Jean Rousseau and Des Cartes. Those principles are what we are living on, but you seem to have, as a team, taken the social contract and thrown it in the dustbin. You must retreat sensibly. You will not lose face. You may even say that you have disturbed the national community and what you will do is to set up a task force to take a more reasoned approach to the whole thing.

Not only property tax, but there are other peripheral-related taxes that need to be looked at. You should do something as a gesture of goodwill to the national community. You must remember what happened when the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) invoked the 10 per cent cut on public servants. It is not that it was not necessary, with the IMF and structural adjustment, but it was the manner in which it was done. Selby Wilson, who was the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, will tell you that they had difficulties balancing the budget and he had a conversation with the Prime Minister that night and the next morning the 10 per cent cut came.

You cannot run a country like that; you cannot deal with a population like that. And then you added VAT. We seem to feel that we only have income tax in this country, but there is a 15 per cent tax rate, accompanying that and it hits the salaried middle class more than anything else because you as a very generous Government—this is where I find that the ambivalence—

11.30 a.m.

Sen. Browne: With respect, if the hon. Senator would remember, the marginal tax rate or the graduated tax rate was in fact 70 per cent and it has been reduced to 25 per cent.
Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: I am coming to that. That is why I was moving my hands so, because you are doing a balancing act. I know you have done good things. In fact, across the Caribbean, you are the most generous Government to the poor and the weak, but your flaw is, again, political management. You do not have any accountability system to help ensure that the money is used wisely.

There is a group that would be really objectively destitute. You are giving out this money with goodwill to others, through your social programmes, but you do not have the structure for accountability to let them be empowered incrementally to help themselves. You are making it look as if to be poor is attractive in this country, because of your generosity. You are making poverty a business in this country, a small people business, through squatting and vending. You can just walk into any piece of land, build a house and just sit back and wait for the Government to move you legally. So you then say you want to be put somewhere else and you are not accepting anywhere else; you want a place that you are satisfied with. That is how it has gotten. You have to review your system of political management.

I say squash this amendment on property tax, send it to a task force, or if you feel you want to impose the amendment now on the country, put it in your manifesto for the next election. Let the public know beforehand: say this is what we stand for. We are going to amend the tax regulations in so and so way, because that is an important thing. It is undesirable to increase taxes so significantly along the way between elections. Put it in your manifesto. Let the UNC put their views in their manifesto too and let the PNM put their proposals in their manifesto and go to town on it.

We do not have a system of referendum. In some countries, we have proposition A and proposition 46. We do not have that system, so please, do not bully the country. Do not bully the middle class. We have enough of that, maybe you are not aware.

Sometimes I feel that the Government is in another country where there is no traffic. You do not see the problems in the educational system; the spillover which is causing gang formation, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. Perhaps, these things are too distant from your vision. No, wake up, wake up. You cannot boast about your GDP and have an unhappy country. That is why there is so much grief and tears over this budget. As a pensioner said, it is disgusting. I will not go so far as to say that.
I have seen in the original budget speech from the Minister of Finance and repeated by the distinguished Minister in the Ministry of Finance, reference to lawlessness. Lawlessness has become a disease in this country. It is a pressure of its own upon the lawful. It is not only giving governments and the police problem, but the lawless break into your homes and are not caught. They steal your motor cars and they are not caught, as they should be.

The Minister of National Security made reference to the crime rate. I do not want to go too fully into the crime issue; that would be for another time. I would give him a breathing space, as it were, but the rate of detection in this country for the larceny of motor vehicles is 3 per cent. That does not look right. The people who own motor cars are the middle-class, more often than not. You lose your car, television or laptop in your house and you have to put burglarproof in your house. Sen. Drayton made a point quite well about the additional burdens on those who own homes to protect their homes. You have to see Trinidad and Tobago as Trinidad and Tobago is. Do not tell us about Singapore and Standard and Poor’s, because a lot of us are getting poor. We have to, as I have said, wake up and be a little careful of political management.

If a Martian came here and read the budget speech, even the one by the distinguished Minister in the Ministry of Finance, he would say this is heaven on earth. The proposals are magnificent. The transportation promises are brilliant, and "doh ask for agriculture". You could make India and China, in terms of agriculture, look small by your pronouncements. That is not the issue, because a Trinidadian would touch the Martian on his shoulder and say: “Aye, aye, wake up, we heard all that before.” The Trinidadian would tell the Martian: “Like yuh booze or what?” And he might give him one of Jack Warner’s breathalyzers to use, because it is not real. The promises you have been making here, I must tell you, are with goodwill. It is an expression of goodwill.

But even from the John Humphrey days, as the Minister of Works, when they promised that highway from San Fernando to Mayaro, people started sending up the value of their land. There was no highway then. In the NAR, they promised us a big family park in Caroni. There is still nothing there. The people in this country, one government after another, especially this one, since this is the present time, have grown very disenchanted. It is a population feeling under siege. They need some more happiness in their lives and this is the time you bring in an amendment for the property tax. By all means, we should want to pay, but what I am saying is, do it a different way. Do it as foreplay. See it as a courtship with the population. Take it more gently and you would really penetrate their consciousness, if done properly. [Laughter]
The taxes on—[Interruption and crosstalk] the imaginations that people have are what the calypsonians use to profit.

**Sen. Piggott:** Very good pun.

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** Why did you not at least, even before now—you say you do not want the rapid rail because it is expensive and there are some questions about the feasibility study and corruption. But still, from where I stand, could you not have put a rapid rail on a height, which is all over the world, from at least Port of Spain to Curepe, at least? You have the Priority Bus Route; you could build these concrete pillars and run the thing. At least bring some partial ease. Do not tell us about from San Fernando to Arima and Sangre Grande. Give it, as I have said, piece by piece. At least do something tangible.

Those taxes that you have imposed on drivers and increased the penalties—[Interruption]

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** It is like a tax, but it should not be in the budget.

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** Those are called boo-boo taxes. [Interruption]

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** It is not tax.

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** Those, sorry, are boo-boo penalties. After one or two years, there will be little or no effect, in terms of tackling the substantive problem and somebody will say: “Boo, look at what has happened.” It is not just nuisance penalties; they have been elevated to higher nomenclature. They are boo-boo taxes.

While you are punishing or seeking to punish people who use the roads unruly, I want to draw your attention to two groups of people. The truck drivers are among the craziest things that the roads have seen in recent times. They are 10-wheel disasters/nightmares. “If yuh see dem how dey drive on the roads!” They cut in and overtake you because they are big and they feel they can push you off the road. I think you should look at these truck drivers in some form of taxing the owners of these trucks more heavily. Not only do they drive more dangerously, they damage the roads more than anything else. You have to review the system of who is using the road and enforce a more equitable form of revenue, if you want to call it so.

You speak about police vehicles being parked at bars and rum shops; that may be true. The truck drivers, that is their waterhole. Whilst they are driving with their heavy loads, they end up being drunk on the roads. I have seen them swerving on the roads and I know drivers who admit to taking a beer and a drink
of rum along the road. They boast about it. Maybe that is why you need the breathalyzer; not only in its presence, but in its enforcement. What has also led to accidents, is another group called the pedestrians. Those are the creatures that walk across the roads gingerly and recklessly, with their cellphones in their ears looking neither left nor right, but crossing in the line of heavy traffic, hoping that by some magic you will stop. They stop and watch you very fiercely, even though the red light is against them. You have said nothing about that, which means you need a more holistic approach to traffic regulations and behaviour on the streets.

What has happened with these pedestrians, some of them, not all, is that they would carelessly cross the roads and recklessly run across with their cell phones stuck in their ears, with no care or concern of the traffic and the need for an orderly more civil way of crossing the road. Where the old railway station used to be, that place is a nightmare; that stretch. The Government has installed a proper traffic light. It has a pedestrian crossing written on it. It turns green and it works well, but these pedestrians cross the whole strip, and even when the light is against them, they still cross in such a way that they would not know if a car would bounce them because the cellphone is in their ears.

When I was in primary school, we were taught to look left, look right and look left again before crossing. There were things called zebra crossings. There were signs near schools. We used to cross the roads more orderly, because we knew what the penalty would be; accident.

What we have now is that as soon as somebody gets in an accident, there are some ambulance chasers. Accidents have now become a profitable industry for certain people. There are accident consultants. They read the papers and whether the victim is right or wrong, even if the victim is wrong, they take a lawyer. I know the names of the lawyers, because I have done some research on it. One of these days, if not today, I would call the names. That is why parliamentary privilege is so important. That is why freedom of expression in this Senate is so important if it is done with the responsibility that is required, which is what I am seeking to do. What happens is that they have these lawyers fixed and they also have a doctor waiting. He is an “accident” doctor now. He is a real pro in giving a certificate stating things that are broken, which are really not broken, because he gets, apparently, a cut in the whole deal.

A letter was written to the Chief Justice in this matter, because it is putting undue pressure on insurance companies and drivers who are really, in the circumstances, not guilty. I have read the judgments, about 13 of them. I have
collected the judgments and I have done a content analysis with two legal colleagues of mine. What we have found is that the judge feels sorry for the victim. I will feel sorry too. Everybody feels sorry for a victim, but that is not the point. The court is not there to feel sorry; the court is there to administer a sense of justice and fairness and if you feel sorry for the victim, you must not punish the drivers so much by making them feel guilty or have this exorbitant charge on the insurance company as well.

11.45 a.m.

This racket has to stop or, at least, it must be brought to the notice of the insurance association ATTIC, the Chief Justice and the Law Association. I will not go too far on this instance, but I will come back to it another time. So, the Chief Justice was written to. It was dated July 14, 2009. Mr. Vice-President, very briefly, it says:

I wish with great respect to bring to your kind attention a situation which in the view of many needs some attention. This concerns civil actions arising from motor vehicles accidents.

Briefly, the cases to which I refer are those in which after due police investigation it was found that the pedestrian was clearly at fault.

There are statements to that effect here.

For example, unduly rushing across the road without looking at incoming traffic; using a cellular phone and walking directly to ongoing traffic. There are cases where they ran to the centre of the car and the police investigation determined that the driver was really not guilty.

So, it was not a matter of bouncing the person. They ran straight in the middle of the car whilst it was passing.

Now, I know the system has some definition of negligence and so on, but I would not go into all of that. I am just looking at the all-round circumstance which is, to me, a very unjust situation which needs attention.

However, the letter to the Chief Justice continues:

Apparently, invoked by private consultants, selected attorneys pursue civil action against the driver and, most peculiarly, which is a major concern, many such cases get tried in the San Fernando courts even if the accidents occurred in the north.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

Even if it happened in Port of Spain, Tunapuna or Curepe, it is sent down to San Fernando for some mysterious reason. Anyhow, I am not going to get into those things now. I will come back to them another time. The letter continues:

And, so, in the circumstances, since I know your deep interest in preserving and building public confidence in the administration of justice, I thought it helpful to bring this matter in a general manner for your consideration and possibly enquiry.

The Chief Justice did reply on July 31, 2009. I do not wish to divulge the contents of the letter at this time. It is a matter that calls for some fair play. If you want to feel sorry for the victim and the judge wants to compensate the victim, well have a joint accident compensation fund, and do the things in a regularized manner and not by ad hoc judgments. If you are a judge that has a deeper sense of sympathy, you will raise the level of the award and so on, but let it be a standardized system with some reasonable arbitration between; and let the insurance companies contribute and the Government contribute part. There should be an accident compensation fund. [Interuption] I am saying through the insurance companies. You could do it in a double-fashion way, but the lawlessness must stop.

Do you know what is particularly grievous about this? From the days of Mr. Chin Lee as Minister of National Security, we have been hearing about zero tolerance. It is like a calypso chorus; it is like a mantra. When you look around, what you have been tolerated is a heightened amount of lawlessness.

In criminology, the discipline studies the causes of crime; the consequences of crime; the implications of crime, both in terms of psychological, social and economic cost. Criminology also scrutinizes the institutions related to crime—the police, the courts and the prisons—to see whether they are functioning effectively and to see where there are gaps in the system.

Sentencing is an important part of the study of criminology. Are the sentences uneven, given similar circumstances? Could things be done to help judges have more reasonable sentencing? All these things fall within the ambit of criminology. A criminologist is supposed to scrutinize the practice in the legal profession.

So, what criminology does? I am coming to lawlessness from this point of view. Criminology, coming from the bowels of sociology, pays a lot of attention to something called the norms of a society. Briefly stated, norms could be legal
norms; formal norms or informal norms but, in any case, a norm is a standard of conduct that is acceptable by all and should be abided by all because, in principle, it is for the good and the betterment of all.

You could have mercy and mediation between but, at least, you must respect the existence of norms of good behaviour. For example, pedestrians have ignored the norms of road safety. What you find in football, cricket, and tennis are norms which are strictly enforced. You have a referee; you have an umpire. If these norms were not strictly abided, the games would collapse. In this society we have norms that are not strictly abided by, and the society is incrementally collapsing upon itself. If you call it lawlessness, the lawlessness has now become something like a disease. The rules are not maintained. There is something called norm maintenance, and we have lapsed seriously in that.

So, I move now to a letter to the Editor in the Trinidad Guardian dated September 21, 2009. It states:

“Move vendors from Charlotte St” by Alison De Freitas.

“I implore the mayor of Port-of-Spain to do something about the street vendors, especially those on Charlotte Street.”

There is congestion, unruliness and disorder in the capital city. What has happened? Last year, Charlotte Street vendors were ready to protest when the mayor asked them to move.

**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. D. Seetahal SC]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you. I am aware that this clock in Parliament has been very unfriendly to me. *[Laughter]* I will try to expedite matters. The mayor did try in April 2008. The article in the Express newspaper dated Tuesday April 01, 2008 states that on Friday, Port of Spain Mayor Murchison Brown said that as of today, vendors will no longer be allowed to sell on Charlotte Street, and he gave his reasons. A lot of pickpocketing was going on; a lot of stealing of haberdashery and other garments from store owners were taking place; and there were several protests from DOMA—disorderliness, rubbish on the street—now, that is the capital city.
Now, the mayor did the right thing. Mayor Murchison Brown gave them a notice, but they were ready to protest. What happened? That is why I referred to the need for norms. You establish your rules and you maintain your rules. Sen. Seetahal SC pointed out a situation in which the Government allegedly broke the rules by creating the zones that they did.

I believe that the Government should not subvert the rule of law, even if it has good intentions. The Minister of Local Government—I say so with a heavy heart, but I have to point out the facts of life if I have to make my point—she intervened and called a press conference. She said that she will set up a committee to look at short-term, medium-term and long-term measures and try to get somewhere for the vendors and so on.

The article said that the Ministry of National Security was concerned that there were many pickpocketers in the area snatching chains and other criminal activities, and they were asking the mayor to hold them off until they could put something better in place. But we must apply the law. The Minister of Local Government intervened and the situation largely persisted to the point where it might resurrect itself in all its probabilities.

You cannot have inconsistency in the application of rules; not when you want zero tolerance. I am merely sounding a warning. I am not necessarily condemning, because I know there was goodwill in it, but the road to hell has been paved with good intentions. The Government must be careful in exerting any influence to give the impression that it is subverting the operations of other agencies. A house divided against itself will not stand, not if you want zero tolerance; not if you want a lawful society; and not if you want to remove and eradicate lawlessness. You have to be brave enough to stand by the rules and ward off those protestors and do something else with them. I know that small businesses are bursting at the seams. They want a place to open their parlour and little business, but not on the streets. That is not what Vision 2020 expects. Please, desist.

I come now to the bus terminals. The Ministry said that those persons who occupy the bus terminals in Curepe, Tunapuna and other places have not been paying rent for years. That was not the arrangement. You have used taxpayers’ money to put up those edifices and, therefore, there was an arrangement to pay taxes. They were not paying taxes—the place was disorderly and broken down—and so the Government intervened. When the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, through the Permanent Secretary, issued the order that they be removed for all these violations and to restore the place into a more civil way and find alternative accommodation, the vendors and
appropriation bill (budget)  

wednesday, september 23, 2009

tenants, after committing all those wrongs, went and protested in front the Prime Minister's office. Do you know what happened? The Prime Minister told the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs to hold off; cease and desist from enforcing the regulations; cease and desist from trying to tidy up the place; cease and desist from carrying out your constitutional responsibility.

I am not going to belabour the Senate with quotations. My time is running out, but a house divided against itself cannot stand; not in the case of trying to reduce lawlessness. In fact, a house divided against itself is quite ironic, because the Minister of Local Government is on one hand and the Prime Minister on the other hand. It seems to be a family approach to it.

You see, it is like a mother correcting a child—to bring it down to brass tacks. The mother is correcting the child from doing wrong and preventing further wrongdoing, but the father comes and says: "No, leave him, I love him." The children then begin to exploit that division. This is what is happening in this country and it is contributing to lawlessness. You cannot allow the Government to escape from that responsibility. That is the point I am making. I say it without malice and with great respect, but it is a situation that needs to be corrected. Do not come and talk about zero tolerance without activating the principle of lawfulness.

Quickly, I believe, just like I referred to the sentences imposed by the court in accidents, I think Members of Parliament have a right to comment on judgments of the court. They have a right to comment on judgments delivered by the court. I am not saying that they should scandalize the name of the judge or be disrespectful to the function of a judge, but I am saying just as the courts and judges are allowed to comment on legislation from the Parliament, and, more precisely, under section 13 of the Constitution, they can reject a law which was passed by Parliament if it does not conform to a proper respect for human rights and so on.

12.00 noon

So, the courts have a great deal of power even over Parliament, but I believe in commenting on matters, and the privileges and immunity of parliamentarians should be secure and remain secure. Anybody who tries to diminish that right on behalf of the people, is really, temporarily misguided, or is on a premature attack against a very sacred right that this country and its Parliament have.
If, for example the Attorney General comments on what Justice Narine did, I think he is right, especially since he is Attorney General. You see, how would you invoke law reform or any adjustments to the judicial system as a Parliament? You have to scrutinize and consider what the judgments are. That is one reason. There are sometimes powerful reasons coming from the judges themselves. I refer to page 195 in a book entitled *A Society Under Siege*. Two jurists, Felix Frankfurter and Learned Hand, in American jurisprudence, together wrote a summary and it was published by the *Supreme Court Review*. This is a regular journal that scrutinizes the Supreme Court decisions, so there is no reluctance there to scrutinize judgments. These judges said:

"Judges as persons, or courts as institutions, are entitled to no greater immunity from criticism than other persons or institutions. Judges must be kept mindful of their limitations and of their ultimate public responsibility by a vigorous stream of criticism expressed with candour however blunt."

It goes on. There are other quotations supporting that option to criticize judges’ decisions. In the instant case though, without going too far, the question arises as to whether the judge should pass this affidavit sworn to by Abu Bakr, for further investigation by the police and the DPP, especially since it is argued that it was struck out by the Appeal Court and the Privy Council.

Striking it out, in my respectful view, as an outsider, does not mean to say it is out of existence. I have heard that comparison made; you struck it out in the instant matter, but you cannot rule it out of existence, as if it does not exist. How can a man swear to an affidavit and you call it completely out of existence? Not totally, because there is a world outside the courts.

The reputation of the Prime Minister in terms of this accusation by Abu Bakr in the affidavit is now before the public domain, and I would wish that the matter be cleared up some way or the other. I do not think that affidavit should be completely out of existence. I say leave Justice Narine alone, do not touch Justice Narine. [Desk thumping]

I am worried about it. I am getting into some deep waters here, but if you do not get into deep waters you would not reach very far. I want the Judicial and Legal Service Commission to stay away from doing anything unfavourable to Justice Narine. I am concerned because a member of that commission gave her views publicly already and I thought that was a pre-emptive attack. So, it creates in my mind, a doubt as to whether Justice Narine would get a fair hearing, if it does reach the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. I am worried; I am not saying yes; I am not saying no, but I believe you should not touch Justice Narine.
This is a summary statement, this is a matter where I know I would not win. I mean the rule of the court must be abided to and the Privy Council gave a ruling. I know that, but I am speaking outside the box as it were, on a broader question of legal philosophy, on the basis of which judgments are made, that they may not be in tune with the rest of society. If I had more time I would have referred to a very classic book *Law and the Social System*, but as I said, the clock is not very friendly to me.

People believe that whatever the court rules is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but that is not true. The courts will tell you that they are more able and they are more destined to secure fairness, not truth, and several Privy Council judgments said so. In some instances, the Prime Minister and the Government condemn the Privy Council for being irrelevant and yet when it makes a ruling in your favour, you want to stick to it as if it is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Those are the inconsistencies that worry me and many other people. I say do not judge Justice Narine, please. He has done his work; the Attorney General has done his duty and let the public decide.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, there is some data here on the educational system, which clearly shows that your secondary education system is very unfair to the working class and lower class students. If you look at the schools listed here, and those who got passes, you would find that those who got no passes—sometimes zero out of 33 students sitting the examination to get five or more passes—none; Guaico, Morvant, Laventille.

Briefly, Mr. Vice-President, why are the prestige schools, why on the other hand are the Government-assisted denominational schools having 80 per cent passes, 90 per cent, 100 per cent? These schools located on the East-West Corridor, in poor areas, are really very disadvantaged. The matter of educational equity is another issue, which I think the Government should put on its front burner to improve its political management.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, it is now 12.07 p.m., we will take the lunch break now and we would resume at 1.10 p.m.

12.07 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

**The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC):** Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for this opportunity to make a few remarks on this year's budget. It is my first contribution since the 2007 budget, when I indicated to my friends on the other side
that I might not be seeing them in this capacity again. I am here today to begin a new page, a new era in relation to the work of the Ministry of the Attorney General.

There is a tendency by those on the other side in particular, but by some in the media, for every word that I utter, to be examined, and that is properly so, that is why I try to be precise in what I say. A careless word, an inappropriate phrase which falls from the lips of the Attorney General can impact cases in the criminal justice system.

I have much to say today, but I intend to be brief. I should ask however, that the pains to which I intend to go in ensuring the accuracy of my remarks should be reflected in the accuracy of the reporting of those remarks. That is all that I ask.


Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am not afraid of you. I am just telling them to be careful. Let me say at the outset, as I have indicated before, that this would be my fifth year as Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, and I feel privileged to be called on to serve for such a lengthy period of time.

The Ministry of the Attorney General, like the job of the Attorney General, to put it mildly, is very challenging. As you are all well aware, the Ministry sits at the centre of the execution of the rule of law function in the Executive. I should repeat that. The Ministry of the Attorney General is at the centre of the execution of the rule of law function in the Executive.

The Ministry, since 1999 and beyond, 1976 in some cases, has comprised the offices of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Solicitor General and the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, the Anti-corruption Investigations Bureau, the Central Authority, the Chief State Solicitor. These are all departments within the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The holders of the chief legal offices, that is to say, the Solicitor General, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and the Director of Public Prosecutions, are designated chief legal officers pursuant to section 12 of the Judicial and Legal Service Act, Chap. 6:01. I pause here to make this point. So important are these offices in the executive function of the State and the Attorney General, that they are constitutionally protected. The Prime Minister, as head of the Executive, is given a role in determining whether any person should occupy these offices by the Constitution, which provides at section 111(2) that:

"Before the Judicial and Legal Service Commission makes any appointment to the offices of Solicitor General, Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Director of Public Prosecutions, Registrar General or Chief State Solicitor it shall consult with the Prime Minister."
At subsection (3) it goes on to say:

“A person shall not be appointed to any such office if the Prime Minister signifies to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission his objection to the appointment of that person to that office.”

The rationale for this power is straightforward. The framers of the 1976 Constitution intended that certain key executive positions should be the subject of a veto by the Prime Minister who heads the Executive arm of the State. This is not only a commonsense provision, it is to be found in other Constitutions which are premised on a separation of powers.

I was not there when the Prime Minister exercised his veto earlier this year in respect of the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions. But that he had the power to do so cannot be doubted as it is expressly provided for in the Constitution and before members of the public seek to condemn as the President of the Law Association has sought to do, the exercise of this power, we should all be cognizant of the fact that there should be a presumption that the Prime Minister will not act capriciously in making appointments to executive positions, in particular, to key executive positions.

In my time as Attorney General, I have encountered a chief legal officer who hid an opinion done by Queen’s Counsel retained by him. On what authority, I do not know, since the accounting officer of the ministry is the Permanent Secretary. This opinion, again commissioned by him, advised on the laying of a criminal charge in respect of prominent persons in this society. It is true to say that that chief legal officer had complete authority to disregard the opinion. But he commissioned it at state expense, presumably for his guidance and he hid it choosing not to consult with the Attorney General on the matter for reasons best known to him. A copy of that opinion has recently been passed to me by its author and has been relayed to the present holder of the post.

Now, if the Prime Minister has concerns about a person who is to fill the post of a chief legal officer, it is his duty to exercise a veto, however unpopular that might be. Let me also add, by way of amplification of this point, I am told by certain of my predecessors that years ago the institutions worked to allow a more informal process of consultation so that there was never any real need for the veto power to be exercised.
In this era of judicial review and mistrust of institutions, the veto is used. That is to my mind an unfortunate development and speaks volumes about the maturity of our institutions. Remember, we are not speaking about appointments to the judicial arm of the State over which the Executive has properly no control whatsoever; we are speaking of appointments within the Executive branch of the State.

The illustration I have outlined has this practical importance. The fact is that single error by a chief legal officer might well have cost this State $1 billion. One billion dollars of taxpayers’ money. The failure to act on advice commissioned by that officer, in secret, without a by-your-leave of the Attorney General, and given to him, paid for by the Ministry of the Attorney General might well have cost the people of this country $1 billion.

I can say no more on this matter publicly at this time or perhaps ever. Suffice it to say, the general rule is that if wrongdoers are left unpunished they continue on in their merry way, sometimes with disastrous consequences as has occurred in this case. This is precisely what has transpired in this case. The quantification of the damage, I have given a ballpark estimate of $1 billion. It might be more. The quantification of the damage in this case is now being worked out frenetically by persons hired, at great expense, by the State for this very purpose.

Mr. Vice-President, the significance of this disclosure is to demonstrate that the Prime Minister, as head of the Executive, has a right and a corresponding duty under the Constitution—he has a legitimate authority to determine who the chief legal officer in the Executive branch of the State should be. That is all that I mean to say on that matter here. Having said that, I condemn the irresponsible and convenient statements made by the President of the Law Association last week, who made remarks in opposition to the exercise of this basic right of the Prime Minister as it is established by the Constitution.

The President of the Law Association was reported to have predicted that had that veto been challenged it would have been successfully so. This is the leader of an association which my friend on the other side—Sen. Seetahal SC—says, speaks for 2,500 lawyers. He did not speak for me on that occasion. He is flying in the face of the express term set out in the Constitution, and before the Privy Council has had a say in this matter on two cases from this jurisdiction which are now pending before it.

I note the comments made by Sen. Seetahal SC during her contribution in relation to the vacancies in the offices of the Solicitor General, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and Director of Public Prosecutions. I agree that these
positions must be filled with expedition. I have been and I am currently liaising with the Judicial and Legal Service Commission to have this done with alacrity. But as I say for the record, cowards need not apply. These are pivotal positions. This country faces a crisis, again, of considerable proportions, from white-collar crime, perhaps more complex and greater than any we have faced in the past. Now more than ever, courage is needed in all executive positions.

On the question of courage, I must note the remarks again made by the President of the Law Association attacking a retired Justice of Appeal who stated the orthodox position on the inability of an inferior court to use an affidavit which has been struck out in those proceedings. I am the Attorney General. I am used to attack. But when the President of our Law Association speaks a lie, I am obliged to call him out. As a retired judge said and as I repeat “such an affidavit cannot be used by the judge in defiance of an order of a superior court.” Out of an abundance of caution I have sought expert advice on this matter from two distinguished Caribbean experts. Dr. Lloyd Barnett’s preliminary opinion has just been placed in my hand. He says and I quote:

“Where a court orders an affidavit to be removed from the record on the grounds that it is scandalous, vexatious or oppressive, the effect is to destroy or nullify the public or official records of the statements contained in the affidavit. Any reference to the affidavit in the same or related proceedings is improper. In fact, it is the duty of the registry to destroy the affidavit because it should no longer be referred to in the pending proceedings.”

Mr. Vice-President, the President of the Law Association, in his haste to embarrass the retired judge and me, who had the temerity to support the well-known position, referred to a case which is almost 100 years old, Jones v Trinder, 1918 Chancery Division at page 7. Dr. Barnett has said of that case that there was nothing expressed or implied in the agreement—that case concerned an agreement, there was no order of a superior court to strike it out. There was an agreement not to use the affidavit. So Dr. Barnett has said that the decision of Neville J. who held that there was nothing expressed or implied in the agreement—which had been arrived at in that case to exclude the use of the affidavit in different proceedings—not in the same proceedings—and the former employer being a firm of solicitors and officers of the court had a duty to make available to the law society information known to them for consideration by the Master of the Rolls on the plaintiff’s application for admission to that profession.

Dr. Barnett distinguished that case by citing the more recent authority of Rossage v Rossage, a decision of the English Court of Appeal which supports the orthodox position articulated by the retired judge and by me. In that case, Hudson,
Chief Justice, in giving the decision of the Higher Court in circumstances where the Lower Court had allowed scandalous matters to remain on file, but put them out of his mind as opposed to this case where the scandalous materials were clearly operating in the mind of the judge said at page 252:

“I am clearly of the opinion that these matters are irrelevant and scandalous, and therefore, they ought to be struck out. The court ought not to be embarrassed by their presence on the file”—get it out of the file in other words, Mr. Vice-President—“nor could the party whom those statements tend to implicate to be embarrassed by having to deal with them.”

Dr. Barnett concludes his opinion by saying that it was right for the judge to be criticized for his actions. I will make copies of the two opinions which I have received from distinguished counsel available to the Senate and write to the President of the Law Association in the hope that the association will cease to act in automatic opposition to the Executive. I say no more on this matter at this time.

I turn now to the areas of activity in the ministry. I should remind the national community because memories for many people are conveniently fleeting these days, that the Ministry of the Attorney General has fearlessly and without favour discharged its rule of law responsibility in the past to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Three Ministers of Government, PNM Ministers were investigated by agencies within the ministry during the past seven years. Two were charged by the independent Director of Public Prosecutions which is a part of the ministry; one, the Prime Minister himself was exonerated.

My colleagues, old and new and indeed, all of us in public life must know that the rule of law demands equal justice under the law. Allegations of wrongdoing by the Prime Minister have been investigated by the Ministry of the Attorney General, and surely none of us on this side is exempt.

1.30 p.m.

I am not exempt from investigation, and I should remind the national community as well, that during the matter with the former Chief Justice, I wrote to the Commissioner of Police requesting him to investigate my own role in the matter, when certain questions were raised. All of us in public life are not exempt. When it comes to the public purse, the Ministry of the Attorney General will spare no effort in his pursuit of its directive to treat with anti-corruption, and we have a track record that speaks for itself.

Mr. Vice-President, I now turn to the other agencies within the Ministry. The Ministry comprises again, since 1999, when Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC instituted it, the Anti-corruption Investigation Bureau. I pause to
remind the national community that the bureau is manned by police officers and that those police officers report to the Commissioner of Police, under the portfolio responsibility of the Minister of National Security. It is a part of the Ministry's budget allocation, and for those who have ears to hear, its recurrent allocations have not been cut. For some reason, it has been idle in relation to serious white-collar allegations of criminal activity over the past two years. That will change immediately. Again, I say no more on this matter for the moment.

The Ministry also comprises a Mutual Legal Assistance Authority. This unit is at the heart of our efforts in respect of transnational crime and anti-corruption. It, too, has a track record that few central authorities possess. There are individuals in the United States now, who have been charged with terrorism in respect of an attempt to import an arsenal of arms into this country. An arsenal of arms which will challenge the arms in the possession of the police forces and the defence forces of this land. That individual is in jail in the United States, in large measure because of the work of the Mutual Legal Assistance Authority. This unit is also critical to our anti-corruption efforts. I would admit that this unit too, has functioned poorly for some time. That period of time is at an end. Again, I say no more on that for the time being.

Mr. Vice-President, these units and the independent office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has managed to, in the past, make the Ministry of the Attorney General a force to be reckoned with, in respect of our anti-corruption battles and our efforts to bring transnational criminals to justice. We have had successes in the field of terrorism as I have said, and also in other areas of horrific crimes in other Caribbean territories. There are offences which were committed in Guyana, in respect of which the central authority played a critical role in having the perpetrators brought to justice in the United States, persons have been quickly and innovatively transferred to other jurisdictions to serve long periods of incarceration. From persons accused of attempting to import vast quantities of arms and ammunition to this country, to others who have allegedly committed crimes in other Caribbean territories, the unit has been effective. As I said before, two former Government Ministers were charged with corruption. The Leader of the Opposition was charged with corruption, as other persons aligned to that political party.

Mr. Vice-President, corruption is an evil that transcends political parties. It is not the province of the United National Congress. It is not the province of the People's National Movement. It transcends political parties. Other investigations have absorbed persons in respect of whom allegations have been made. I promise
the people of Trinidad and Tobago that these units and agencies are ready to serve in the coming years, and that allegations of wrongdoing would be scrupulously investigated. There will be no sacred cows. The rule of law demands nothing less.

My colleague and friend, Sen. Seetahal SC, spent some considerable time discussing the independent institutions. I intend to say nothing about the Judiciary. They are an independent arm of the State and while I work closely with them, it is no part of my remit to account for them. I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand, however, that one of the elements of the rule of law doctrine requires that trials be determined in a speedy fashion.

The fact that I had left this job and returned to find prosecutions meandering aimlessly along, fills me with no pride as a citizen of this country. The fact that after seven odd years, certain white-collar crimes are still winding their way through our court system in an unhurried manner, fills me with grave concern, more so, when in the United States persons related to that matter have been tried, sentenced and have served jail time, and in some cases are now being set free in respect of these very offences. The people of Trinidad and Tobago must legitimately be entitled to ask questions of the systems governing the criminal justice system.

Mr. Vice-President, I say with the greatest deference to the Judiciary, that this is the business of all of the ordinary citizens of our country, the man in the street, and as a consequence, the Executive. An increasingly discerning public is aware of the slow pace of criminal justice and of the fact that the State is consistently failing to meet the deadlines set out in Pratt and Morgan, in capital cases, for a two-year period for all domestic issues to be dealt with by our local courts. This is the principal reason why the State has been unable to implement the sentence of death over the past 10 years. This is the business of the Executive, and as such, it must be the business of the Judiciary. In this regard, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, intends to introduce a host of measures to deal with some of these delays. Let me repeat, this is the Executive’s legitimate business.

We intend to move to abolish the preliminary enquiry entirely. Cabinet has agreed to legislation to introduce a Diplock Court. At the assizes level, we intend to pass legislation to allow for the selection of special juries in complicated fraud cases. The Ministry of Justice which the Government has articulated is intended to work to speed up the justice system. No steps will be taken towards that end, that is, to the establishment of the Ministry of Justice, without full and appropriate consultations with the Judiciary.
These and other measures announced yesterday by the Minister of National Security, including anti-gang legislation and that Ministry’s omnibus package, comprehensive legislation to attack money laundering and financial crime, will represent together the most dramatic changes to the criminal justice system in this country since Independence.

Mr. Vice-President, we will also go after the guns. The possession of illegal firearms is fuelling the gang warfare and wholesale killings, which are taking place across the length and breadth of this land. Further legislative action in this area is critically needed, and will be delivered by the Attorney General, to the Minister of National Security. While the Ministry of the Attorney General is not the lead in attacking violent crime, our remit is white-collar crime. I pledge to the Ministry of National Security, every resource of my Ministry in this existential battle for our nation’s soul.

The fight against corruption has pitted this Ministry against colleague Ministries and Ministers, friends and political opponents. It is a fight that we as a nation cannot afford to lose. Our adversaries by definition are well financed and highly motivated. In some cases, they are the very elite in this society, but we are ill afforded to lose this battle. To succeed, we therefore need the goodwill and support of every true patriot of this country, and we shall need your prayers.

Mr. Vice-President, I am not daunted by the challenges that we face. I expect no help from other overt political groupings or institutions which are seemingly independent institutions that may have been compromised. The obscure whispers, contentious talk and the detractors who are opposed to the present Government, do not go unnoticed. Their views are sifted, they are weighed and processed, some more expediently than others. However, they will not break the resolve of the Government to do what is constitutionally correct, and in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I close by saying that the law is not my faith, it is my profession. The Law Association is not my fellowship, it is a brotherhood, with all of the connotations that go with that. No judge is my God, they are all my equals. I will fearlessly and conscientiously serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago as I am obliged by oath to do, for so long as I hold this office.

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

Sen. Corinne Baptiste-Mc Knight: I thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me this opportunity to intervene in this most important debate. This is the second occasion on which I have had this privilege, and I have come to realize
that the budget debate in this Senate at least, is not about the figures. It is in fact our opportunity to accept the Government's report on its stewardship for the previous fiscal period, and our time to assess the quality of this stewardship, to form our own opinion on the effectiveness, not only of the Executive, but the management and the complete team—that is the civil service—that supports them.

Now, this meant that I had to peruse roughly about 20 centimetres of documentation, closely typed, written on both sides. But I have to tell you some of it was fun. Over the fiscal period, I understood that the period 2008/2009 was going to be a difficult period, but at the same time, in 2009, we are almost halfway to 2020. So that I really expected to be able to find some measure, some evidence of the innovative people that we are working to become, showing up the fashion in which matters were dealt with.

1.45 p.m.

I have got to admit, I was a little disappointed, but then, as luck would have it, I find that the theme for this budget, "Strengthening Effectiveness, Addressing the Challenges", is very apt. The challenges abound, and they really were very obvious in the course of the documentation that we were presented with.

I found in that documentation inconsistent message. There was lack of clear direction and, certainly, the evidence of the teamwork gave me the impression that the team was not orchestrated by Ben Hur.

Why do I say that? Let us look at the key documents that we were presented with. I found that information in the public domain, meaning information gleaned from post-Cabinet conferences, statements of various ministers on various occasions, in various fora, the progress report, Vision 2020 Operational Plan, is not consistent with statements in the Social Sector Investment Programme, nor in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) 2010. On top of that, I find that statements made by the Minister of Finance, in her presentation of the budget speech, tend to be at variance with information in these documentation and statements made here by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry.

As a matter of fact, at one stage I wondered whether all Members of Cabinet were conversant with what goes on in the ministries of their colleagues. It is okay, if that is the case, but, really, I do not think that the budget document is the place to discover this. I hope I am wrong.
Let me highlight a few of the areas that give me concern; I will not mention those that have already been highlighted by my colleagues. I want to start with the Vision 2020, the targets achieved. A target that represented an improvement on the goal was the fact that 340 schools now have Internet service; great, but two pages further down, in the same document, same chapter, we are told, "Target achieved". What is this target? That 180 primary and secondary schools have access to the Internet through the KID Programme.

Mr. Vice-President, 180 schools and all the libraries marks an achievement of the target, but 340 schools marks an improvement. Hello, what am I to understand? Where are we along the achievement of this goal? It goes on.

In the policy overview chapter it says, and I quote:

"The widespread adoption of science, technology and innovative thinking in the citizenry..."

I do not recognize this in the country in which I live, this widespread adoption of science, but the documents go on to say that this is evidenced by 88 per cent passes at CAPE in math and science; elsewhere they tell us that it is 46.7 per cent passes at CSEC. Interestingly, nowhere do they tell us what percentage of the total candidates presented themselves for either level of exam.

Later on we understand—and this I realize is a very laudable fact—that 38 per cent of the scholarships awarded by Government, for university education in the science field, were taken up by people in the science field. What that tells me is that those who are good in science are very, very good, but it does not tell me what percentage of the population is acceptable, far more good. This is not a serious approach to reporting. It is either I believe it is widespread, and somebody does not understand the meaning of widespread, or that we are working towards getting it there.

Let us go on to the early childhood care centres. In one document we are told that work is ongoing for the identification of sites for the construction of an additional 150 centres in 2010. Then in the Social Sector Programme for 2010, we are told that 50 centres would be constructed and for another 100 the Education Facilities Company is to source funding.

This suggests that building is not going to happen, because funds have to be sourced and you recall that sites have to be found. But then the Minister in presenting the budget in this House tells us categorically that 50 will be built. I would like to leave here sure that 50 would be built, and the 50 that were in construction would be completed.
Then we talk about the goal of improving participation in tertiary education to 45 per cent of our school leaving population. But how is this going to be achieved? There is a shortage of sixth form places in the country. This shortage is exacerbated by the fact that the Sixth Form College situated at what used to be the Corinth Teachers College was closed down. It is reported that private sixth form institutions have had their requests for funding for students rejected. The explanation being that sixth form qualification is no longer required to access tertiary institutions.

Whereas that latter is a fact, I ask: Is the cost of having a student do sixth form in a government or private institution the same or more than having that student funded under GATE at a tertiary institution? Has there been a study which proved that the two-year period, which would normally be spent doing sixth form, is not beneficial to the student? Then why is it that government scholarships for university degree qualifications require CAPE qualifications? There is a bit of a mismatch here, and this is coming out of our Ministry of Education. There is some logic here that escapes me, but let us go on.

We are told that the training of teachers has been handed over to three tertiary institutions: the University of the West Indies; the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and the University of the Southern Caribbean. But we are also told that during this period, and continuing into 2010, the Ministry of Education is, I quote:

"...now devising a policy on training and teacher education, to address the training of teachers, and collaborating with stakeholders to develop and commence undergraduate programmes in education for teachers and educators."

The first batch of teachers is due to graduate in 2010. Is something wrong side here? You have the people graduating and you are now going to look at a policy on their training? But that is not all. I have discovered that there is going to be a MATE. Do you know what that is? Male Academy for Teacher education, MATE. Why can the male teachers not go to these three tertiary institutions? I thought some of them were there, but something has got to be wrong, that on top of all that you are now going to create a MATE. A MATE for whom?

We are told in various fora that the removal of the shift system in secondary schools has been completed; but yet when I read the budget document, there is a whole page that lists junior secondary schools throughout the country. So I said, "Well, okay, most likely it is just that in all the documentation they have not changed the title on the top," but it is the staffing of these institutions, on the basis of which the budget is calculated, that is included in these pages.
Do you know what I found? The identical staffing for each school that was in the budget last year, and was in the budget the year before. Now, is it reasonable to expect that a school that had two shifts of children doing the same level of subjects which now has one shift and more students probably doing a little different curriculum, would have the identical staff needs? That defies good sense.

2.00 p.m.

Okay. Last year I, sort of, complained about the student services, so this year I was very happy to see that 45 per cent of primary schools, 80 per cent of secondary schools—it has not been identified whether these are just Government or all the schools—will each have one guidance officer, one social worker, one special teacher. Now, if even these warm bodies can be found to fill these posts, I cannot identify any item in the budget that will cater for this, because this ought to require an increase in the number of these guidance officers, et cetera, because I think last year there were about 80/82 on the whole establishment, which would clearly be insufficient.

Is it that we are really not expected to read the documentation in this fashion? I am beginning to think that that is the problem, but as a retiree I have nothing to do and I cannot afford much entertainment so this is where I get my entertainment.

Let me ease up on education a bit. So I go now to the Ministry that is hailed—and I believe it—as the best performing, best functioning. And I believe it, you know why? Because when I was ready to look at the budget I received the reports for the periods from 2006 up to 2008 from the Minister of Health. That is the only current report that I have received. Take a bow. [Laughter] So that I felt immediately that I have a duty to him, to help him to continue to be the best performing Minister. Right? So I want you, Mr. Vice-President, to ask him to accept what I tell him in this frame of mind. [Laughter]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Now the lash coming. [Laughter]

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Now, the Minister is as good as the information that he gets from his team and I tell you already “ah find yuh” team flawed; not your team alone, all the teams, flawed.

School Health Programme: This is the programme that screens primary school entrants for hearing and sight and it says in the book that there is a problem with the screening because the audiologist resigned.
Now, the fact is that an audiologist resigned years ago, not during this period, and they have not been able to source a permanent person to fill the gap. But I want the Minister to know that this programme has continued because his ENT specialist medical officer is a qualified audiologist. So do not let your people tell you that you do not have an audiologist. Perhaps what they are trying to do is to make sure that you are not aware that, one, you need to offer an apology to that person because this is written there, and perhaps organize some compensation for doing more work than you are really paying the person for. The documents there are admitting to that.

What I find passing strange, though, is this emphasis on the missing audiologist but we have no mention of the ophthalmic portion of the screening. Is it because it is going so swimmingly that we do not need to be advised of it at all, or is it because it is not happening at all? My information is that it has not started to happen yet. But give us the information. Do not give us half-picked-duck. So you could tell your folks for me—I notice they are not there today—I am disappointed in them.

Let me go to your “Centre of Excellence” on Oxford Street. This is on my beat and it is a state-of-the-art facility of which we are justly proud. But there is no ophthalmic, no dental facility there yet. You cannot call it excellent there until you have it all functional. It started functioning this week?


Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: I will pass around there next Monday.

Sen. Narace: I said "Yet."

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Yet? Not yet? Well give us the whole picture, “nuh”. Let us know exactly how we could help you, because I would get up here and tell them you are embarrassing the good Minister by not providing him the things that his “Centre of Excellence” is supposed to have—Do you know what they also have to give you? Some permanent shelving so that your medicines can be properly stored, and proper bins for the storage of cleaning materials etc. Yes, take notes. Check it out Monday and you will see what "ah telling yuh". The “fellas” trying to embarrass you.

Now, Mr. Vice President, something that is dear to my heart, the Chronic Non-communicable Disease Programme. There is a lot that is very good that is happening in the country on this. Forty-seven per cent of us, yes: almost or over 600,000 of the population of 1.3 million access CDAP, so that it is working and it
is useful. Dialysis is available, not to everybody but in great measure; in every public hospital and at some private institutions. Diabetes: a good programme, except, of course, there is always need for more education, because it is one thing to say stop smoking but when you stop smoking and you eat more bagels, pita or roti, you are heading for CDAP.

Sugar is a problem; salt is a problem. But, you see, you are coming here to tell me to stop smoking but you are not telling me to cut down on the flour and the sugar. But I guess that is what you tell us all with your health fair which I think you need to roll out all through the country, because 10,000 people participating in Port of Spain, only 1,000 of them—at best 2,000—would go for the various tests, but if at each health fair 1,000 people turn up, you get more people.

Sen. Narace: Thank you.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Right. But where I want to focus today is on the oncology, because cancer is a problem. I know from personal experience—and I do not think that there is one of us here who does not know at least one person who is afflicted. We have the template. You have an HIV/AIDS Programme, that one is world class, because drugs that in the United States people have to pay $2,500 a month for, you only have to turn up with the ID and you are getting them here, free.

The cancer equivalent of the HIV anti-retroviral treatment is radiation treatment. There is no proper Government facility for that. It goes to St. Clair. Do not tell me about that cobalt thing they have down by me.

Sen. Narace: That is all it is missing.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: The oncology centre that is coming up? Do not worry, I am coming to that. Save yourself the time and let me press on with my time.

With a little bit of innovative thinking and action to match, we could match the HIV/AIDS Programme. Do you know what we need? One linear accelerator at the St. James Centre now.

Sen. Narace: That is all it is missing.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: We cannot wait until the next five years when you put one down in Mount Hope. There is one somewhere around town now, a private one that Government pays for people to get treatment at. But let us do the math. Three years of payments to a private centre for a few people would buy a linear accelerator for St. James now; you could treat all of those that you would
have treated at the private centre plus more, because it would be our thing, running exclusively for us, and we could even get imaginative and run it 24 hours a day. Because when you hit St. James, you have to weave through people who are waiting for treatment, because cancer is a problem here.

Now, if you have one in St. James, one in Mount Hope, hopefully one down south, but let us say you just deal with those two and the private one and we have three in the country, is it that three linear accelerators, three radiation treatment facilities would be too many? How could it, when for the same 1.3 million people you have seven stadia? Is it too much to ask that we could be the sporting hub of the Caribbean and at the same time the cancer treatment hub? I think that the two things go hand in hand with each other and I am really making a plea, let us not wait, let us put a linear accelerator down at the St. James Radiotherapy Centre now.

2.15 p.m.

I am sure that you could juggle the budget to deal with that. Now again, to help the Minister to straighten out his mind for 2010, I went through his proposal for 2010 and I see that he is going to be involved in institutional strengthening of the RHAs. Is it the job of the ministry to strengthen the RHAs? The RHAs have a board each and what they have to do is to organize themselves so that they could be accountable for their performance. That is not the Minister's business. All he has to do is to crack the whip and let them feel the lash or fall in line.

The Minister is going to establish a monitoring and evaluation unit. Now, I understand the jargon because every ministry according to the document is supposed to establish a monitoring and evaluation unit in order to bring itself in line with the Managing for Results System. This is all well and good. But in the realm of health care what is essential is your information technology. Unless and until that is in place, monitoring and evaluation is of no use to you. What am I talking about? It is a matter of collecting standardized data; having the assurance of the integrity of that data and knowing how to manipulate that data properly. Unless the ministry has that in place, a monitoring and evaluation unit is going to get you no place. Trust me. I checked it out.

The ministry needs a quality plan. I am hoping that what this really means is a quality improvement initiative, not a plan, which addresses improving service quality and clinical quality. Very focused not just another plan. "Yuh see how ah tryin to help yuh." Because after 50 years of delivering health care, thousands of
pages, and nowadays, millions of gigabytes of information and recommendations, we still need another plan? Something is wrong if that is so. We need to concentrate on implementation and delivery. That is quoting you. You have said it in this Senate so often that I remember it. Concentrate on implementation and delivery.

Here is where I had a little laugh. A health needs assessment. Come on. On what basis did Government move to adopt the RHA system? Not assessed health needs? On what basis do you decide on where you site facilities and what sort of equipment you put in facilities? Surely you do not go on the Net and copy what you see there. It got to be on the basis of needs. So we know the needs. I will tell you something, if you need another suggestion here is one.

What we need is a health system that provides quality health care for all at a reasonable cost. You said it. One that demonstrates that we are getting value for the billions invested. I am just parroting what I have heard you say. Reminding you.

The ministry needs a manpower plan. You have it in Vision 2020, where you have the doctor/nurse patient ratio engraved in stone. What you need is an innovative way of implementing all those programmes.

Now we come to the one that I am sure everybody loves and is waiting for with bated breath, a National Health Service. The nation has been waiting for this ever since we started paying health surcharge a generation ago. About 30 years now we have been waiting for it. Do you know what is worse? There are some people out there who figure you already have the money for it because you have been collecting this health surcharge and nobody has ever been able to find out where that money gone. Now I could tell them that the Minister is giving us a National Health Service.

My earnest hope is that the draft framework that you are talking about will finally help your ministry to arrive at an appropriate, actuarially defensible pricing for the basket of services that we now enjoy, because I do not see how you could roll back and give us less.

There is this idea of having an incentive for utilization. With my folks that is a very bad idea. I think that what you need to think in terms of is an incentive for improved quality and delivery, not utilization. Please, stop fooling us. In 2013 it is not going to happen. That is myth. We could drop that one.

I think that I have sorted out your best Minister so I would like to spend a little time on three more issues. I was particularly upset and I think this is because I too, am very partial to the Caribbean integration and ensuring that we move
forward together on the same page, but the Minister of Finance in her presentation on economic integration had me a little worried. I think that it is the way it was put. In their accompanying documentation the point was made that promoting, I quote:

“Effective government involves the way in which we relate to our immediate neighbours in the Caribbean.” And again, “We practise a foreign policy based upon respect for the sovereignty and the sovereign equality of all states.”

How do those statements jive with an announcement that Government is going to establish an airplane maintenance facility in Grenada and a maritime facility in St. Vincent and the Grenadines? I have three distinct problems with that. One, with respect to the manner in which the announcement was made, I feel that that ought to wait until somebody graduates from the diplomatic academy where they will teach them how to go about these things. We need to help. I agree that we should help. But should we not be thinking first in terms of establishing resident High Commissions in all these countries up the islands, so that we would be able to have firsthand information on what is going on in these countries; what the real needs are; how the people perceive not only the needs but the assistance that we are offering?

We cannot go in and tell the people that we will give you this and give you that. It does not work like that. What is worse is that what we are threatening to give them, the Ministers here are saying, and the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry reiterated that among the proposals for diversification of the economy is to establish maritime centres. In the document they talk about maritime and yachting industries. What are we giving away or is this going to be additional? When we talk about putting aircraft maintenance facility in Grenada, is this to accommodate the hundreds who were retrenched here so that they would now relocate to Grenada to offer a service which by that time will neither be perhaps appropriate, cost effective nor mutually beneficial?

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. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: I thank you and my colleagues for giving me a little more time. I shall not need all of it though.

On another note, my second point is that going further through this documentation, I have become a little uneasy. I get the feeling that there is a move afoot to disband the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender
Affairs. How do I get that impression? Because with the exception of the project to establish a National Theatre and Art Company, everything that is listed as done, or to be done or being thought of by this ministry involves constructing something or overseeing the construction of something else. That seems to me as if the plan is to move it to the Ministry of Works and Transport and disband this ministry. It might be helpful if the national community could be told at some stage what is going on there. I have not seen any mention of the gender policy or anything to do with gender affairs associated with that ministry throughout what I have read in the documentation. I share my concern with you.

Finally, I see all these problems, the lack of consistency, lack of teamwork and people not knowing what the one next door is doing, I think all that points to deficiencies in the training, supervision and management, most of all, lack of teamwork.

2.30 p.m.

This cannot be remedied by a managing for result system. It cannot be remedied by strengthening managing for results. Why? Because this concept of managing for results, to me, is doublespeak of the same order as talking about moral rearmament in an amoral society. The management capacity does not exist; it has been decimated. What we need—and I see that something has recurred, which I am very happy to say—is a Public Service Academy.

When I look at the provisions for the Public Service Academy, I have a suspicion that there is a plan to do with it what is happening to ECIAF, CARIRI and Cipriani Labour College. The appropriations there make you realize that somebody is either not serious or does not know what the function of that academy should be.

Let me tell you what I think the remit of that academy should be. It is to imbue every single public servant, from bottom to top, with the knowledge, understanding and confidence to do his or her job in such a manner as to express belief in the value of the tasks that they are given to do and an understanding of how these tasks fit within the whole of the service. It is not only a matter of how what you do affects your Ministry because everything that happens in every Ministry affects what happens in every other Ministry.

That is what used to happen when I first joined the service; when we did not have an academy; when we had something called a Central Training Unit (CTU), which performed those functions. I feel this is the only way we are going to be
able to reclaim the glory days of the service—go back to grassroots training. Unless we can do that, unless we can take this academy seriously now, we would have lost the last chance to get our civil service back to its original moorings.

While I am on the subject of academies, I cannot resist mentioning the Foreign Service Academy. Now my colleague was not sure we needed one, but trust me, my experience says that we need one. When do we need one? We should have had one from the beginning, but that need was not recognized in the early days because we had a strong functional civil service within which the foreign service officers received their training from the older heads in the Ministry. Some of us were sent abroad to train, but with no civil service function to assist and with the thought of reviving the civil service training, the time is right simultaneously to start a Foreign Service Training Academy.

How do we do it? We do not have to look far; we just have to look south, Brazil. Brazil has the best foreign service officers and the best foreign service academy in the world and we already have a technical cooperation agreement with them. If we have a Trinidad and Tobago Academy in the mould of the Itamaraty, we would have a first class foreign service.

Now I am aware of the fact that it is known in this country that cheap things are not good. I bring to your attention that this advice is not cheap. Look upon it as a consultancy paid off in monthly instalments because by the end of the month I expect my little stipend to be in my bank account. Know that you have paid for it, so you can use it.

Currently, most of the officers in the Ministry have never been trained and, as foreign service officers, all of them speak two languages fluently: Trinidadian and Standard English. There are a chosen few who would have a third language—obscene. Then, you would have some with recognized foreign languages—French, Spanish, Portuguese etc. That is not good enough for nowadays. We need to be like the Brazilians where everybody speaks three and four languages fluently. That is now par for the course.

Just another word of advice: When you take your delegation to Brazil to discuss this, there is a gentleman in the Ministry, a Foreign Service Officer, Tedwin Herbert, he must be on your delegation. Do you know why? He is a graduate of that institute and, if I am not mistaken, in his year he topped his class. So he understands the system and they will remember him immediately and realize that you are serious because you are bringing their product with you.
Mr. Vice-President, in closing, the challenges are not insurmountable. All we need is to recognize them and confront the problems just as we are doing with the CSO. It broke my heart to read that we are getting technical assistance to improve the Central Statistical Office (CSO). When I joined the service in the 1960s, the CSO, under the late Jack Harewood, was among the best in the Commonwealth and almost fifty years later, instead of Trinidad and Tobago being in a position to give technical assistance, we are seeking assistance to improve our statistics. We have to stop creating our challenges in order to leave ourselves the space to deal creatively with the challenges that would come at us.

I close in just informing my colleagues that my comments on the revenue collecting measures will be reserved for the appropriate Bill.

I thank you.

VISITOR TO CHAMBER

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I would just mention that a few minutes ago we had a visitor in the Chairman, Dr. Amilear Figueroa Salazar, the alternate chairman of the Latin American Parliament. Unfortunately, the Senator fooled me when she said she was on her final point. I thought she would have been a lot shorter. I did not want to interrupt her to introduce him. Just to inform the Senate who the visitor was.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

I start by congratulating the Minister of Finance and, indeed, the Minister of Trade and Industry for piloting this Bill and say that I support the Appropriation Bill, 2009/2010.

I really thought it would not have been necessary for me to speak, but there are a few matters that need clarification and I would try to do so. Moreso, there are some areas in which I would like to advance to the national community on some of the progress we are making in health. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I begin my contribution by offering a world perspective.

The United States unemployment figures are now reaching double digits; the fiscal deficit is projected to be $9 trillion over the next decade. The United Kingdom is struggling; figures last week showed unemployment rising to almost 2.5 million in the three months to July, the highest level since 1995. The forecast
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]  
Wednesday, September 23, 2009

of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development last week was 
that, worldwide, 25 million jobs could be lost because of the global slowdown, 
roughly one job in a hundred across the planet.

In addition, the G-7 economies are projected to contract by about 4 per cent 
for this year and the growth rates of the economic power houses of India and 
China have dropped. Consumer debts stand at 101 per cent of disposable income 
in Germany, 140 per cent in America and 172 per cent in Britain. Most French 
economic indicators are weakened. Germany's indicator showed limited growth 
forecast. Iceland is in serious trouble.

When we look at world economic circumstances, this is a difficult time for the 
world and I almost thank Sen. Prof. Deosaran for saying to us that part of the 
price of being on this side is that you must subject yourself to all kinds of things. 
That is part of the price.

All advice is good advice; whether you take it or not is another story, but all 
advice is good advice. I firstly want to respond to some of the points made and to 
make the point that one of the problems we face with advice is that if you do not 
take it, because it is not correct, how you are going to be treated. When you take, 
it is yet another issue.

For example, we got advice from Sen. Mark and before I go into all the 
issues—I got his Hansard and this is what Ministers have to put up with as Sen. 
Prof. Deosaran correctly said. Sen. Mark said that in 2000, under the UNC, the 
infant mortality rate was 17 per thousand. Do you know what it is under this 
Government according to UNICEF? He went on to give a range of statistics.

When I invoked a particular Standing Order and pressed him, he said that he was 
quoting from the source UNC. Now the national community will be listening to all sorts 
of advice whether wrong or right. It is our duty to show them when it is wrong. Sen. 
Mark's information is totally incorrect, yet we had to sit here and listen. I will go 
straight to correcting those figures before I even speak about my Ministry.

There was one thing Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight said with which I agree: The budget 
debate is a time when we have to give an account of what transpired over the last fiscal 
year or give an account of our stewardship in general. I would agree with that.

2.45 p.m.

I just want to provide some information on infant mortality. In 2001, it stood at 
18.5 and in 2005, the last available figure was 15.4; a dramatic drop. The target rate for 
2010 is 15.1. That is CSO figures. I can quote my figures and I can circulate them.
Infant mortality by the hospital: In 2001, 68; 2008, it was down to 45 at the Port of Spain General Hospital. It went down by 34 per cent. In 2001, at San Fernando General Hospital, 98; 2008, 63, a 36 per cent increase; 2001, Mount Hope Women's Hospital, 100; 2008, it has gone down to 55, a 45 per cent decrease—a group of individuals that deal in imaginary figures. I saw it in the other place and I see it here. He also gave—what was the other figure he gave? I cannot seem to recall it at this time; but it was equally incorrect. The figure I think was—I do not have it at this time—the maternal mortality. In 2001, 7; and 2005, 6. These are some of the figures we have to treat with sitting on this side as they present figures.

Let me also just give some figures, in terms of what we have been able to achieve, in terms of admissions. In 2001, at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, we saw 5,399; 2008, it has gone to 13,000, an increase of 147 per cent. Sangre Grande showed an increase of 56 per cent. Of course, Tobago showed an increase of 24 per cent. That was the only issue raised by Sen. Mark that I wish to correct and I have since corrected that figure.

I want to go to Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol. I want to tell her that I got the Hansard and it is very interesting to see what I have been able to find. Do you know what is interesting? I decided to spend a little time on Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol who said in this Parliament that she sits here as a COP representative. That is what she said. I go to page 4 of her unrevised copy:

"If time permits I would even explore the political practice of my political party, the Congress of the People."

I then go on to her next statement. I want to tell Senators on the other side, when you are speaking, it is important that you know what you are saying, because someone can get the Hansard and then come back and when you do an examination of it, you would realize what you are doing. You went on to speak about the difference between the UNC-led administration, which has always been evidenced by the very fact that they were born out of the working class. And all that talk about that is why the UNC was in government.

There is nothing about the COP again; not a COP policy; not one. [Interuption]

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** If time permits.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** She continued to say that is why when the UNC was in government, if we look back at their budgets, and she went back as far as 15 years. She spoke about the reduction of poverty.
Let me just tell the goodly Senator that the Minister of Education spoke to it, sorry the former Minister of Education, the current Minister of Local Government. The Senator forgot, when the PNM came into office in 1991, poverty was at 36 per cent and unemployment was 19 per cent; pretty much the figures we are seeing in the world today. The Prime Minister took the chairmanship of the social sector. He became Minister of Finance, because he said what he needed to do was to make an intervention, immediately, so that the very people that Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol was talking about; the poor people and the small people would not remain poor and the 36 per cent would not go up to 60 per cent, so that we could bring it down to what it is today. I think it is around 15 per cent and the unemployment rate today is around 5 per cent. It was a deliberate PNM strategy and policy that reversed all of that.

The PNM delivered on houses for the people. People who earn less than $8,000 per month can now qualify for a 2 per cent mortgage interest rate. That is how you help poor people. First-time homeowners get preferential mortgage rates between 6 per cent and 8 per cent. That is how you help poor people. Sen. Gronlund-Nunez spoke about all of this. In their time it was 462. Under the beneficiary-owned land programme, individuals with an annual income between $24,000—$50,000 will receive a subsidy of up to $50,000.

I do not know if you recall, but in 1991, the Senior Citizens Grant was $720 and when we were in election mode we said we would take it to $1,000. Do you know what the UNC said? They said: “That would never happen. They cannot pay that. They cannot sustain it.” Today, it is $1,950. That is how we help our people. Seventy-one thousand people are now in receipt of a Senior Citizens Grant.

The Ministry of Social Development is now partnering with several NGOs to operate senior citizens homes in St. James, Maloney, Chaguana, Rio Claro, Pleasantville, and Barataria; making an intervention in people's lives.

We delivered on free tertiary education. They said the PNM could not do it. They delivered free education. Do you know who were the people who did not get free tertiary education? It was those people at the lower base of the society. They could not find it. At best, if they could find the first dollar, if they wanted to get the dollar-for-dollar, they had to find the first dollar.

We gave free school books, buses, computers in schools, and social and community programmes across the country. We introduced the book grant, the uniform grant and breakfast meals. All of these were under the Minister of Education; loan for GATE. Not only did they agree to give you free tertiary
education, the Government said if you needed a loan so that you could tidy over your circumstances, they would lend you, I think it is up to $75,000, if I am not mistaken. That is very interesting.


They provided psychosocial support, just to name a few. They focused on the families. There is the National Family Services Division. They implemented family life for 2,000 individuals. There are weekly radio programmes. They focus on children. All of this, aimed at helping poor people, small people and vulnerable people. There is so much more I could say in the social sector, but just to make sure that we corrected that, I thought I needed to correct that. I needed some time to correct that. [Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Nanan: On a point of order.

Mr. Vice-President: What is the point of order?

Sen. Dr. Nanan: 34(b).

Mr. Vice-President: Which is?

Sen. Mark: He is misleading the House.

Mr. Vice-President: 34(b)?

Sen. Dr. Nanan: Yes.

Mr. Vice-President: Your point of order does not make sense. Continue.

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Nor any of their other contributions. Do you know what is amazing? It is how Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol is fitting right in. She is almost sounding like Sen. Mark. Mr. Vice-President, I am hopeful that she would make this turnaround.

Between 2001, let me give you some of the other things that we did, because I could not let that comment come to this Senate, and I sit here and not say something about it. We have now assisted over 500,000 citizens on the CDAP programme. There have been over 30,000 surgeries. We have done over 230,000 free CT and MRI scans; all aimed at helping people.

I would talk about some more. I would tell you about the dialysis machines. One point I wanted to make is that I wanted to make the misinformation points that Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol spoke about. The Caribbean Court of Justice
Appropriation Bill (Budget) Wednesday, September 23, 2009

[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

(CCJ), which was I think US $100 million, she said: Why did we need that? Of course, the Attorney General corrected her. She went on to say: “Thank you for clearing it up and for enlightening me that we spent $100 million in start-up funds; all politics.” Caricom spent it, not Trinidad and Tobago. You still do not grasp it. It is the Caricom that put it. Therefore, that is the point I am making. When Senators sit in this Senate and mislead the national community, I take offence to that. Every figure and every statistic that I have given so far, has been documented and it is open to challenge.

I am happy that Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight recognized that I had submitted my administrative reports, because we at the Ministry of Health take what we do seriously.

Let me talk a little bit about—in fact, I have one more comment on Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol. Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol said, when she was wearing one hat on page 14:

“Let us look at health.”

She spoke about the health sector.

“…they are proposing a comprehensive health care system that would be placing greater emphasis on the 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, this is indeed good...”

This is one, Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol. [Interuption]

Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol: But I went on.

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: I do not know what would have happened to her. [Interuption] Hold on, I am coming to you. On page 16 of your unrevised Hansard this is what you had to say:

"I could not care how many times you go around the savannah...”—The bottom line is we need beds; we do not need anything else—. “…do you have beds? That is the bottom line.”

One time she said that we do not need beds, we need prevention. Then something happened between—[Interuption] it is in the unrevised. Let me quote you:

“…do you have beds? This is the bottom line.”

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol, please, your outburst today is unaccustomed, so please.
Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Thank you for the protection, Mr. Vice-President. All I have to say is that on the one hand you want prevention and on the other hand "doh tell meh anything about prevention, talk about beds".

Indeed, Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight spoke about prevention. That is why I would go straight to prevention before I come back. When Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol spoke the first time, I think at some point Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight said the same thing; prevention is a major strategic objective of both the Ministry of Health and this Government. Indeed, wellness and prevention is what the intelligent world is moving to and the Ministry of Health is on track. Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight, I notice that you really intended to give advice. You were not correct in some of them, but you intended to give advice and I think the intent is more valuable, even if the message is wrong and it is my duty to correct you.

Firstly, with respect to the audiologist, we do have Dr. Pinda, who is a trained specialist and that is being done. You can check. I would give you a name. [Interruption]

Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Audiologist?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: She is. She is working and she is doing the screening. What you have mixed up is, on the one hand you mixed up the Regional Health Authority with the Ministry of Health and then you come back at the end and say that the Ministry of Health should not be dealing with the RHA. You were mixing it up. It is okay, I took it in good faith.

We come back to prevention. Mr. Vice-President, the truth is that I have to bring a Motion on Health for the number of things that we are doing in health. I cannot talk this thing through. Anyway, I would touch on a few points. We agree that the positive lifestyle change and improved health across the population is important and we plan to do that through public policy prevention and public education initiatives.

We are looking at the development of physical activity initiatives; the very point that was made by Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight. In fact, I would tell you more about that. We are looking at nutrition, education and counselling. We are working also in the public sector. We have come up with a policy. All the Permanent Secretaries have agreed with it and we would be looking in the public sector in the first place, the schools and areas that we can have some intervention without too much trouble. Of course, we would roll it out to the national community.
We are strengthening all our school health initiatives with respect to screening and diet testing. It is ongoing as we speak. We are scaling up our population-based disease prevention initiatives, including health screening, using health mobile and pap smear screening initiatives at primary care facilities and there is also the dissemination of nutrition and other information that would enable citizens to assume greater responsibility for their own health. You can now call 800-WELL and get advice on nutrition. There is a magazine called Live Well, which we mail to every household in Trinidad and Tobago every quarter, trying to give advice. We are on Twitter. We are on Facebook and we have a website. You can reach us and we are trying to reach you. It does not stop there. We recognize that health promotion and education activities are critical to the reduction of CNCDs and we know that is the big killer.

Say what you want about the Bill, one of the first acts that I did as Minister of Health was to advance the tobacco policy, because it is through public policy and that kind of intervention, education, promotion and wellness, we can make appropriate intervention in reversing the ethic and culture of the, as you said very correctly, the trans fats, sugars, smoke, alcohol and all those things.

We have adopted an integrated approach, which includes prevention, health promotion and improved access to our health services, both at the school and workplace and we are making community interventions. In fact, I can share one with you, our healthy communities caravan. We are going to all the communities, particularly, Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol, the underserved communities. Incidentally, I am not upset with Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol, I have the best wishes for all members of this honourable Senate, including every last one, because I know that one day they will say: "God, am I being true?" And if they are able to find themselves, it will be a better world for all of us. Our healthy community caravans are going through all the various communities. They are being supervised by the Regional Health Authorities and we will utilize the health fair format, to bring health to communities with a range of health programmes. We will identify local health needs. We will complete situation analyses with community stakeholders. We have already started and we continue in September. We have St. Mary's Village, Moruga; Bangladesh; Guaico/Tamana; Pinto Road, Arima; and Success Village, Laventille.

I would just give you some of the constituencies that we are looking at. The first 20 constituencies are Arima; Arouca/Maloney; Caroni East; Chaguanas East; Couva North; Fyzabad; La Brea; Laventille West; Lopinot/Bon Air West; Naparima; Oropouche West; Port of Spain South; Princes Town South/Tableland;
San Fernando East; St. Ann's East; and St. Augustine. We are going through the communities. It does not matter whether they are PNM or UNC. There are no COP as yet, but it does not matter. It matters that we go to these communities and try to bring the message.

More than that, our Caribbean Wellness Day was an initiative of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. That Caribbean Wellness Day spoke to a number of declarations made. I think that was in 2007. What it is seeking to do is to accentuate and highlight the importance of prevention. We have been rolling out the programme and sensitizing people.

I think it was last Saturday we were able to attract almost 10,000 people. It was not the fact that they ran that day; it was symbolic that they would go back to their communities and carry the message. It was symbolic that we are starting a culture shift that will cause people to change their lifestyles; something that Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight spoke about and we need to treat with it.

Not only are we doing that, we are working together with PAHO and they have agreed to provide some funding. We are also working with the Ministries of Local Government and Sport and Youth Affairs, where we would take every playground in Trinidad and Tobago. We are starting with 14 regional corporations and we would continue to roll out, where every playground in Trinidad and Tobago, ultimately in a community, will be able to have a leader, so to speak, in that community and we will bring to those communities physical activities and even possibly lectures, so that the wellness programme could become entrenched in the community. We are doing all those things.

Commencing in November, we will be rolling out 20 point-of-care testing health facilities. As we roll those health facilities out, it will mean when you come into a health facility the idea and intention is that within 24 hours you will get back your test results. In fact, the first one will be at the new District Health Facility in Siparia. I would come back and tell you what we have done in the last two years, specifically.

We are evaluating our school meals options in Trinidad. We are building educational experiences. We will be doing food and nutrition clubs. We are doing nutrition camps. We are building wellness centres throughout the country. So far, we are doing a number of things. I spoke about the caravans and the wellness day. We are looking at workplace wellness programmes, which would also be piloted at the Ministry. We are looking at accidents and injuries, all, again seeking to reduce—of course, we spoke about our billboards and our communication.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Wednesday, September 23, 2009

[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Since Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol and Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight raised some issues about infrastructure and beds, I want to state that only last week, or about eight or nine days ago, we commissioned 24 beds at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and next week we are commissioning another 24; 48 beds. Additionally, we have added to the Paediatrics Specialty Unit another 20 beds; and to the neonatal unit, another 35. We are now up to about 100 additional beds. Let me give an account for 2008. [ Interruption] It has already been commissioned, except for the second 24. All 76 are on and 24 are coming next week, which would make it 100.

During the past fiscal year, we have completed the following facilities: St. James District Facility, which will serve approximately 100,000 people; La Romain Health Centre; Debe Health Centre; and the Ste. Madeleine Health Centre, which will serve another 60,000. I just spoke about the Neonatal Ward at Port of Spain General Hospital. There is the New Paediatrics Accident and Emergency Department at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; the new Paediatrics Specialty Unit at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; a new Orthopaedic Ward at Port of Spain General Hospital; the Barataria Mental Health and Wellness Centre, which will serve approximately 15,000 to 20,000 people; the San Juan Health Centre, serving approximately 15,000 to 20,000 people; and a new ward at the St. Ann’s Psychiatric Hospital. [ Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol: When?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: They have all been opened within the last 20 months. Let me also say something about the new National Radiotherapy Centre. I would like Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight to know, through you, Mr. Vice-President, that it is the most modern cancer facility in the Caribbean; the NRC. You are correct; all it is missing is a linear accelerator. We just moved to Sangre Grande and we have put satellite services there, both oncology and dialysis.

I would tell you what else we are doing. We are refurbishing the Chaguanas Health Centre, which will be opened in October. Siparia Health Centre will be opened in November/December. The St. Joseph Health Centre will be completed and operational in February. The Morvant Health Centre would also be completed in 2010; and also two health centres in Tobago. The Scarborough Hospital—[ Interruption] in fact, let me go to that—is going to be opened next year. It would be commissioned next year. There is all this talk about reciting the same things and that we are saying the same things. I would be more than happy to arrange a
visit for this Senate, so that you can see where we have reached. The Point Fortin Hospital— [Interruption] it is in the budget. We have a preferred bidder and that will start in the first quarter. Already, we have moved the administrative offices and we are making arrangements, because we have to use the same location. With respect to the Arima Hospital, as the Minister of Trade and Industry said, we are looking to a second-or third-quarter start-up and we would be phasing the Sangre Grande Hospital.

Let me come back to the Renal Dialysis and Oncology Centres. The National Oncology Centre is going to be restarted in the first quarter. The RFPs were out. We have a preferred bidder and it is just a matter of a Cabinet approval and then it will commence in the first quarter. Since we are building this state-of-the-art Oncology Centre, one has to rationalize all that we do to make sure that we are doing the right things. A national health needs analysis and manpower plans are important to your infrastructure. You cannot just build things without understanding the EPI Profile so that five or six years down you cannot do your HR planning if you do not have those things. I am very surprised, in the abundance of good advice, that Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight did not realize this. How can you plan all that infrastructure, a whole NHS, and you do not have a needs assessment plan? I am truly surprised. That is why I said that I think her intention was good. She felt: "Doh worry to do the planning, just build it."

Let me also say that Cabinet has signed off on two world class renal dialysis centres. One centre would be at Mount Hope and the other would be at San Fernando. Again, that will start in the first quarter of 2009. Money has been provided for it in the budget. These are things that you can see. These are things that are real. These are things that are happening. These are things that are provided for in the budget and these are things that would be unfolding as we go into the future. That is why she was correct; I could submit my report because I know exactly where we were and we are doing it on a very scientific basis. Suffice it to say, in terms of the HR, Cabinet has given great support. I would not be able to speak about that at this time.

I want to talk about H1N1. There is one point I want to make. When you look around internationally, at what is happening in England, France, Buenos Aires and the United States, I know you all look at the news and the trouble and difficulty they have found themselves in, nobody is prepared to say that Trinidad and Tobago did a good job.
3.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, Dr. Gopeesingh did say that, and it was in the newspaper but, suffice it to say, we have gone further than that, and we have now agreed to order vaccines. We have ordered 50,000 vaccines and we expect to move up to about 200,000 vaccines. We will have a strategic approach and those vaccines will ensure that Trinidad and Tobago will be one of the few countries that would have managed the H1N1—it has been a pandemic for the last 41 years—and you must admit that is relatively acceptable. You cannot deny that. [Desk thumping]

I have watched the way this economy has been managed. Nobody has lost his or her credit card and jobs as has been happening in the world.

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** What!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** What do we do in this Parliament? We have some issues. I accept that we have some issues in a number of areas. I listen to people who come to this Parliament and say, "Let me just beat you." I respect Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran for saying that is the price you have to pay for holding that position, but the Government has managed the economy well. The very people who are speaking on the other side have called in Standard and Poor's and told them to downgrade Trinidad and Tobago. [Laughter] That is what they said. In other words, do you know what the implications of that would have been? There would have been higher interest rates; less money available for the very dialysis; and the linear accelerator. Do you know what Standard and Poor's said? Jokers! They removed the watch list and they said: “We affirm your credit rating.” Can you imagine that? That is what we are faced with.

This is the only country in the world that is doing well, and people are saying to kill them; shoot them; and burn them down. In fact, I want to come back to Sen. Dr. McNicol. She reminded us about 1970—

**Mr. Vice-President:** Minister, I think you should give the Senator her due respect. It is Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I want to go to the *Hansard* where Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol said: “I think I am being seditious.”

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** I said I am not being seditious.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol used the word “seditious”. So, what would have caused her to arrive at the word “seditious” is strictly a matter for her.

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** That is my expertise as a social scientist.
Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Mr. Vice-President, I want to urge all the health care professionals in this country to continue putting their shoulders to the wheel; I want to urge the administrative staff in the Ministry of Health to put their shoulders on the wheel and be undeterred; I want to urge the national community to cooperate with them; and I want to urge the health care workers to cooperate with the national community so that we can do more and become a better society.

Just a few weeks ago—the Minister of Trade and Industry can correct me if I am wrong—we moved from No. 90-something to No. 84 or No. 86 in the Competitiveness Index. This is a big jump for Trinidad and Tobago. We do not celebrate the good things; we do not want to look at the good things. I am the first to admit that we have challenges. In fact, the budget’s theme speaks to "Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges".

Mr. Vice-President, I want to talk about the National Health Service (NHS). Cabinet has approved our draft policy for the NHS. We have gone through a number of areas which deal with it. The NHS will facilitate access to health care services in an equitable and efficient manner and will also provide sustainable means of financing our health care services. What this means is that every single citizen—whether you are rich or poor or from the East or the West or indigent or otherwise—would be entitled to access health care services with dignity, equality and equity. That is what that means.

Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol: When?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: I am pleased to report that we have received Cabinet’s approval for our draft policy, and let me just give a brief outline of what the NHS is and how it is going to change health care delivery to improve the lives of every citizen. All persons eligible to participate in the NHS would have guaranteed access to a defined package of health care services at public or private providers registered with the NHS. So, once you are resident in Trinidad, you are going to have access and your payment may vary. Every citizen would be issued with an e-health card which will access the instrument to the NHS.

Mr. Vice-President, in light of the global financial crisis, we are fully aware of the tendency for the health sector to require increasing expenditure over time due to increasing demand for services. Generally, medical inflation increases at a faster rate than the general price index, but we recognize that the NHS will require a sustainable financial mechanism in the long term, and if we were to rely only on Government’s revenues it would not be sustainable. It would be very irresponsible for any Government to not be forward-looking, in that respect, and allow a
national health care system to collapse at one point or another. We need to ensure that our children, our children's children and all other generations would have guaranteed access and so on. Therefore, we opted for a mixed system of financing whereby the NHS would be funded by the Government and other sources of revenue.

Let me just make this point for Sen. Baptiste-Mc-Knight. The amount of money contributed to health surcharge amounts to less than $200 million a year or thereabout. This year, our budget for health care is almost $4 billion. Last year, it was $3.6 billion and the year before that it was $3.2 billion. We have been increasing the budget and, secondly, it is not even 5 per cent of what is spent on health care. So, when you asked: Where the money gone? It is not even 5 per cent. Again, I am happy that Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight asked the question, because she would have held out a view: What are you doing with my health surcharge? Which is not even 5 per cent.

In fact, if you look around the world, you are going to see that it is the biggest issue. In France, sometimes it takes 10 hours to get access. In Canada, people wait for months. One can just follow the debate that is going on in the United States of America and one will recognize the difficulties that health care provide. The fact that the Ministry of Health has been able to take up the battle and is rising to the challenge, I congratulate the employees of the Ministry, because it is not the Minister, but it is the employees in the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Vice-President, so doctors would be paid on a capitation basis. It means that every individual will have to register for a GP so you are guaranteed an annual exam and so on. Again, we are moving back to prevention.

The National Insurance Board will manage key elements of the system, including member registration; fund administration; contract negotiation and quality assurance. A creditable and sustainable Catastrophic Fund would be established for patients in need of overseas treatment.

**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. J. Jeremie SC]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Mr. Vice-President, thank you. The infrastructure will include connectivity of all sectors via gov.net. Let me just go back to the Catastrophic Fund. We are contemplating a Catastrophic Fund so if someone
needed treatment abroad or they had a catastrophe in their family, it will not be the end of that family. The Catastrophic Fund is going to be a private/public partnership (PPP) where we can access international funding and special arrangement and so on. So, we will see a centralized data centre; application software for patients scheduling and registration and online access to health records and other data.

So, what is the NHS? The NHS is a system where every single individual—regardless of personal circumstances or regardless of who you are—would be entitled in the long term to health care and be guaranteed health care. It contemplates a Catastrophic Fund where, if there is a catastrophe in a family, it would be looked after. That is sustainability; that is Vision 2020; and that is thinking into the future.

We have laid the Green Paper, the White Paper and we have done a number of things. Cabinet has approved it and we now have the authority of the Cabinet to proceed with the implementation. So, just to answer Sen. Baptiste-Mc-Knight, she said that it is so long in coming, but it is now ready to go.

Mr. Vice-President, together with that is the e-health card. The e-health card is going to change your experience in health care delivery. It is going to allow immediate access to a patient's biodata. When you go to your practitioner and you swipe your card, he is going to get the patient's demography—name, address, telephone number and next of kin and so on. You do not have to fill out those forms and wait. That is going to be so at any health facility, because we see the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago as one health sector; the private sector and the public sector.

With the NHS, you will now be able to access health care delivery either at the public sector or private sector. So, it is going to be open to all. As I said, as you swipe the e-health card, you will be able to see the patient's demography. If, for example, you needed a prescription and you have to go to the pharmacy, you just have to say where the pharmacy is, and via the electronic capability, we will be able to send that prescription to the pharmacy, and when you arrive at the pharmacy the prescription would have been filled. You could then take your e-card and swipe it and collect your CDAP prescription as the case may be or whatever it is.

Incidentally, the pilot project starts in a matter of months. Presently, we are doing it with the glucometer strips, and we are going to roll it out for all CDAP drugs. Mr. Vice-President, when Members come to this House and they challenge
the Ministry of Health, what they are really doing is giving me an opportunity to extol the virtues of the Ministry of Health, because ordinarily it would not look good to boast like this.

Mr. Vice-President, we are going to start with the CDAP database first and that is about 400,000; we are then going to move to NIB which is about 500,000; and then we are going to move to the schools. Right in there we are going to find about 900,000 persons that we can start with rather quickly.

The public will be able to register or update their demographic information through the web portal. They can also use pharmacies, banks and schools. As we move forward, children from birth would be issued a unique registration number. In other words, the idea is as a child is born, the child will be given an e-health card and it continues straight through. At the schools we are going to do the same thing also with the CDAP and NIB users.

Registered patients will be able to access providers’ availability, rosters and services online to book an appointment. For those who do not have access to the Internet, they can call a toll free number to obtain an appointment. It is about changing your experience; it is about giving you access where you can just call a number and make an appointment, so that we can see the efficiencies that come with it and so on. We can use text messaging to give results. Once at the facility, the patient will present the e-health card to the clerk who will confirm identity and retrieve the patient's files. Once treatment is complete, the patient's records would be updated with the physician's report, images and lab results.

Mr. Vice-President, let me give you the benefits. There will be a decrease in the patient's waiting time; doctors will have real-time access to patients and the system guarantees confidentiality. Each person registered with NHS would have the ability to access a health portal where he or she will be able to access customized information.

3.30 p.m.

The potential of the e-health portal is enormous. There is the capability to connect devices to the PC, such as glucometers and upload the information. We would be able to tell, by a demographic, in areas where there is a high incidence of diabetes. We would be able to tell nationally what is happening to cardiac disease, hypertension. We would be able to tell all of those things. Through this technology is the empowerment of people to take charge of their own health by creating a modern supportive environment in which personalized solutions encourage compliance and increase convenience for patients and their families.
Using the health card, if you know you are diabetic, we would put you to a certain channel that would tell what your meals should be, what your exercise should be and give you advice and information. Private doctors would have an incentive to be part of the national health system since they would be receiving public health patients. For both public and private doctors the services validated by the system would be promptly credited and/or paid while you would have all electronic access to the patient's updated medical information.

If I failed to say it, let me also say that there would be a PIN number. So, while you have the patient's demographics, you have the medical history, you have the accounting information and you have the electronic data; what we are going to do is to put a PIN number just as you have on your bank card, so that if you did not wish for anybody to know your medical history, you would have patient confidentiality. So, these are some of the things that that card would bring and moreover because of the real time validation provided by the card, incidences of fraud and so forth will be greatly reduced.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the tentative timetable is as follows: The e-health card will be piloted between October and December 2009 and the national rollout will occur between March and December 2010.

Sen. Dr. Nanan: Minister, would you give way?


Sen. Dr. Nanan: Is that part of the Johns Hopkins consultancy?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: No, it is not. Let me just take the opportunity to congratulate the administrative staff in the Ministry of Health. This policy draft framework that is highly acclaimed came out of the Ministry of Health. I want to congratulate those people in the Ministry of Health. We are looking at 2010 between March and December that everybody should have an e-health card and the full rollout of the NHS is scheduled for 2013, and possibly if we can expedite it, we are looking at it before.

Health is a very serious thing for the Government. This Government recognizes that if we do not have a healthy population we cannot have a productive population. This Government recognizes that we need to take the nation's health seriously, and that is why in all of the difficult economic circumstances, the Government continued to
support infrastructure development, to support budgetary additions in their allocation. That is why the Government did that, because the Government recognized that. I want to say that is when you care about all people, which includes poor people; that is how a proper government will operate.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I believe everything I have outlined has illuminated the way this Government intends to transform the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We are moving quickly with our infrastructure, our HR and a number of other areas.

Every initiative we undertake is based on evidence, consultation and sensitivity to needs of our clients. People like to come and read letters, and I thought I would read a letter or two as well. The first letter I would read is a Newsday editorial. Surprised? The Newsday editorial went on to congratulate the Ministry of Health and the handling of the H1N1, and I would not go through all of it. They just said the caution issued and they went on to speak about it, but they ended up by saying that the Ministry of Health officials and representatives have met, they spoke about the country should not underestimate the potential of the flu. It went on to say that we urge that all of the actions suggested by the Ministry of Health ought to be sustained and they were highly congratulatory to the Ministry of Health.

The Minister of Tourism read a letter where the Murium Greene family—Just the other day I was in Mount Hope and a lady who was visiting Mount Hope was from Canada, and her daughter congratulated us on the treatment that she got at Mount Hope. So, we have letters. We have one here from the High Commissioner of England. We get letters congratulating the Ministry of Health. Whilst the Government would take some credit for it, as they take licks for what did not go right; whilst the Minister would take some credit for it, as he would take some licks for what did not go right, the truth is there are many great things happening in the Ministry of Health, and they are happening because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is interested in every single citizen.

So, I understand the advice given, all of it not correct, but I would go through each of it and where we can correct it or where we can look at it, or where I can advise—Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight—I would so do.

Mr. Vice-President, I think there are just three quick issues that I did not deal with, well, actually there are none.

I thank you very much.

Sen. June Melville: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I rise in support of the Minister of Finance, on her second budget presentation 2010. Also, to support the
Minister in the Ministry of Finance, and to congratulate all Members of this honourable Senate, who have contributed so far.

This budget truly reflects a national perspective and will impact on both Trinidad and Tobago. In times of plenty, we had received plenty. The test now is to deliver to the people with whatever we are allocated.

The allocation to Tobago, which is over $2 billion, represents 5.12 per cent of the national budget, and it exceeds the measured minimum recommendation under the DRC. Although it is less than what the Tobago House of Assembly requested, Tobagonians on the whole recognize that the Government must exercise sound fiscal discipline, in light of the global economic circumstances.

We all know that Tobago is still playing ‘catch up’ and as hon. Secretary of Finance, Dr. Anselm London, stated, no allocation is ever enough, but the capacity to continue to deliver is important. And this present Tobago House of Assembly administration will use all its resources possible in a wise manner to deliver to Tobagonians.

What is reassuring, is that the THA's development programmes that are in progress or planned, will continue, notwithstanding the reduction in the budgetary allocation.

During the recent weekend, every Tobagonian would have experienced electrical power outages at different times. In fact, we have heard that there is a broken cable that needs to be fixed, of course, and so from Thursday, even up to yesterday, there were electrical power outages, quite unlike the norm. But soon this would be a thing of the past, because thanks to the foresight of our Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance and their vision for Tobago's development, there is a new state-of-the-art T&TEC power plant at the new Cove Eco-industrial Estate and Business Park.

Last Sunday I drove down to Cove, and indeed, I was truly impressed. I was reliably informed that T&TEC had the foresight for early commissioning of the plant to address these power outages within a short time frame. Furthermore, when the plant is fully operational it would provide Tobago with 64 megawatts of electricity.

Indeed, Tobago would be suitably positioned to take care of the many new industries at Cove and may even export electricity to Trinidad. Mind you, in the budget, this is an extra development project, which was financed by the PNM Government in its quest to hasten Tobago's development. That T&TEC power plant project would cost about $600 million.
Mr. Vice-President, during my visit at Cove, I also observed that there was construction work on the gas pipeline project, which is on the way. The pipes on the other site at La Brea are already undergoing concrete coating process. It should be about 57 kilometres long, and it would extend from the BHP Billiton gas field straight into Cove to power electrical supply in Tobago. This project is managed by the National Gas Company and it is expected that it should be completed by 2011, at a cost of $1 billion. Again, this is a project that is not included in the budget. So, here we have extra moneys for Tobago's development. When that project is completed at last, Tobago would have the energy to woo investors to our new industrial park.

At Cove, there is also the commencement of a processing plant at the cost of $300 million; that is also not in the budget; that should be completed by 2011.

The Tobago House of Assembly had the foresight to send 10 Tobagonians to the reputable University of Trinidad and Tobago, to be trained in plant processing. This is a phenomenon in Tobago. Indeed, these individuals would be well positioned when the plant is completed. We must give credit to the Secretary of Finance for his passion and dedication to the diversification initiatives at Cove. This is in keeping with Vision 2020. When these major projects are completed, they would certainly play a significant role in Tobago’s diversification and development.

This honourable Senate must congratulate both the PNM administration here in Trinidad and the THA, for the respect, foresight courage and team spirit with these projects. We know that soon these developments would increase our employment prospects in Tobago and of course, the impact would be tremendous.

Other major projects such as the long overdue Scarborough Hospital would be completed within this fiscal year. And this is a turnkey project, where the contractors are building and they would outfit. When it is completed within this fiscal year we would be handed the keys, so, that both Tobagonians and indeed all our visitors, would have a modern state-of-the-art medical facility.

I believe that our very hard working Minister of Health, who is partnering with the Tobago House of Assembly to provide quality health care for Tobago, is doing a great job.

The delivery of projects by our very own Tobago contractors has been very challenging and in some cases, detrimental to Tobagonians.
3.45 p.m.

Over the past eight years, the THA PNM administration has deliberately engaged and encouraged Tobagonian contractors to undertake projects. I believe that this chance is extremely important so that Tobagonian contractors are given the opportunities to deliver, to learn, to grow and to develop their expertise. But the THA has reached a point where it has realized that some contractors are simply not delivering; some are delinquent and some are even not paying their workers. I have heard numerous complaints from residents at Charlotteville about their long suffering health centre which is still to be completed.

The library at Scarborough—another Tobago contractor—is still under construction for far too many years. Why should Tobago students have to wait so long for a proper state-of-the-art library? When we look just a stone’s throw from here we have a very spacious, accommodating and well-informed library. I believe that our students, and to a larger extent, the Tobago population deserve better.

Now that the THA has taken responsibility and has taken steps to address these issues, hence the services provided, which is contrary to the ranting and raving by the TOP about the services provided by the foreign companies, through international tender. This will assist the THA as quickly as possible, to get these projects on the way. As we look at the work at the Scarborough Hospital, half of the workers there are locals. They are not all Chinese workers. Very soon the Crown Point extension will be out for tender. Again, and hopefully, there will be some predictability to these projects. That is very important in Tobago. We need predictability in the completion of our projects.

Mr. Vice-President, tourism is paramount to the Tobago economy. Internationally, tourism has declined by some 15 per cent as developed countries have dealt with the consequences of a global recession. Inevitably, Tobago has experienced a significant decline in international air arrivals.

A few months ago, sometime in early July, there were a few cases of swine flu in Tobago. And unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition in Tobago sensationalized his concerns so loudly that foreigners and even visitors from Trinidad cancelled bookings at hotels and guest houses in Tobago, much to the detriment of the tourism industry.

So indeed, the hoteliers, the guest house owners, taxis, route operators, tour guides, craft owners and a significant number of Tobagonians who depend on tourism were negatively affected. This is a financially difficult time for many of
these businesses. Now is the time during this decline for the tourism sector to be prepared for the future tourism boom when the global economies improve.

Again, I was heartened that both the central government here in Trinidad and the THA are working together and collaborating on initiatives to improve the Tobago tourism product. They are working to upgrade the hotel stock and to reposition Tobago as an appealing and attractive market. One thing I must mention, the renovations at Vanguard—the old Hilton—are long overdue. We have recently heard that Virgin Airlines and even British Airways may pull out of Tobago because of the insufficient numbers of quality rooms—the three to five-star rooms—and come November we will have CHOGM. Again, we are short of quality rooms for our guests.

But I have recently heard of a stimulus package which should assist in this regard. A stimulus package of some $26.5 million was mentioned and I also noted in a proposal from the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association dated July 15, 2009 that one important recommendation, which is training, is at the bottom of the list of their recommendations. I am suggesting that great emphasis must be invested in training workers in the tourism industry in Tobago to be more customer-focused and customer-friendly. As a Tobagonian, I am ashamed to say that a large number of our workers in this industry are not customer-friendly. On too many occasions and in too many areas they render poor service. Locals face the same situation.

I have heard too many complaints as I sit at the airport in the waiting room, waiting to come to Trinidad, or on flights. And what is important is that right here in Trinidad, there is a prized market—because we in Tobago are trying to encourage local tourism. What we must remember in Tobago, is that there are other Caribbean islands that are also competing and are wooing our sisters and brothers right here in Trinidad, so we simply cannot take our sisters and brothers here in Trinidad for granted.

The quality of the service rendered to all our guests is important, irrespective of race and nationality. Let me tell you, Mr. Vice-President, foreigners must not—when I say foreigners, persons from England or wherever—be treated any better than Trinidadians or Tobagonians. On a few occasions when I have experienced less than adequate service in Trinidad or anywhere, I would have dealt with that immediately because I can take care of business. But the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association must make every effort and use some of that $26.5 million
from the stimulus plan to improve the product. Training in quality customer care must be one of its highest priorities and this we are demanding. We are demanding quality service in a customer-friendly establishment. But I must give some credit to the taxi drivers at Crown Point Airport, they are truly very courteous and very helpful. I must give credit where it is due.

Every Tobagonian wants to own a little piece of Tobago. Young families, young professional women and men are now adopting the First World lifestyle to be—so-called—Independent. They rent accommodation; that is a new phenomenon in Tobago, because in the recent past most persons would still live at home until they were married or otherwise.

During the past eight years, many Tobagonians have invested heavily in large homes, guest houses, small hotels and other businesses and these are evident all over the island. And of course, these individuals are looking forward to financially comfortable retirements. One of the things you must remember too, is the cost of building materials in Tobago is excessively expensive. There are some business persons who are really taking advantage of the Tobago population. Mind you, even with the advent of the two fast ferries and the other boat, where travelling to and from Tobago to Trinidad is much easier than previously, we still have these high prices. It is no wonder that many individuals come to Trinidad and do their shopping. I recently did a little shopping and I was amazed that certain items were sometimes twice or even two and a half times the price in Tobago than in certain stores here in Trinidad.

What is happening in Tobago in terms of housing is that the Division of Settlements and Labour has brought great joy to many Tobagonians who are now living in their homes at the new housing development at Roxborough. There are also new houses being built at Blenheim, Plymouth and Castara, and hopefully by the end of the year quite a number of these houses would have been distributed to the true owners. Please allow me to add here that these houses are for first time houseowners only. I am suggesting they are not extra houses for rental or retirement businesses for senior public servants, for business persons or even for some of our local politicians, No! These houses must be allocated to the persons who truly need them and who can afford to pay their mortgages. I must say I share the sentiments of the Chief Secretary that the funding available right now for housing is inadequate, notwithstanding, the budgetary constraints.

Since the presentation of the budget on September 07, there is a great degree of gloom, concern and fear in Tobago of the proposed property tax and I know the Government will do its very best to allay these fears in terms of clarity and
relevant information. This is a very sensitive issue. Tobagonians are hoping that the Real Property Ordinance Bill and the related Bills—there are a cluster of Bills—would be placed on the legislative agenda as soon as possible, because land ownership and lack of deeds and titles continue to be a serious problem in Tobago.

We have situations where the older folks are unable to legitimately will their properties to their children. You hear where people are talking about paying their land taxes. And here in the Red House there is a different name on their land. So there is that fear and we need to deal with this Real Property Ordinance Bill as soon as possible, because what we are trying to do is we are trying to take care of land. You know, in yesteryear, land was just taken for granted in Tobago. My mother was just given a piece of land by an aunty because she bought her a water tank—you gave away a piece of land. We appreciate the value and the younger people are appreciating the value even more. No longer do we just sell our land cheaply to the Germans for a few dollars so that we can buy a second grade car. That no longer happens.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the Tobago House of Assembly continues to ensure that as much lands as possible are owned by Tobagonians, and as the hon. Orville London stated, for generations to come, land will be available for our children and grandchildren. This is quite unlike some of the other Caribbean neighbours, where the people, the locals do not own most of the land.

As a result of this, the Tobago House of Assembly continues to purchase land for these reasons, most recently at Goat Island, the Pembroke Estate, the Grimshaw Estate—on this estate there are 25 households—and the Adelphi Estate which was mentioned here some weeks ago, there are about 126 households. The persons here, or families, who have been living on these estates for 30 to 50 years and do not have the right, or did not have the right to own, to obtain a mortgage, to sell, did not have a title to the land. But, our present THA administration has a foresight to purchase this land, and they are in the process of regularizing these lands for these people, so that they will have security of tenure. I think some credit must be given to this THA administration. In fact, the surveyor is on the ground and leases will be ready in the very near future.

Mr. Vice-President, just recently in the Tobago budget, the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Ashford Jack stated in his contribution and I quote:

"We have come a long way."
He is absolutely correct. He is absolutely correct because Tobago and Tobagonians have come a long way under this PNM/THA administration, together with the PNM government here in Trinidad.

Mr. Vice-President, even though houses are being built for Tobagonians, I am suggesting that Tobagonians be given the choice to purchase lands at reduced cost and with mortgages from, be it the HDC or otherwise, that they be allowed to choose their own design and build their own homes. That is the preference in Tobago, rather than everyone in a small area having the same house, the same design. And the process so far has been very slow, very slow. I am sure that quite a significant number of Tobagonians would prefer this method. Give them the land to build their own homes.

The THA is revitalizing the agricultural sector, and much credit must be given to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who is heading the team in this instance, and of course, our Secretary of Agriculture, the hon. Hilton Sandy. Because as we know, food security is tremendously important to a nation's development. This division, the Division of Agriculture in Tobago is encouraging, developing and nurturing young farmers, and we even have CEPEP workers and soon URP workers, who are involved in small farming projects in Tobago.

Lands have been allocated to small farmers at Courland and at Indian Walk Estate, and I must tell you that Tobago is beginning to resemble St. Vincent, where the hills are covered with peas, potatoes, corn, ochroes: the valleys, dasheen and other foods. House gardens are now, again, the accepted norm. I know a lot of young persons and even not so young persons, like my mother and her friends, who have very good gardens and they just love to reap their bodi, peas and everything else. So, Tobago is signalling, that again, it will soon be a serious food producing island. The march is on and very soon, very soon, we will be exporting foods and vegetables to Trinidad, as was the norm of yesteryear.

Earlier yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources indicated that there will soon be cheaper access to fertilizers, and I am sure this will greatly benefit the Tobago food security initiative.

There is also revitalization of the fishing sector and as we know, freshly caught fish is very important in the Tobagonian diet. And indeed, the Tobago House of Assembly continues to assist fishermen in this area with the jetty repairs, the construction of new jetties and the construction of fishing depots around the island. All of these structures may not be completed or functioning effectively, some may not have the water as they should or the electricity, but the Secretary of Agriculture will spare no effort to address these issues in this fiscal year.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
[SEN. MELVILLE]

Mr. Vice-President, please allow me to discuss the impact of the recent budgetary allocations to the THA Division of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports. Over the past five years, the secretary of this division, the hon. Claudia Broome-Duke, has worked extremely hard to improve the physical structures of our schools in Tobago. I do not want to boast, but Tobago must have some of the best maintained schools in the nation. And one thing the Secretary of Education has had to grapple with over the years, was the improvement in SEA, CXC and CAPE results. We seem to have had problems with that. Funding and training opportunities were made available, and indeed, the culture of training has been embraced by our teachers. So inevitably, this has improved the capacity to deliver, and indeed, has resulted in great strides in the overall pass rates, especially in the CXC examinations in 2009.

I believe the Secretary would be very upset with me if I did not mention a few of her highlights here. The overall pass rates for 2009 were the highest since 2004. There has been 44 per cent improvement. At one particular school which is called the Pentecostal Light and Life, there has been an increase.

**Sen. Dr. Nanan:** Who built that school?

**Sen. Manning:** PNM.

**Sen. J. Melville:** The pass rate has increased to 31 per cent. In fact, it is 256 percentage improvement in that time frame. At Roxborough Composite School, there is a 54.4 per cent improvement; at Speyside High, 59.3 per cent improvement; and at Goodwood High, 71.8 per cent improvement. So the Division of Education is working; is working extremely hard to take care of education in Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, time and again, the Secretaries in the Tobago House of Assembly have complained about senior public servants and other workers who are not producing, and who are frustrating the developmental processes in Tobago—some for political expediency—and their actions or inactions are much to the detriment of the majority of Tobagonians.

In mid-February, the new Secretary of Infrastructure, the hon. Godwin Adams and his new administrator took a very bold initiative, and under intense criticism from the Opposition and with cries of victimization and discrimination, they successfully restructured and reorganized the systems in place for the development projects in that particular division. Do you know what used to happen, Mr. Vice-President? You may have a small project and you may have
needed 15 persons and there would be 30—a lot of men and women just standing around idle, and of course, they were being paid. So, things had to change and the hon. Secretary of Infrastructure took the bold initiative and made the changes. And you know what he said? He said that the two-week closure has borne fruits. More projects are now back on stream; the efficiency of the programme has risen tremendously, there is a significant increase in the production and the output of labour, and indeed, there is no discrimination, contrary to the disturbing sentiments from senior TOP members, because I personally know both PNM and other non-PNM workers who were affected by this.

Mr. Vice-President, in times of plenty, our Caribbean neighbours were not as fortunate as we are. And I remember a few years ago two islands, Haiti and Cuba, were devastated by a hurricane. They needed help, they needed financial help. And in our nation, both in Trinidad and in Tobago, there were loud cries against the brotherly act of charity that the Government was trying to help these people. There were complaints that the Government was giving away too much money to our needy neighbours. What it boils down to, we do not want to share. We never have enough. Today, the revenue is less and we are still crying, we are still complaining. But you know what, we are very blessed in this nation, and we must say thanks to the master and we must learn to appreciate.

In good times, every Tobagonian has benefited. The signs of development in Tobago are obvious in every community. We do not want to boast, but we believe that our quality of life in Tobago is better than in most of our Caribbean neighbours. I said that. And sorry, but maybe even better than quite a lot of persons right here in Trinidad.

But I know that in terms of major development and diversification, we are still playing ‘catch up’. I know that. However, this PNM government continues to demonstrate its commitment to Tobago’s development and supports the major projects.

Again, our budgetary allocation must be seen within the national framework in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. There is national decline in revenue, and then we must expect cuts in the budgetary allocations. As the Chief Secretary stated, because Tobagonians have greater opportunities, we also have greater responsibilities to produce, to provide and to deliver.

4.15 p.m.

No one can develop Tobago, but Tobagonians; it is up to us; we must take that responsibility. We must use our resources wisely. Tobagonians must reposition themselves for higher goals. We must demonstrate sincerity of purpose and good
work ethics must be the order of the day. This speaks of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We must be responsible for our actions, inaction and misdeeds, rather than blame others.

With mutual respect, Tobagonians and Tobago will continue to develop side by side with Trinidad, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, towards Vision 2020 and beyond, with God's grace.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

**Sen. Lyndira Oudit:** Mr. Vice-President, I waited with bated breath, as probably so many in this country—and I will start my contribution today with this—to listen to the Attorney General in his contribution to this national debate. I waited to hear the Attorney General in his contribution on the cost of the Integrity Commission fiasco, but he chose not to speak on that. I waited to hear his contribution on the UDeCott disaster, but, again, he chose not to speak on that. I waited to hear his contribution on the duly established commissions and the problems that these are facing, but he chose not to speak on that. The nation waited to hear about the Validation Bill; he chose not to speak on that. Neither did he choose to speak on the Equal Opportunity Bill that is so necessary at this time.

Instead, in very measured doses, the nation was served with stern warnings, story book quotations, veiled passing of judgments on matters in the public domain, and almost arrogant pronouncements of what would happen to those who opposed.

I took notes; there were about seven quotations that I am sure story writers could use: If wrongdoers are left to go unpunished, they continue along their merry way; I will not deal with this matter; cowards need not apply; memories are for those days; memories for many are fleeting; the rule of law demands equal justice, and when it comes to the public purse, no money will be spared. These are quotations, in my estimate, that dealt with matters of national importance.

I would like to move very quickly to the hon. Minister of Health, Sen. Narace; I wish he was here. In his contribution he looked at economic and fiscal indicators of developed nations. He tried to show that throughout the world, referring to the United States with how many trillions in public debt, what these countries are now experiencing. I would like to say that the Minister has certainly missed the point. It is not about fiscal measures. It is not about economic indicators. It is about your human condition. [Desk thumping] He has missed the point.

Minister Narace referred to statistics from the Central Statistical Office (CSO). He made mention of the fact that available data was only from 2005. He claimed that Sen.
Mark was dealing with imaginary figures. I suggest that the Minister use international objective statistics compiled by international bodies.

I have here with me 2008 statistics that the Minister, simply at his disposal, could have gotten; better figures. Do not use CSO statistics, where we are not even sure that the information coming from Mount Hope, the San Fernando hospital or any one of them, were even compiled in an objective or, I would say, non-political manner. There are many things that you could actually use. Do not use local statistics. [Laughter]

Minister Narace spoke about the access to health care in the draft policy. What concerned me was his reference to the e-health plan. There are too many cards: Smart Card, party card, you name it. There are too many cards. I suspect that if the PNM has their way, this would be a particular manner that they would discriminate on who has access to the very basic health care in this country.

In fact, Minister Narace said that wellness was the way of intelligent nations. What does that say? If it is a way of intelligent nations, then what have we been seeing for 50 years? Are you saying then, since wellness is not a part of what we had before, and you are now proposing a draft document, that for the last 50 years we have had nothing intelligent? Those were the Minister's words.

Year after year, the financial gurus look at every budget in amazement. When they look at them, there is something wrong with the numbers. The numbers do not tally. There is something wrong.

Recently the United States Department of Defence has added a new term to the public lexicon; this is referred to as "perception management". This is not about spin stories, because they do not spin facts. Perception management, according to the US Department of Defence, creates scenarios and environments and sells these created environments to the world. When it comes down to the bare facts, it does not make sense to waste your resources on discovering the truth or unearthing it, but rather, as the PNM has found out, you must create the truth.

I put forward today that Vision 2020, Budget 2010 and all the documents out of Vision 2020, are shams. They are gimmicks and created untruths—not for the local population; this is so that the international community could buy into a story that we are doing well. That is why the budget only deals with economic figures. This is why Standards and Poor's could only deal with economic figures, because they cannot—[ Interruption]

Sen. Narace: The same one "all yuh" tried to change?
Sen. L. Oudit: Minister Narace is here; I wish he was here at the start of my contribution, I would have told him—in fact, I will repeat it. When you are quoting your statistics, do not get local compilations, go to the international bodies.

Sen. Narace: Where do they get it from?

Sen. L. Oudit: This is UNICEF, Sir; UNICEF World Health Organization. If you want to ask them questions, I will give you the address, you could send a letter.

Sen. Narace: You are challenging the integrity of public servants?

Sen. L. Oudit: It seems that the only equation that makes sense in Vision 2020 is nothing from nothing leaves nothing. For all intents and purposes, our international economic indicators say that we are a stable country. But the international economic ratings have missed the almost crippling pauperization of this nation. We have been crippling; we have come to a point of where we are developing a welfare state. After 44 years, we have the pauperization of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

On page 3 of the budget statement, the Minister asked the question: How has Trinidad and Tobago managed its affairs. [Laughter] [Interruption]

Sen. Jeremie SC: What did she say about me?

Hon. Senators: Nothing. [Laughter]

Sen. L. Oudit: The Minister boasted that:

"...under prudent and responsible stewardship...we have succeeded in...maximizing the national welfare."

What a joke. What exactly does this Minister mean by "national welfare"? Does national welfare refer to the taxi drivers, taxpayers, fishermen, the craftsmen, the teachers or the housewives? Does national welfare refer to social indicators of human existence; the percentage of people living below the poverty line; the poverty gap ratio; infant mortality; maternal mortality or even slum population?

The Minister's opening words in the budget would be laughable, if they were not so frightening. It says here:

"...we continue to implement a progressive programme of development intended to improve the quality of life of our nation's citizens."
What does the Minister mean by “quality of life”? Does the Minister equate quality of life with buildings and complexes; with desalination plants; the Tamana E-TecK Park; the Maracas Redesign and Restoration Project; the financial centre or the rapid rail system? In what way has the quality of life of people in this country improved? How has the quality of life improved for any sector, after free and vulgar spending of this PNM administration, besides the PNM boys and girls club? Whose quality of life, in the last eight years of this current administration? The complete breakdown of our system of law and order; the reversal of roles of police, "tief", businessman and crook has led to an alarming culture of violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, sex crimes and the pervasive plague of lawlessness at every level of our institutions.

After massive spending, we have become a nation of neglected, disadvantaged and deprived people. We are plagued with the highest level of crime in the history of this country; the worst agricultural capability and the shoddiest social sector development that this country has ever faced. Rather than uplift and elevate the people of this country, the PNM has made more and more persons dependent on the State. That is the strategy of PNM pauperization and state dependence. This seems to be the true Vision 2020.

After billions of dollars, unemployment of persons under 24 years is a staggering 43.8 per cent of the total unemployed population; this is as of July 2009. According to UN Millennium Report of Trinidad and Tobago for 2009, after billions of dollars, 10 per cent of our total population live below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption. Mr. Vice-President, 5.9 per cent of our population are children under five years who are severely or moderately underweight. That translates to 76,000 children in our nation's schools that are underweight and severely malnourished, and this is according to UNICEF. [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, unless you plan to wrap up now, it is now 4.30 and we will take the tea break now. This Senate is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.02 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Sen. L. Oudit: [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Before the break I mentioned that 10 per cent of our total population live below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption and that translated, as I said, to 76,000 children or 5.9 per cent of our population who are under five and severely or moderately undernourished and underweight.
From 2000 to 2006, some 20 per cent of all under-one infant population had a low birth rate because of undernourished mothers. The PNM should be ashamed. From 2000 to 2006, only 34 per cent of all children under five suffering from pneumonia were receiving antibiotic treatment from this nation's health facilities, while only 32 per cent of children in this country who were suffering from diarrhoea were receiving oral rehydration therapy. It is in the UNICEF Report for 2008.

What has this PNM Government been spending its moneys on? After wasteful spending, our under-one infant mortality rate per 1,000 population, is 31. For members of the public, in the international arena 10 per 1,000 is considered barely acceptable for infant mortality rate. In Trinidad and Tobago, our under-one infant mortality rate is 31. Further, our under-five infant mortality rate is a shameful 35 per 1,000. Again, 10 is considered an acceptable standard. Again, this is the UN Millennium Report for 2009.

What international best standards does the PNM want us to mimic? Which standards are those that we are to follow? Is this country to follow the economic standings or are we following the human disaster that is facing Trinidad and Tobago? That is what we are doing. Our international best standards are not about the economics. The indicators of social and human condition in this country are more real and more honest than the economic indicators that were used in the prioritization of this budget. These are the measures that should go into how a budget is prepared.

On page 29 of the budget the Minister speaks about strengthening families and promoting sound values. According to the UN data for 2009, 32 per cent of all births are by adolescents. Even worse, of all our sexually active females, only 51.2 per cent even use contraceptives of some sort. Of all sexually active 15-to-24-year-olds in this country, only 54 per cent of them have even an adequate or simple knowledge of AIDS or HIV. The Minister spoke of programmes to reduce the rate of HIV and AIDS infection. The truth is, only 58 per cent of all infected persons in this country even have access to anti-retroviral drugs that could treat with their infection.

Vision 2020 speaks of a First World social sector, but after eight years of this current administration and some 44 years of PNM administration, 25 per cent of our population now live in slums. This translates to 247,137 persons in this country who are now considered living in slums. On page 30 of the budget statement, the Minister referred to the Integrated Social Enterprise Management
System, the ISEM. That is a grand sounding term. This programme, it claims, will employ a strategic technological approach to reengineer the accessibility of social services. Wow! That is almost funny.

For every 100 persons in this country, only 15.96 per cent have Internet access. This translates to 212,800 of our population as at September 2009. Our ownership, according to the United Nations 2009 Report, indicates that for every 100 of our population, ownership of a personal computer is a shameful 13.16. This means only 175,500 persons have ownership of a personal computer.

So how does the ISEM—how are these social services going to benefit people in an e-connect way when they do not even have Internet and Internet access, far less for a computer? These measures are a sham; these are gimmicks. They look good on paper. This is a paper budget. People who are looking at it from the international arena will say, "Wow, that is a good budget." But in reality the social conditions speak volumes.

The budget speaks of a Children's Authority on page 30. It claims this will eradicate neglect and abuse and foster holistic development of our children. If this is a follow-up of Vision 2020, then why, after years of PNM rule, according to the UNICEF Report on the State of the World's Children, 2008 and updated July 2009, why out of 189 countries in the world, Trinidad and Tobago ranked a high 75th in the under-five mortality rate?

The world's poorest countries, those with the most ravished and devastated economies in the world, ranked in the first 100. We ranked 75th. We ranked among the poorest and most devastated territories in the world in 2009. Do you know which countries ranked with the lowest mortality figures? The ones we like to compare ourselves to. The best ranking 27 were the industrial nations. The US and the UK ranked 151st and Canada ranked 161st out of 189 countries.

But what was even more shameful was not how the industrialized countries ranked, but, in fact, how the other territories of the Caribbean area ranked. Of the developing countries in the Caribbean, Antigua ranked 143rd; Barbados ranked 138th; the Bahamas, 130th; Cuba, 157th; Dominica, 128th; Grenada, 113th and St. Lucia, 130th. For those who do not quite understand, the larger the number the better your infant mortality rate. We were 75th. We were among the 100 poorest and most devastated economies in the world. We were 75th out of 189 countries. You should bow your heads in shame, PNM!
Imagine we want to tell our Caribbean neighbours how to fix their economies; we want to spend money to tell them how they should allocate their budget. What a joke, when their mortality rates are double, triple, quadrupled, far better than Trinidad and Tobago.

The under-five mortality rate, along with the under-one year infant mortality rate, in conjunction with your gross domestic product growth rate, according to the United Nations, according to World Bank and according to the FAO, gives a far more realistic and accurate measure of a country's progress. What we have here in this country is an alarming opposite. The better our economic growth for Trinidad and Tobago, the better the economic indicators and fiscal measures, the worse off our country becomes, especially for our women and children.

In Budget at a Glance, this little document here, in the table identified as "Selected Economic and Fiscal Indicators", the preliminary real GDP growth for Trinidad and Tobago is a staggering minus 00.9 per cent for 2009. When I read this, at first I thought they made an error. At first I thought this was some typographical error. But then I kept hearing it being repeated by successive Ministers on the other side. This figure is frightening. It is frightening for two reasons. One is that our economy, if this is true, is not only contracting, it is shrivelling, unlike what the Minister would like us to believe, that we are growing negatively. You cannot grow negatively. We are shrivelling; our economy is shrivelling. It is shrivelling away like a little prune. This country, according to this, is negative 00.9 per cent, according to the Minister's Budget at a Glance for 2009.

5.15 p.m.

The reason this is so frightening for me is that this seems to be the tip of another little spin story of this administration. In 1998, after decades of negative growth, under the United National Congress, this country recorded for the first time, a growth rate of 4.4 per cent. In 2000, this figure was 3.10 per cent and one year later after we demitted office, under the PNM it became a shattering 0.70 growth per cent. It did climb. In 2007, this growth rate was 7.1 per cent. That was when the price of oil was astronomically high. So it grew. Last year in 2008, this dropped to 4.7 and out of the blues, last week our Minister of Finance told us that our estimated growth rate for Trinidad and Tobago for 2009 is negative 00.9 per cent.

Our GDP per capita average growth rate in 2008, given by the United Nations Statistics Division was 4.7. In 2008, this country ranked the eighth highest out of 189 countries in the world because of our GDP per capita average growth rate. In 2008, only seven countries in the world did better than us. They are Albania,
Armenia, Cambodia, China, Estonia, India and Korea. In 2008, the US growth rate for that same period was 2.1; for the UK it was 2.5 and for Canada it was 2.2. Now the Minister in her budget wants us to understand how we could move from figures like 4.7 and 4.8 in 2008 to -0.9 per cent in 2009.

That, more than any other factor in this budget is the most telling indicator of the wasteful, wanton, corrupt and destructive spending pattern of the PNM for the last eight years. [Desk thumping] From 4.7 in 2008, according to the United Nations Division of Statistics to a horrendous -0.9 per cent in 2009. It is in the document. If we were to use this alone then the PNM should do the honourable thing. You should resign on grounds of incompetence, mismanagement and corruption. [Desk thumping]

What is all this telling us? It is telling us—and I hope that you are listening because you too, one day will feel what others are feeling—that the more money we rake in from oil and gas, the worse off our children are. The more our economic figures seem buoyant and fantastic, the more our babies and children are dying from preventable diseases and illnesses in this country. For that I am mad. The hon. Dr. Keith Rowley said he was mad for other reasons. People are writing to the editor every day. You just have to pick up a newspaper. The people are mad. You do not want to listen. You believe that is all opposition. As long as everybody says that you are not doing such a good job, it is the Opposition's problem. You have to listen. As you know what they say? "Who doh listen will feel." Unfortunately in this country, we have had that experience.

Why does our money not translate into better health care? Is it only for the big boys of the elite cadre? The under-five mortality rate is such a telling indicator of a country's progress and development that a government must be cognizant of the inputs that go into that particular index: the availability of antibiotics to treat infection; the nutritional health of babies and mothers; immunization; maternity and child health services; access to those services; income and food availability and the availability of safe drinking water. Basic sanitation is the factor that goes into infant mortality. We ranked so high, 75th in the world. That is a crying shame! It means that moneys are not reaching the people who need it the most. [Desk thumping]

It is clear that this is a paper budget. The figures from the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations speak of children who are dead and dying. They speak of undernourished mothers and babies. The figures speak of
neglect of people in rural communities and even worse, the deliberate abandonment of people unless you belong to an elite group.

A couple weeks back, a very interesting young man sang a little ditty for me. A little lingo. I will not sing it but I will tell you what he said as we were talking about this elite cadre. He said.

"Be still my foreign heart.
You long for the taste of the Julienne mangoes.
But alas, the mal come and going.
Shall be your ondoing.
Oh Pa, tricks flash before my hazel eyes."

That was what a young man roughly 16 or 17 years had to tell me about the people who were getting the spoils of this country.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, in their assessment for crop and food supply assessment 2003, there is a definition of food security, I was glad that Sen. Melville spoke about food security in Tobago. It is an important factor. Food security exists when every person has a steady physical and economic access to healthy, nutritious food in sufficient quantity to cover the needs of the daily requirement. Food insecurity is a preventable condition. It is a multi-dimensional concept and the result of several factors all of which are currently at play in Trinidad and Tobago. Food insecurity, according to the FAO, is the result of low levels of food production—we have that; and poor distribution through a lack of adequate storage—our farmers and fishermen complain constantly; low income; agricultural and livestock losses due to flooding and disease; poor rural infrastructure and the phenomena of urban migration.

I read through the budget and looked at it in all the ways. I was hoping to glimmer something that the Minister would have referred to in dealing with agriculture, true and honest attempts to make this a nation self-sufficient in food. Has the PNM not learnt anything? In the financial sector the world crashed and we waited. Minister Narace, I believe or was it the Attorney General, talked about people going along their merry way. That is what happened in this country. All around us the financial world was crashing and we went along our jolly merry old way, until it hit us and then, we are still reeling from that. There are people whose money and pensions are still being tied up not only with Clico but also HCU. The financial world crashed and we wait until it hit us in the forehead and then we decided in retrospect we should have done something earlier.
When are we going to deal with this food crisis? The world is currently facing a supply crisis in grains, cereal and livestock. According to the 2001 World Bank Poverty Assessment, 69 per cent of the world's population is currently facing a food crisis. The budget does mention the Tucker Valley farm initiative but could give no exact detail about how much was produced, how much money was spent and revenue earned from that exercise. Mention was made of the ADB's expanded programme for credit facilities to purchase machinery and equipment.

If no one told the Minister before, I will say it now. The farmers do not need extra machinery or equipment, at least not in the initial instance. The farmers need basic roads, electricity, water supply, infrastructure and land tenure, before they could even commit to further debt. By extending credit facilities it does not encourage the people to plant.

Farmers of this nation do not trust the words of the Minister when it comes to agriculture. They have been set up. From 2000 to now we have an almost total collapse of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago. Hundreds of thousands of people in this country are currently under threat from a food crisis. If we are not careful, we are heading for serious, serious devastation. The figures speak for themselves.

Eradication of hunger and malnutrition, even basic access to food, these are basic and fundamental human rights. All the social programmes that have been initiated by the PNM seem to look good on paper. Again I started off by talking about the US Defence Department and perception management. It looks good on paper. Everything the PNM does looks good on paper. These documents, Vision 2020, great on paper. Public Sector Investment Programme, great on paper. It does not translate to the reality. Instead of improving the quality of life by genuine, social, institutional and infrastructural development, Trinidad and Tobago has been reduced to the growth of slums and a dependent citizenry. A pauperization of our people. We have become a nation of dependence, a welfare state. Over 1/4 million people in this country now live in slums while only 13 per cent live in urban centres. Budget 2010 is truly only for those 13 per cent who already have highways, infrastructure, water, computers and Internet. It is not for the rest. It is not for the next 87 per cent.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a slum is defined as a squalid and overcrowded urban area inhabited by very poor people. Squalid refers to extremely dirty and unpleasant. It pains me to see more and more of our
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Wednesday, September 23, 2009

[SEN. OUDIT]

communities unfortunately, becoming slum areas, where the social pendulum swings away from people and basic roads, drains, electricity, water, health services, schools and recreational facilities are withheld.

As of July 2008, our slum population represented 247,137 persons or 24.7 per cent of our population, according to the UN Millenium Statistics of 2009.

5.30 p.m.

What does the budget tell us? Does it deal with this? Many communities are now under threat of becoming slum communities and I was glad that the Minister of Health referred to some communities that many in this area would never see far more hear about, these threatened communities: Debe, Barrackpore, Rousillac, Moruga, Manahambre, Palmyra, Bon Aventure, Diamond Village, Cunupia, Oropouche and Claxton Bay. Mr. Vice-President, the list goes on. Many of these communities are facing slum threat simply because roads, infrastructure and drainage, basic social services, are withheld from these communities.

The budget speaks of a Poverty Reduction Programme. What a strategy! You push people out of jobs, you discourage farming and agriculture, raise taxes, increase rates for essential services, you discourage industry, you discourage agro-processing, fishing and farming, frustrate households, so what does this do? It means that more and more people go under the poverty level. So come election time, there is the Messiah with the manna and the very people you have made poor you come right back and say, take this.

That is the election gimmick. This is what is referred to as the pauperization of a people. This is the start of a welfare state. This is what the PNM has been doing to this country; making it a welfare state so that we become dependent and a pauperized nation.

Poverty comes from many factors, but two in particular, according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Education and Family Planning. In this country, we refer to education of all sexually active women age 15 to 49—contraceptive use was only 42.5 per cent. Among males age 15 to 49, condom usage by sexually active males was an appalling 37.7 per cent as at July 2009. Even worse, among adolescents 12 to 16 years, the birth rate was a staggering 32 per cent of all births in this country according to the US Millennium Report Indicators, 2009. Twenty-one per cent of our entire population—

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. W. Mark]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. L. Oudit: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. You are so kind. Half an hour would have done it.

I will repeat: A staggering 32 per cent of all births in this country are by adolescents aged 12 to 16, again according to the UN Millennium Report Indicators, 2009. Twenty-one per cent of our entire population lives below the poverty line. Even more frightening is the percentage of employed persons now living below US $1; employed, 4.2 per cent of our population. Mr. Vice-President, 60,000 persons are now considered the new working poor. That makes me very mad. Who suffers as a result of these things? Women and children.

I make a special plea on behalf of the women and children of this country. The United Nations Platform for Action on Women and the Economy as outlined in the ILO's report of 2003, places emphasis on the need for all governments to pay attention to the needs of women and children in all and every single budgetary measure.

Pregs Govender, South African Member of Parliament, in his address to the UN Women's Action Committee, 2007, said:

“If you want to see which way a country is headed, look at the country's budget and how it allocates resources for women and children.”

Mr. Vice-President, how does the 2010 budget aim to improve the lives of any woman or child, except for a few, the elite cadre? Does this budget speak to the needs of rural women; rural access to services? Does it speak to the needs of working mothers, single or married? It does not even matter to the PNM. We have a net where we are dragging more and more working people to become poor, the working poor.

Moneys allocated in every Ministry in every budget have not reached the most vulnerable members in our society. What about equal opportunities in the workplace? What about the professionals, the working sector? They are becoming increasingly pauperized. In fact, since 2001, the report was made available to the PNM Government on the survey conducted by the International Labour Organization on the Programme for the Promotion of Management/Labour Cooperation.
Over 350 businesses were surveyed in this country and over 70 per cent had no formal equal opportunities policy. There was nothing about remuneration, maternity benefits, child-related matters, even washrooms and toilet facilities in business places, infrastructural considerations, none of these; not even sexual harassment.

In the 2010 budget, the Minister's words were very clear. It says here:

“We recognize that at this time the State is the principal agent of economic and social development.”

What a created untruth! I do not want to say a lie. What is the State's intention? If it is the principal agent, then we are truly in a sorry state.

Page 20 of the budget statement sets the tone for the major untruth of the budget. It says:

“We must therefore continue to protect, to provide them with the best health care service, First World infrastructure and the social structure to develop strong and sustainable families.”

This is the Minister's statement in the rationale behind the Government's prioritization despite enormous increases. We have seen inefficiency, mismanagement and corruption at every public sector in this country. Is this the vision of the PNM? Every budget speaks of the need to import labour. Ironically, the UN report on unemployment identifies the employment ratio as being 61.5 per cent of all the available employable persons in this country as at July 2009, and it was averaged at 58.6 per cent of all available employable persons in the last seven years.

That report identifies that for all persons under 24 years, of all the persons who are unemployed in this country, 43.8 per cent are under 24; all the unemployed persons, as at July 2009, was 47.2 per cent. Full employment this year is a shameful 61.5 per cent of all available employable persons and the PNM talks of the need to import labour.

What is the real reason behind these created truths? The hon. Minister, on page 37 of the budget statement, in three very short paragraphs, talks about economic integration between Trinidad and Tobago and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. For those who do not know, these states were formerly called the Less Developed Countries (LDCs).

The economic integration that was so carelessly brushed off in the budget statement is merely a deeper path of a union which involves the treaty of a union and a single economy within a legal and constitutional foundation. On June 23,
2009, the task force report of the integration initiative was laid in Parliament by the hon. Prime Minister. On page 18 of the Executive Summary of that document was the rationale, which says that this integration:

“…recognizes a deliberate decision by the constituent governments to establish a form of political cooperation that would match an evolving ‘economic integration’ arrangement subsequently moving to full ‘economic union’.”

This is a very dangerous and devious path of the PNM for this country. In fact, in 1992, the very West Indian Commission referred to in the document warned against this exact initiative. In no uncertain terms, the Commission made its recommendations very clear. It says:

“We do not recommend federation, federal structures or federal concepts as the way forward for the CARICOM…Both federalism and other forms of political union involve the surrender of sovereignty…As regards Government, we do not believe that the political climate for this exists in this region at this time…We have made it clear that we were not advancing proposals along these lines.”

Now the Commission did refer to sovereignty of the states and joining in some form or fashion of the region, but not political union. If this was a strong recommendation in 1992 and our economy is currently experiencing negative growth, why has this PNM administration felt it necessary to invest so heavily in these islands?

The budget refers to the building of an aircraft maintenance facility to boost Grenada's tourism industry. Do we not need encouragement and employment of foreign exchange in this country? Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight in her contribution similarly questioned the way and urgency of these measures. Her question was: What are we really giving away?

Shipbuilding and maintenance facilities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, quarrying facilities for the people of Dominica. Mr. Vice-President, in the words of the Minister herself on page 42, she said that, “at both the individual and the national levels we must balance the need to spend to stimulate growth with the thrust to earn and save. We must prioritize and exercise discretion and discernment in the employment of limited resources.” What is this urgency to fix the problems of our neighbours? Who will gain?

On July 08, 2009, in this very House, the Government passed the Local Government Bill extending local elections for a further 12 months. At that time, I voiced, to the utter dismay of Senators opposite, my belief that this postponement
had less to do with Trinidad and more to do with our regional friends. Many references were made in the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform. At that time the Government, some of them, tried to trivialize my interpretation of the word “regional”. Today, I stand even more convinced that it was not an error on my part.

On page 26 of that draft document, it says that, “one of the salient objectives of the Local Government Reform Programme is to review existing boundaries with a view to facilitating coordination among government agencies as well as national and regional planning.”

5.45 p.m.

Sen. Manning: On a point of order.

Sen. L. Oudit: I only have a few minutes.

Sen. Manning: On a point of information.

Sen. Mark: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Vice-President: That is not a point of order, unless she is willing to give way.

Sen. L. Oudit: On page 27 of the draft document it says that, “it is imperative to reflect changes in natural geographical configuration, population growth, regional and urban migration trends, new settlement patterns and industrial and commercial activities.” What is even more distasteful, and which came over so clearly is this abject hunger on the part of the PNM to fully realize political union of the Eastern Caribbean States.

Mr. Vice-President, in the Draft White Paper on Local Government, it is reported that the Prime Minister reiterated that, “local government reform must be viewed as an integral path to constitutional reform and must reflect environmental realities to promote good governance, balanced regional development and sustainable local communities.”

In the Integration Report at page 130 Vol. 1, it says that the way forward is very clear. It identifies political constitutional integration that guarantees a degree of autonomy appropriate to commitment made. It outlines the constitutional design or the elaboration of legal commitments on foundations.

This proposed draft constitution, in light of allocations in the 2010 budget; in light of Vision 2020 operational plan; in light of the political integration initiative; and in light of local government reform must never be allowed to replace our
existing Constitution. Mr. Vice-President, the vision of power is what acts as a deterrent to tyranny. In 1953, Mark Heald of the Rutgers University—Mr. Vice-President, you have to give me two minutes for the interruption—[Laughter] said that, “the only substitute or alternative for a political system that encourages differences of opinion and which encourages repression, such a system is, in fact, tyranny.” For it is the Judiciary, though separate, that functions of the legislative and the Executive branches meet.

Mr. Vice-President, as I close, our very Constitution is under threat. I would like to say that those of you who chose to support this, you have sold out, and you have to be very careful. This budget out of Vision 2020 is not supported by the Opposition but, more importantly, not by the people.

Thank you. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Basharat Ali: Mr. Vice-President, thank you. I stand here today to speak on the Appropriation Bill, 2010. I must say that I am a little constrained, because I left part of my notes at home, so please forgive me if I have to stop and start every now and then.

Mr. Vice-President, this month, I have been practising in my religious reading from right to left, so I am going to start the same way in the budget, not only because this is a good place to start, but my dear friend, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, has been giving me practice in reading from right to left by giving us all the 2008 accounts in opposite order, so I am now very used to doing it. I start today by going to the budget arithmetic which is the penultimate page, before fiscal measures.

Mr. Vice-President, if I were to take the statement of the hon. Minister of Finance and use those units to calculate the budget, then I would be in great trouble, and I think we all would be in great trouble. For some reason or the other, the hon. Minister of Finance chose a wrong unit of measurement. I think it is a mistake which should not be made at that level. I am being very honest. I do not like to criticize the Minister, but it is not a mistake that should be made at that level. I am speaking here to figures that are quoted as US dollars per million cubic feet, when it should be either one of two things; dollars per mmbtu or dollars per thousand cubic feet. Those are the correct numbers. I am sure all the technocrats who had to work on it did not use million, but I would urge that in future we make sure that documents like this which find their way into the media and into the international system give a good impression of ourselves.
We are aiming for developed country status. I hate to criticize, but that is what it is. I have to criticize. Mr. Vice-President, you may remember that in January last year when the budget was first recalibrated—I really do not know the use of this word “calibration”. I have a definition for calibration in my mind; a scientific definition. To “calibrate” means “to mark (guage or instrument) with a standard scale of readings—correlate the readings of (an instrument) with those of a standard”—determining the calibre for a gun, I do not think that applies—“or determine the correct capacity or value of”. So, when I see this word “calibrate” it raises some strange feeling in me, because if you say that you are recalibrating, then you must have made some mistakes with these instruments that you were talking about. People who do calibration of instruments are in Trincity, and that is the Bureau of Standards which comes under my dear friend, the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

The point is, at that time, when those two recalculations were made on different premises of crude oil price and natural gas price, I had looked at those numbers and I could not really reconcile that shortfall which was announced by the Prime Minister of some TT $7.2 billion with what I had calculated. I calculated $14.3 billion, and it was not my numbers, but numbers taken from two budget estimates, 2007 and the current budget estimates. I was using figures which were provided by the Government in the yellow books. So, that $14.3 billion came up that way. I was very worried about it, because it was such a big difference. My figure was twice as big as what the hon. Prime Minister said in a public statement.

So, it was the end of January at the time, and I did send my data to both the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, but I did not get any reaction from them. So, when I attempted to raise that matter again the following Tuesday which was on the 29th—at the time we were doing the Supplementation of Appropriation Bill for 2008—I have to say that I was put down by the President, and I cannot really blame the Minister, because he attempted to give an explanation as to how these things are worked out. He told me about how they used 130-odd persons to do this exercise, and he just could not say, okay, he will take my figures rather than those that were worked out by these people. So, I was left in that position of uncertainty. I was very fearful having seen those numbers and having seen subsequently, so many of the people who do numbers say that the revenue shortfall is within double figures, of course, in billions of dollars. I was concerned that we would continue to spend as if it were only $7 billion which had already put us into a deficit.
So, when these new numbers came out in the budget arithmetic—the number was given on the basis of the last set of figures that were used—a shortfall of $11.516 billion from the original budget, which is still closer to my $14.2 billion than the previous number of $7.2 billion. A little after that, we saw for the first time the Review of the Economy, and there was a figure of $18.9 billion there. So, there is still some reconciliation to be done. That is bigger than all the figures that we have seen so far. Maybe the hon. Minister can explain to me, at some time, where those numbers came from, because that document was laid after the budget was completed in the other place. So, how did they arrive at that $18.9 billion? Is it then that it was projected on a shorter time span? Maybe it was, I do not know. We know that also even in the write-up here that there was an admission that certain prices were falling and, evidently, they were not being taken into account. To me, that is really quite a thing to say.

If you were taking natural gas and converting it into ammonia, urea and so on, and those prices were dropping then, what do you expect? The revenue is going to fall from the gas netback and, more than that, you would not be getting any of that windfall profit from the gas sales by which you have this flexible formula. To me, the model itself needs to be examined. If that can happen now, it can happen again.

Mr. Vice-President, more than that, I believe what was not looked at carefully was the share of profit which comes from these state enterprises in terms of dividends and surpluses. I believe that was mentioned somewhere here. So, this is something that needs to be looked at. I believe one of the problems is that they are not counted as oil and gas revenues; they are counted as corporate revenue. They might get left out by someone. So, I would urge hon. Ministers to have a second look, and let us not get into that position again if and when we get into another downturn.

Out of that, I then looked at the budget arithmetic and what we were using as the budget assumptions for this current fiscal year. The “2010 Budget” is crafted in the context of projected real GDP growth of 72 per cent. It is predicated on oil and gas price assumptions of US $55 per barrel of oil and a gas price of US $2.75 per mmbtu. Based on these assumptions, the total revenue is forecasted at $36,663 billion.

Mr. Vice-President, I asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, what really are those figures? Is US $2.75 per mmbtu netback to the gas producer or is it the Henry Hub price? He has assured me that the calculation that they have used is the netback. So, on that basis, the Henry Hub equivalent to that will be basically US $4.75.
6.00 p.m.

You can put $2.25 as expenses, so, Henry Hub then would be pretty well $5. Let us start from the top; $5, and therefore it is no longer a conservative number compared to what we have used before. If we said okay, that is the Henry Hub price, then the netback would be just 75 cents, and that is what would have been the frightening thing. Those were the numbers I looked at, US 75 cents per million btu at well head. So, if that is a number you have, you do not have much flexibility and we keep hearing that our main source of revenue is natural gas.

So, if we make a mistake on natural gas, it shows up much more quickly and to a larger extent, than if we make a mistake on the crude oil price. The crude oil price of what is quoted here as what is taken as a budget assumption of US $55, instead of what seems to be prevalent, $75, may be considered in my view, a reasonable position to take, and I think it might be supported. I do not look at projections too far beyond. Every time I want to look, I go to the Short Term Outlook of the Department of Energy, for example.

Let me give you a feel as to what they have said in their September Outlook—they produce this each month. This is the outlook which came up almost simultaneously before budget September 2009, and they gave the following figures for their assumptions. They have the Department of Energy (DOE) projections; Calendar 2009, they have a WTI of your $60 per barrel; Calendar 2010, they have a price of US $75 per barrel. So, prices have been going up. We know that, we have seen it creeping up and I have no problem with that. In a way I agree with that, I am not an expert on these things, so I might have to look at what might be the best data.

For the Henry Hub, or for the gas, the Department of Energy says for Calendar 2009, Henry Hub would end up, they expect, at US $2.70 per million btu, and the average projection for Calendar 2010, $4.78 per million btu. So, that is pretty well what we are using. Whether it is pure coincidence, or by intelligence, I do not know. I think we would have to be looking at this very carefully as we go along into this period. We are pleased to see that prices are a bit up but we have to watch it, especially as we continue to be in a fiscal deficit position. That is the point I wanted to make about the budget arithmetic.

I would like to go to the other matter which comes up in the budget quite early on and it is called "economic integration". It is the second to last headline in the budget. I was wondering what that really meant and I realized in fact, that is virtually taken from the Prime Minister's statement at the end of June. A
statement made in the House of Representatives on 24\textsuperscript{th} June really translates as a policy or whatever it is in terms of the budget statement. Let me read here just briefly what economic integration according to the budget statement is:

"The Government is well aware of the economic constraints faced by our Caricom counterparts. It is a priority of this Government to reduce the economic disparity that exists between Trinidad and Tobago and our neighbours, specifically the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States countries, since they play an integral role in our export industry today.

The Government has initially identified four projects which will provide considerable mutual benefits for Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica."

I think mention has been made here by many people. I think Sen. Oudit mentioned a couple of these, but I want to speak to a couple of them that I have seen there and I wonder where we are.

The one on Dominica is the one that stands out most in my mind and that is one which was given heavy weather by the Member for Diego Martin West. I depend on him because he is a very experienced geologist and for many of you in this Senate who may not know, he was the first general manager of National Quarries. I know that because that was the time when National Quarries was formed. When he wrote so negatively about quarrying, that there was no need for quarrying in Dominica, I would yield to his technical expertise on that matter.

I was a little concerned about that particular project. I am not very good at geography, so I went to the "CIA, a World Fact Book" and when I read what they said about Dominica, I wondered why do we want to convert what they have described as basically a haven, into a place that is pock marked with—I would not read it; it is a very long thing to read, but it is worth reading. It is not a local story, it is from that geographical statement, and they speak of the pristine beauty and the natural beauty of that country, that they are into ecotourism, that they have a EU project for developing its geothermal energy reserves—[\textit{ Interruption}]. So, they have all of that in there, and I wondered why we would choose to put Dominica in that position.

Mr. Vice-President, I love my country and every time I take a drive to Santa Cruz and I look at all the pock marks on that road, it hurts me, that all the greenery there is now exposed because of all the quarrying that has gone on in this place. Have we asked the Dominicans whether they want that? I do not know. They are the ones who have to say whether they want it. That is where we are on that one.
On the SVG one, on the setting up of a ship-maintenance facility, the only rationale seems to be that we have some naval assets or marine assets which we have acquired and they have a small facility for doing repairs. Therefore, we should put more into it to build it up so they can repair our vessels, whether they are naval vessels or civil vessels or water taxis or what.

We have to think of ourselves first. We have a reasonably well-developed downstream maintenance facility. People come here to do maintenance on their boats, et cetera. Why must we then ship out to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, items which are in many respects, part of our security system? I question whether that is where we are supposed to go, but I realize all of that is really very much in the feasibility stage.

The one that takes the cake really, is Grenada, because the only rationale for putting aircraft maintenance like C-check in Grenada is that they have one of the longest runways in the Caribbean. Is that a reason? What about all the resources required to get it there? So, like if people would want to just take the jumbo jets, bring it there, get the service and take it back because Grenada has the longest runway. To me, it sounds absolutely crazy.

It sounds like if somebody sat in a brainstorming session and they say we have come up with that; but it appears in our budget. I question why it appeared in our budget at this stage. More than that, I ask whether in our budget there are funds allocated for any work on that. There is the Minister in the Ministry of Finance who is the craftsman of the budget. I ask the question in all sincerity. I checked, I could not find anywhere, any development budget for that. You just do not take something like that and stick it into your budget document without having something to support it. You must allocate some funds for it. I looked at where it might be in the development programme, in the estimates and it is not there. I ask, through you, Mr. Vice-President, whether they can provide me with some answers.

There were supposed to be four projects but we only saw three. I suspect the fourth project, in fact, may be, alumina for the smelter. I do not know, because in the Prime Minister’s statement there is a big statement on alumina from Jamaica for our proposed smelter. Alternatively there is something called a partial scope agreement, which was signed with the United States. I do not know. There has been no discussion on it. I do not like to see gaps like that when I am doing anything. So, that is my problem with that. That is what I have to say on economic integration as proposed in this budget.
Let me go further then to this. I had intended to go down that way. I did not want to speak on national security, but I listened to Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph. I did have questions on health, on the national oncology programme, but I would defer those. I had a word with Sen. Narace, I would get back to that. I do not think it is critical enough to take up the time.

Going down the line we come to Trinidad rapid rail transit system. When I first read the statement I honestly did not see that being on hold, then I was quite surprised when the hon. Minister of Finance said the project is on hold. What the statement said was that they are completing the feasibility and on the basis of all the data that they have, they would make an informed decision. The decision might be the train, I do not know. That is not, in my mind, a hold position. So, why did we get there?

The hon. Minister of Works and Transport spent one hour speaking in the other House, and I even downloaded what he said. He said not a word on it. Maybe he is demoted head of mega projects and is leaving it to my good friend, the hon. Acting Prime Minister, to make a statement on it, because I cannot see otherwise. When the Minister of Works and Transport speaks for one hour and says nothing about rapid rail, and a couple of months ago, every time you looked at Channel 4, you would see the rapid rail train on that advertisement, so something has gone terribly wrong there. No "trini" train is going to come for a while it looks like.

Let me go along. I have to come to energy. I was hoping the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would have spoken before me, but I believe he has chosen to wrap up on Friday, but I cannot wait until Friday. I read what the document says about energy and there are a couple paragraphs here. On page 9, it says:

“Mr. Speaker, Pillar 3 of our Vision 2020, Strategic Plan is “Enabling Competitive Business” which includes the development of a business climate that attracts investors. In this context, providing the right enabling environment to stimulate investments in the energy sector continues to be the major challenge. The review of fiscal incentives, the identification of new acreage for exploration and the decision on new opportunities both upstream and downstream will set the platform for providing sustainable growth of the sector.”

6.15 p.m.

I was very surprised. Normally, when we have a natural gas audit announced we have so many experts here who can talk about Ryder Scott. Up till now I have not heard the word Ryder or Scott in the budget debate. I wonder where they have gone.

Sen. B. Ali: They went back to Houston. Maybe they have but they have left behind their figures. I am quite surprised that nowhere have I read that, but I do take the opportunity to bring the Senate and the community up-to-date on this and the figures as at January 01, 2009 of proven reserves will be 15.4 tcf; probable 8.5; possible 6.3; which gives a total of 30.2. The difference of all of that is 0.6.

In fact, the production or the gas that has been drawn down is 1.5 tcf which is pretty close to the drop in the proven reserves of 1.6. So it is much of a muchness, since I know we have added a bit of proven reserves. So we are really in this position of where if we had a number of projects to go we might have been in trouble, but we think we are still very easy. What I am trying to say is that we have a set of tasks to accomplish and we need to do them very quickly and that is the discussions with the producing companies on incentives, et cetera and all other things that go with that.

I was hoping that the Minister—maybe he still will—says something on that when the time comes tomorrow and I will listen very carefully. I have read two or three statements he has made—the joint statement when you met with the producer companies, et cetera, so I am looking at it. I know there is a bit of space there and the reason why there is that bit of space is because we do not have any projects that require new gas. Once again I go back to the budget statement and there is a paragraph here which says:

“…the Government's policy is to deepen the industrialization process by diversification through gas-based downstream industries aimed at achieving increasing returns along the energy value chain. This builds on the current strategy of the monetization of gas reserves through primary products such as urea ammonia and methanol.

Government is pursuing the further development of downstream industries in metals and plastics.”

And there is a one liner after that which says:

“In particular, a steel plant, a polypropylene plant and an aluminium smelter are the centre of the Government's strategy”.

So, these are the three projects that we are looking to let us go ahead. I really was taken aback, but I know the three projects.

The first project, I believe, is the Essar steel—unfortunately, I do not have my notes so I am ad-libbing a bit—project which is a big project and which requires—I think 140 million cubic foot a day into this plant which is supposed to make plates. The second one is, what we have heard for a long time—a polypropylene plant, a big plant,
which uses 160 million cubic foot a day, I believe, in terms of natural gas requirements to make 500,000 tonnes a year of polypropylene resin. Of course, our little smelter is still there at 125,000 metric tons a year.

Mr. Vice-President, the people are asking how much gas these projects require? We are talking about three projects which require 350 million standard cubic feet per day. In fact, there are commitments or agreements—I do not know how firm the commitments or agreements are—for natural gas to be supplied through the NGC, presumably, for all of these three projects.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Energy and Energy Resources (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 completion of our current speaker and three others.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Sen. B. Ali: Mr. Vice-President, how much time do I still have?

Mr. Vice-President: You have 13 minutes.

Sen. B. Ali: Okay 13 minutes of regular time, so 13 minutes plus 15 minutes, okay that is fine. Thank you very much, because I am going a bit by guess.

What I want to say about these three projects which evidently are on hold because of the state of the economy and what will get them out of that hold would be any uptake in price. I had some work done on what product prices were going to be and looking at it, it looks to me that Essar is still in a position where they would not be able to move forward for sometime, because when the prices were at peak in August 2008, it was about $1,300 per tonne for hot rolled plates for Essar, I presume it is the product, I am not 100 per cent sure, I just guess sometimes. In May, 2009 that went down to $605 and in June to about $500. So it would appear that there is no recovery there, so if there is no recovery there might still be deferral, but I leave that for the Government Members to tell me about it.

Now the other big project, the natural gas to polypropylene, I am not a big fan. I believe the Acting Prime Minister knows that I am not a big fan of that project, but that project is a big user of 160 million cubic foot of gas. So what is happening to polypropylene? I am looking at the prices. I had some data and I
picked up a few tidbits from that. When we first talked about that, I thought about over a year ago we were talking at $1,800-plus for a tonne, or somewhere in that vicinity for resin. Resin has gone down considerably in price in this period and that is what happens with consumer products, so resin kept going down and down, and looking at those figures I saw in January it went down to 1,300, in March 1,400, up to June about 1,500, so there has been some recovery on that. I am sorry that is aluminium—which is a good story—I am sorry I mixed up my files. The good story is that aluminium is picking up and I had said so. I said that by the time we get this plant on stream—if and when we get it on stream—we will be in up-cycle, so that is how it looks like, but I am sorry when I said that for polypropylene.

Polypropylene, as the Minister knows was about $1,500 for a tonne of resin is currently 45 cents per pound which works out to just under $1,000, so that is still on the downturn. Maybe at some time we will get an assessment to where we are, because we cannot continue to be kept on hold for these projects. These are all big companies and we are just a little cog in the development chain for them. So if there are any words of wisdom to come from whoever it is—the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries or the Acting Prime Minister because he was the Minister of Trade and Industry before and he used to answer all of these questions. Whoever it is, I would like to know where we stand because we have the gas and we have time to develop the other tranche of gas. As someone was saying today, it takes five years and we have those five years now to put effort to increase our reserves capability in terms of natural gas.

Let me go back to my notes. Having said those things, I may go back to my notes.

Mr. Vice-President, I did not have any projects to deal with this year, which is an unusual state of affairs. Normally, I would have projects to deal with, so in the circumstances I chose to manufacture projects and I chose three projects. [Interruption] I called them the good, the bad and the ugly. Three names. The good project I am pleased to say is the AUM project, because a great deal of our money has been going into AUM through Methanol (Holdings) and that is the good project of the lot and it is evidently doing very well. The basic thing about AUM is that they make a large amount of urea ammonia nitrate, 1.46 million tonnes per year of solution and two small melamine units of 461,000 tonnes a year. Where are they? This project is somewhere about US $1.5 million or US $2 million. Where are they today? They have already started the ammonia plant which is the basic plant for that project and it is on stream, 1,850 tonnes a day, a
full scale ammonia plant. The ammonia plant is really the base for making all the other products, because ammonia goes into urea, ammonia goes into nitric acid and then into nitrate and then you make the urea ammonium nitrate solution.

My information is that these projects are well on target for completion, the urea plant is expected to be completed in October of this year, which is next month. The conversion of ammonia to nitric acid and ammonium nitrate will be the end of October also. Urea ammonium nitrate has to be made into a solution for sale and that is mid November, and the two melamine resin plants are expected to be completed by the end of the year and will be produced as bagged products for sale. So I got the information from the people who have been putting the plant together and I think it is a very commendable thing under the circumstances that they are there and they give us hope. I have every hope in those people there because they have done all of these plants around them, so I have every hope and faith in them that they can get the plant done. What we need is price.

What I would like to say is that as we all know fertilizer prices have been breaking through the low barrier and I looked at some prices before I came here. Anhydrous ammonia is being sold in Tampa at US $325 per metric ton, that compares to no market or $100 a year ago. Think of that. That is equivalent to a nitrogen value of $395 per tonne. Granular urea which is sold in Louisiana is going at $285 per metric ton or $610 per nitrogen unit, and the product which we are after there—and that is the UAN32—that pretty well at 80 per cent solution of urea ammonium nitrate, that price—it sounds low—is going at US $144 per metric ton, but the equivalent in terms of nitrogen value for that is $445, because it is only 32 per cent nitrogen.

6.30 p.m.

So I am pleased that this is a project which might give us some hope to bring in some real revenue in a relatively short period of time, and it introduces a new product for ourselves, a new export product for us into the United States and this urea ammonium nitrate in fact, will go into a pipeline system to be used as fertilizer during the spring season, summer season, et cetera.

So I congratulate the people at Methanol (Holdings) Trinidad Limited (MHTL) which is 56 per cent owned by CL Financial, which is run by the Government. So I congratulate all of you. I hope you do well because my wife has shares in CL Financial also. So with those prices, I think things are looking good.
[SEN. ALI]

I have one word which I would like to give, a word of caution on that project. I have said it before, but perhaps this is a better time for it to get stuck in the minds of people, and that is, ammonium nitrate is a very explosive substance that has to be treated with great care, and has to be controlled wherever it is within your plant limit before it becomes a solution. So, in terms of security and danger, et cetera, I am saying to you, hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the rest, the hon. Minister of National Security, make sure that everything is in place because that is a place where disaster can happen. You make one slip and somebody gets ammonium nitrate out, they evaporate it and then they can make a bomb. That is what happened in Oklahoma. The guy bought some urea nitrate from ICI, went and made a bomb, and blew up the Oklahoma City centre, whatever it is. So, I am just giving this as a word of caution.

I said I was going to say that it is a good project. The bad project unfortunately, is Petrotrin, and the project is the Gasoline Optimization Project. I want to make a statement on this particular issue and that is, today, I noted on the online edition of two newspapers, some very adverse remarks about Mr. Malcolm Jones, a former executive chairman and current chairman of Petrotrin. I have known Malcolm Jones as a fellow professional since 1969, when I was senior advising technologist at Shell Trinidad and he was then an engineer in the Ministry's south office. Subsequently, we worked together on projects, like the first Tringen project when I joined the government service.

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. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. B. Ali: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. But I will continue on this vein because I think it is important that somebody says it, and I feel that I am in a very good position to speak on behalf of Mr. Jones. As I said, because of his capability and the kind of trust we have in each other, I can go on and on and on. In fact, when Malcolm Jones left the Ministry, he went to National Gas Company where he was general manager. I was a board member and I recommended him without any doubt. I recommended him for the position, and this is the relationship Malcolm Jones and I have had over the years, trusting each other and a mutual respect. Let us say a mutual respect for our respective technical ability, or integrity in handling matters.
So I am really very upset when I see what is being said about my friend. He is my friend, okay. So if I have to say anything today, I do not think I need to defend his integrity. I think Malcolm Jones can do that himself. [Desk thumping] But if I have to say anything today against Petrotrin, it is Petrotrin, not Malcolm Jones. Malcolm Jones is not Petrotrin and vice versa, so it is Petrotrin which has stumbled. In fact, after consideration of it, I thought calling things bad was a harsh way of describing them. They found themselves in a very serious position. Petrotrin is in a process of development from which they cannot get away, so it is a do or die situation. I have said so before, it is a survival project. If they do not do their refinery project, then everybody might as well go home. That is what it is. So, let us understand where they are standing in this whole thing—and they got caught. Many of us got caught. I did, and people from Fertrin. We all got caught in the first boom when we entered into projects which all went over the budget, and with partners like AMOCO, where we in fact had sourced plants which we thought would have helped us in getting there early. I did methanol and urea; both plants were probably about 30 per cent over in the end, but I did not have any choice and I do not think any of us had choice.

The one choice you do have and I think maybe it could have been exercised a little better here, and that is, in the choice of lump sum contracts. Under those circumstances, Mr. Vice-President, if you go for a lump sum contract, they might decide, well, we do not want to annoy those people, so they give you a lump sum contract. I was appalled where I saw for one project, they signed a lump sum contract which was three times a certain amount. It was put boldly like that and I was not happy about it.

I think the documentation in that Supplementary Public Service Investment Programme (PSIP) does not do any credit to the company. They could have made it much better, to write it up as a professional thing. Their English was even bad. They had past tense, future tense, present tense, all in a great big hotchpotch, and how could anybody read that and be sympathetic to them? I would say, no. Nobody wanted to be sympathetic to them. So I am very sympathetic that Petrotrin has found itself in such a situation.

This is not the first upgrade that Petrotrin has undergone. They have undergone one already, and that one was started during NAR time into UNC, et cetera. So they always got caught in that process, and that one did not work very well either. I can tell you that, I know. I was asked to do some process engineering work as a consultant on that project, and I did it for a while. Many of the people who were there then—Malcolm Jones was not there—did not like us,
that technical advisory group being around them, Mr. John Andrews, myself and a
couple of other people. They really did not like us being around them because
they were spending IADB funds through the government, and there was really
little or no accountability for it. Okay, it is so much and that is it. But that is how
it was, they did not have any finance project management. They were just spending,
and the next budget, they did not have any variances, because the next figure that
was the next budget. So they never had a variance, a negative variance of these
payments. I think for that US $360 million, a lot was left behind, to start with.

In 2003, I said that before we do anything, we should have done a technical
audit to say, "Well look, we have done all of this and this is what we got achieved
out of it", before we go to the next step. I think it was probably too late then, but
those were my feelings. We have gone that route, and I still feel that we have
made some mistakes there, in that we have gone and put as the centre unit there, a
unit which is 59 years old. That unit, the catalytic catcracker is 59 years old. I
knew that. Passing through that plant going to Point Fortin, was the first time I
saw something called a catcracker, and just seeing this thing being built.
So that
catcracking process has gone through a lot of changes and whatnot, and they did
try to keep up with all the changes. Mechanical, catalytic, everything else,
equipment, but there comes a time when you must make a decision. Start from
fresh because in the end, it becomes easier. You just break it down and start from
fresh. That is what they should have done. But it is easy for me to say because I
am not inside, but if I had that project, that is what I would do.

As I said, I am trying to soften the blame on Petrotrin, but they did do some
things which were not quite right. For example, looking at the offsite facilities
associated with this plant, in normal project work, the plant battery limit is the easiest
part. So you have to look at all the facilities that goes with the offsite, and they did
not spend enough time on that. That is why the offsite budget went up by 45 per cent.
That could have been partly avoided, but as I say, that is where we are. I presume, Mr.
Vice-President, hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, that we are going
with the low aromatic diesel plant because once again, we have no choice. We need
low sulphur, low aromatic diesel. So we have no choice. So the project has gone
up by 300 per cent, but you cannot turn back now. It is too late to turn back, you
need it. So they have found themselves in that position, I feel really upset about it,
but there is nothing I can do about it at this stage. I believe the project will have to
go on even with that, and this is why I said not good project, but not bad.

The ugly project is still there and I have no problem saying that is an ugly
project, and this is the gas to liquid project. I do not know if anybody could say
otherwise, but that is an ugly project from day one till now and it started in 2003, when they first came up there nobody knew what it is. I did not know. I asked senior process people from Petrotrin, what is this? They said we do not know anything about that project. So it went from 2003—if you look at all my contributions in this Senate, you will see each time I have talked about that project. When I found out what was really happening, I went to the EMA to look at this project, to find that really this is a patent which these people want to commercialize, and they brought it here and sold it to us—sold it to somebody. And there we were, we went from US $100 million, which is $630 and it is now $1.3 billion in escalation, and the worst part of it is we do not know whether it is going to work. That is the worst part of it.

I am of the view that it is not going to work, and there are many others who are of the view that it is not going to work because they have not done their homework properly. Just like Nucor did not do its homework properly. Nucor brought a patent here, they sold the idea, they put it in, they did not do the process engineering part and it did not work. Okay, it did not work. They abandoned it, and I think NGC bought part of the facility. But we gave them a pat on the back for it. We negotiated to bring them down here, Nu-Iron Unlimited transferred a facility from Convent Louisiana to here, to make what? Direct reduced iron (DRI), the biggest DRI module we have, and that is what they came with here. To me it is really—how that came here, I do not know. But these projects really put me in a position where I do not know what to say.

Gas to Liquid Technology (GTL), Mr. Vice-President, do you know the National Insurance Board has put US $10 million in preference shares in the joint venture company for GTL? And I believe that First Citizens has put some money as part of their energy fund portfolio and I would not be surprised if UTC has put some funds in there also.

6.45 p.m.

From the point of view of the global thing, I think the foreign company borrowed US $100 million from Credit Suisse; so that is their contribution to this fiasco, as I call it. I do not know where we are going to go from there. There is nowhere to go. To me, it is another Nucor, and we give them credit and all kinds of things.

Mr. Vice-President, there is not much I could say on that project. What can you do about it? Should you just take the final decision to scrap it? Because it started out as scrap; they brought bits of scrap from Delaware, Guatemala and
Mexico. Those are plants that they brought together and put it in with chewing gum, or whatever, but they never did the work that was supposed to be done. I am very concerned about that. As I said, they are like Nucor.

I would just like to raise one little matter on Nucor. I saw a snippet which said that Nucor in Charleston had a case. It said that a Federal Appeals Court had revived a discrimination lawsuit brought by black employees who claimed that they worked in a racially hostile environment at Nucor Steel in South Carolina. That is a matter which has come back now. It was dropped for a while, but it has come back now. I think that we need to look at it to make sure that we have not been supporting persons who treat black people like that. According to allegations made, they deprived them of promotional opportunities and they treated them—well, you know how they are; so there it is.

Mr. Vice-President, what else could I say at this stage? I would be quartered if I did not speak on property tax. [Laughter] I had better say a quick word, for a minute or so, on property tax.

I will be a victim of property tax, to start with; I am saying that loud and clear. I am a senior citizen; I am 76 years old. When I came from Point Fortin, I built my house in Maraval out of funds I had from Shell Trinidad, pension funds or provident funds. My wife and I have lived in this house from that day to now. I pay my lands and building taxes every year. I know how to calculate it very well; I used to work out land and building taxes for the big projects, .45 per cent of capital, so I know the old formula.

No one could tell me now that is what you are going to get; no one could tell many of the persons on my street, because they are all residents; they live there, that "Okay, it is all going to be revalued and you would have to pay more." As somebody said, I may end up on the street before I pay more. I wanted to say that word on behalf of my fellow residents, who are all like me, middle income people. [Interruption] I know you are telling me to wind up; I am, indeed, winding up now.

I thank you very much for listening to me. I hope that I will get some answers from my friends across there.

Sen. Laurel Lezama: Mr. Vice-President, the march to developed nation status requires a dynamic partnership between the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to realize Vision 2020. It is in this vein that I join all on this side in commending the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Ministry of
Finance for their presentation of the Budget Statement 2010, ‘Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges’ Vision 2020”. But it is with a very heavy heart that I join this debate.

Permit me from the onset to denounce and reject, in the strongest possible manner, the misrepresentations brought forth by some of the Members on the Opposition side who spoke earlier today, as well as yesterday.

One Senator said that we should be ashamed, and rightfully so. I am ashamed that such hatred and venom could be spewed out of the mouth of somebody who is supposed to be molding the young minds of Trinidad and Tobago, and out of others who are supposed to be mentors to young people and the role models in this society. It is in this light that I continue to say that I would be very disappointed if ever one day theirs is a more formulative role to play in the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I really intended to just stand and say that I support this budget today, and I will say that. I support this budget statement, but there are some things that I need to add. We have been told that this budget was not for the poor and that it was an assault on the working class of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I beg to differ. I wonder if these other Senators and Members really listened or read all the documents with which they were presented.

Permit to say that when I listened to Sen. Mark, he quoted, as his reliable source, the UNC Manifesto. So I went last night and Googled "UNC Manifesto". What did I find? I found a little notice on the website saying, "This site is temporarily unavailable; kindly bear with us until we come back." [Crosstalk]

Sen. Jeremie SC: Where is he?

Sen. Oudit: All the technology, and you do not know which site to go on? [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Sen. L. Lezama: I went on to the website yesterday, and that was what I saw. [Crosstalk] Well, you Google it and see. It is so unfortunate that their own Members are not aware that their website is not working.

After I Googled the UNC-A Manifesto, a lot of things came up; the COP Manifesto also came up, and I thought, "Well, I would not really bring that into the debate." [Laughter] [Crosstalk] It did come up. To my wonderful surprise, I found this document, "A Draft Manifesto for Change in the UNC". [Sen. Lezama displays document] I Googled it and this was what I found for the UNC-A Manifesto. [Laughter]
Mr. Vice-President, please permit me to present to you what this alternative government's members are saying about them, and tell me if the people of Trinidad and Tobago really have a viable option on the other side. [Desk thumping]

"If we are to earn the trust of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago"—I am quoting from page 10 of this draft manifesto—"so that we could govern, then our party must become outward-looking and in touch with the dreams and aspirations of the people we seek to represent and govern."

I was taken aback; I was filled with horror, because clearly there is a recognition from some factions that the UNC or the UNC Alliance or NJack, or whatever they want to be, [Laughter] is out of touch with reality and out of touch with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Navas and Jack—NJAC. [Laughter]

I continue to quote from page 10:

"It is becoming a cause of embarrassment that we, as a political party that seeks to earn the trust of the people through the ballot box so that we can govern, have consistently put off holding our own internal party elections."

Yet still, twice in this debate, I heard one Senator call for a national snap election and another called for the Government to resign. [Crosstalk] I do not understand. Where is the viable alternative provided to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [Crosstalk]

I go on to page 14:

"Our members have been taken for granted for too long. They have been denied a voice and denied the leadership we need to take us into government in order to start to make our country a better place in which to live."

Mr. Vice-President, I ask again: If they cannot treat with their own members, how do they propose to treat with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Is that an alternative government? [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

In that vein, seeing that we have no alternative government in Trinidad and Tobago, I continue to commend the efforts of this PNM administration for its wonderful work and the leaps and bounds and prudent measures it is taking right now in these challenging times. [Desk thumping]

Also in this document there was one statement which really had me a little baffled. I really liked it, but it was a little confusing. It says:

"We can no longer afford to live on past glories."
I had to go back to the budget of 2000/2001, presented by the formerly hon. Brian Kuei Tung. When I looked at it, I saw nothing related to young people; nothing related to the seriousness of treating with the education of our people and improving literacy levels; nothing to really treat with poverty alleviation and nothing to really treat with agriculture. All they did was provide lip service, but, "we cannot afford to live on past glories". [Crosstalk] Unfortunately, they have no real past glories on which to stand.

What do they do to young people on that side? I had a wonderful counterpart over there, a former teacher, and she was booted out. I am very concerned about that. [Interruption] Before you were there, there was a young lady by the name of Cindy Sharma. [Crosstalk] That is what they do to young people. They provide only lip service. One of their senior Members stood in a debate, some time ago, and said that in her banana republic the young people were only getting pregnant and that this was a lost generation. On behalf of all the young people and all the people in my generation, I say that you are wrong, and I invite you to take back that statement immediately, because you are causing embarrassment, [Desk thumping] and you are showing no confidence in the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Vice-President, please allow me to go on into some of the accomplishments that this PNM administration has achieved for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, after the so-called "no intention to alleviate poverty".

The Senior Citizens Grant was increased by 271 per cent over the past nine years, to $1,950. There are 71,000 persons in receipt of a Senior Citizens Grant. The Division of Ageing is in pursuit of providing the best quality of life for older people. Over 700 older citizens have benefited, having access to free dance and cooking classes, aqua aerobics keep fit regimens and opportunities for socialization and fellowship. There were older persons fora conducted in Point Fortin, Maloney, Tabaquite and Barataria. Staff who interacted with vulnerable senior citizens, were sensitized to the clients' needs, so that training took place specific to that.

What about persons with disabilities? This allegedly uncaring Government looks after all of its people, Mr. Vice-President. Persons with disabilities—Government is a full partner with civil society in promoting equal opportunities for all, including differently-abled citizens.

In 2009, the Disability Grant was disbursed to persons who have been certified as permanently disabled or unable to earn a living due to physical
disability. More than TT $320 million was given, this year alone, to over 20,500 persons as a support for them, for those differently-abled persons, as they interact with other elements of society.

What about family life? The National Family Services Division implemented a family life management programme, including parenting workshops for existing and prospective parents; life skills sessions for adolescents; anger management classes and support for caregivers of children zero to three. More than 2,000 individuals and families in crisis benefited from the services of social workers who deal with crisis intervention in the family. Life skills workshops for adolescents were conducted in Moruga, Diego Martin, Chaguanas, Penal, Marabella and Beetham Gardens.

What about children, the most vulnerable in our society? The legislative agenda for children remains of paramount importance for Trinidad and Tobago, according to this Government.

7.00 p.m.

The appointment and initial operations of the Children’s Authority is under way with preparation for staff recruitment in train. Cabinet has approved the development of a comprehensive plan to address the problem of sexual exploitation of minors. Seventeen children’s homes were provided with funding and an additional four are currently being processed for funding. More than 312 boys and 252 girls have been assisted via the provision of $34 million. Seventy-nine million dollars in subventions was provided to 70 NGOs.

I continue. What about the socially displaced? There has been full rehabilitation of the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons in Port of Spain. Over 200 persons get service at this centre. A new $30 million Care and Rehabilitation Centre in Piparo has been established. It currently hosts 25 persons who are part of the pilot scheme and they are being trained in agricultural and other important developmental programmes.

Twenty-five formerly displaced persons are receiving mental health care at the St. Ann's Hospital; 30 older persons are being supported at senior citizens’ homes across the country. The Ministry of Social Development is to partner with the Ministry of Health and other NGOs to strengthen the mental health capacity.

A move-along policy has been agreed to with the mayors of Port of Spain and San Fernando to be implemented by the municipal police officers. Over 220 deportees were provided with very intensive services during fiscal 2009,
including connecting with families, assistance with location for employment, location for residences, referrals to grant programmes, counselling, advice with regard to resettling and with obtaining birth certificates and other ID.

The list goes on, of the achievements this Government has accomplished over the past year and this Government will continue to achieve; this Government is going to continue to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago and seek the best interest of each and every single citizen in this country, from the poorest person to the richest person, from the orphan to the great, great grandmother—every single person—because we subscribe to the principle here that every creed and race must find an equal place. [Desk thumping]

What about education and training? Permit me to just go through some of the statistics that we have here, for instance, tertiary enrolment.

**Sen. Dr. Gopaul-McNicol:** What is the source?

**Sen. L. Lezama:** It comes from the document entitled Operational Plan but this represents figures from the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology. In 2000/2001, enrollment at UWI, 6,002 persons; in 2008 the enrollment at the University of the West Indies now stands at 15,358 persons and that is because this Government provided free tertiary education for all persons who qualify and who can meet the academic criteria.

What about TTHTI, Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute? Three hundred and six persons enrolled in 2000/2001, but we are now in 2008 and 702 persons have enrolled in these programmes. And these things continue to go on.

What about training for those persons who are not academically inclined but are more technically skilled? For MIC we have had 1,167 persons enrolled; in HYPE (Helping You Prepare for Employment) Programme, 791; YTEPP, 3,397; MuST, 2,964 and the grand total of enrolment for the year 2008/2009 is 15,284 persons who probably would have still been in the streets or resorting to alternative means of life had a different administration been in place; that different administration being the administration that closed down the youth camps and the administration that had nothing good to do for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Oudit:** What are the sources?

**Sen. L. Lezama:** It certainly would not be the UNC manifesto, that is for sure.

Mr. Vice-President, several ministries are on board in implementing the poverty reduction programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. These ministries are: the Ministries of Social Development; Community Development, Culture and
Gender Affairs; Sport and Youth Affairs; Education; Health; Local Government; Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; Planning, Housing and the Environment and National Security, almost half of the Ministries in this country all engaged in actively combating the problem of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

As I said, I did not intend to be very long here this evening, but there is one thing that I must speak to. Recently I was reading the British *Independent* of Sunday, September 06, 2009 and they interviewed 10 persons, 10 economic pundits, as they prefer to call them, one of them being Sir Richard Branson. Now we all know Sir Richard Branson is the owner of the Virgin brand of companies, and he said what his solution was in treating with this economic situation that the world faces right now:

"ENTREPRENEURS - MEET THE DEVELOPING WORLD"

He says, and I quote:

"Smile and say: 'The worse the crisis, the greater the opportunity.' That's Sir Richards's view of the recession."

And he goes on to say:

"A good entrepreneur, very early in life, thinks of the world as one place’—Chase after the opportunity wherever it arises."

This Government continues to provide opportunities for all young persons and all persons across the spectrum who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs and having some form of self-support. Through Nedco, as well as the YES Programme, which is the Youth Entrepreneurship Success Programme, an initiative was conducted with specialized training programmes for small business, particularly geared towards money management, marketing and business administration. Last year alone 85 businesses participated. And the list goes on. There are several persons who have benefited before and there are several people who will continue to benefit from Nedco from all the loans and grants offered to them.

So just before I close, two things I want to say. Sen. Mark asked us not to compare ourselves to Caricom countries anymore. He mentioned New Zealand, Suriname, Malaysia, I believe, Norway. So I went on to New Zealand and I just tried to find some information on New Zealand and how they treat with their children in New Zealand. I got a report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is a European partnership for several European countries and they are expanding to include other countries from around the world. Do you know what they said?
"New Zealand needs to take a stronger policy focus on child poverty and child health.

New Zealand’s government spending on children is considerably less than the OECD average.

Spending more on young children is more likely to generate positive changes and, indeed, is likely to be fairer for more disadvantaged children.”

They also said:

“New Zealand has the highest rates of (youth) suicide in the OECD…”

I put on the table today that the Trinidad and Tobago Government takes great effort in ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated specifically towards the young people of Trinidad and Tobago which include the children of Trinidad and Tobago; I hope Sen. Mark was not alluding to any parallel between Trinidad and Tobago and New Zealand insofar as the suicide rate with the young people in Trinidad and Tobago. I can guarantee you, under the People’s National Movement Government that suicide rate will certainly not go up at all.

So as I close, I just have one final quote that I would like to read, please. It is from the British Airways Highlife Magazine and it is written by Chris Leadbeater. He is speaking about his experience in Trinidad and Tobago and he speaks about when he first heard of Port of Spain he thought of romantic churches and all these lovely things about Spain. Then he goes on to say:

“Instead, as I stand at the waterfront where galleons once docked after the long voyage from Europe, I’m transfixed by the towers of the International Financial Center – twin banking colossi of impressive height. Behind, a crane pecks at another construction site...”

He continues:

“Trinidad is ambitious. Dreams of a future as a financial beast are ripe. New buildings are going up funded by an economy...The names on the map—Carapichaima, Point Fortin, Chatham...Manzanilla—talked of the mixed Amerindian, French, British and Spanish influences, a soupy past befitting an island that straddles the crossroads between the Caribbean and South America.”

This speaks to the beauty of our nation and it speaks to the beauty of our people and I want to implore those persons in this Chamber, particularly, who continue to bring this debate to vulgar, crude, obscene and obtuse levels, to please cease and desist, because you are setting a very poor example for the young people in this country. [Desk thumping]
I close with one final quote which I got from the one UNC site which was working, which is the “UNC Youth Arm Blog.” It is just one little sentence which says—and when somebody talked about madness, I was not sure if the “mad” meant angry or a different synonym. It just said:

“A wise man once said, ‘Power is not only the greatest aphrodisiac but, it is also the greatest intoxicant - even the smell of it can drive some men crazy!’”

Some men who probably want snap elections called—and women.

I commend this budget in the highest possible manner and I look forward to the people of Trinidad and Tobago continuing to flourish and thrive under the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Annette Nicholson-Alfred: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for my turn to say my piece on the 2009/2010 budget. I have been taught not to be a doubting Thomas but to give one or each one, in this case the Government, the opportunity to prove itself. As I go down we will test ourselves to see if that is being done or has been done.

Not being trained as an economist or a financial analyst probably makes me look at the budget more like a layman, that is, the way the masses would look at it. Having studied the budget statement my first question to the Government, through you, Mr. Vice-President, is: am I to believe that after so many years of plenty, this country having boasted of being the financial capital of the Caribbean, our money for yet another time has passed through us, like in the 1980s, as a dose of salts? And as a result, we are now expected to raise revenue by the hook or the crook, by any means possible, so the population is called upon to pay all sorts of taxes?

Those who will feel the weight of these taxes are the ordinary citizens: the poor and the working class; those who are just eking out their existence, while those who have will continue to have more. There must be some ways and means of retrieving some of the “blatant overpayments” to the multimillionaires who have benefited from cost overruns and “exorbitantly over-budgeted projects”. There must be some way to do this.

I want the Government to know that there needs to be a review of certain aspects of the budget of 2009/2010. There must be efforts to relieve the oppressed. The first item for such review is, as the Tobagonian is saying in strong voices, the property taxes, where homeowners are called upon to pay 80 to 1,000 per cent on their present taxes.
Almost everywhere you turn on the streets, in all the newspapers, the topic being discussed is the imposition of substantially higher property taxes on the population. It is not that I agree that the antiquated system of taxation should be maintained, no, no, where homeowners who presently pay $50 to $100 on a property valued at about $400,000 to $500,000. However, to ask that same homeowner to pay taxes of $1,500 to $1,800 in 2010 is onerous, too drastic and uncaring. [Desk thumping]

Those on fixed incomes, the retiree and the pensioner would be devastated by such increases. How about the single parent and the widow? Statistics say that more women outlive their men. They too would be shattered. This Government needs to be more sensitive to those on fixed or low incomes. Would consideration not be given to phasing in the new property tax bit by bit, rather than choking the poor homeowner?

Increase in house taxes results in increase of water rates as most of us know, for water rates are based on the annual taxable value of the house. Electricity has also been increased. The homeowner, I will say the wise one, will raise his or her house rent in order to retrieve from his subletters all the taxes that he has been asked to pay. Who gets hurt? The poor, the working-class.

We have a situation in Tobago—and you know that would be my key name; my key word would be Tobago; this is from where I draw my experiences—where over 70 per cent of the island's residents have no proper titles for their properties. We are calling for the—

Sen. Browne: Why is that so?

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: You would know because you promised to pay attention to that for us, and to clear it up since last year and years before. We are calling for the initiative long promised by the Government even up to last year, to regularize Tobago land ownership, removing the names of the dead and replacing them with those of the living. Before asking Tobagonians to pay these new property taxes, the Government should make its promise right. This matter is very urgent and according to a writer in the Tobago News of September 18, 2009, in Tobago there should be, "no taxation without title regularization".

In a place like Tobago where the cost of living is as much as 20 per cent higher than that in Trinidad, and food and building materials, et cetera, are so costly, my brother, Sen. Cummings on the other side who lives in Tobago now,
would understand that. It is so costly compared with Trinidad. How can the Government look in the eyes of the Tobagonian and suggest that they pay such taxes?

When the Government came up with its new property tax plan, was any study made on Tobago? I do not think so. We were as usual forgotten, brought in at the last minute. I want to say to the planners here that the suggested tax reform would wreak havoc on business in Tobago. Tobago is a tourist island and has been such for many years. So, imposing such taxes on Tobago when tourism is at its lowest would just crush the island's economy. Nearly every village in Tobago entered into the tourism agreement along with the Tobago House of Assembly, be it in the form of bed and breakfast plants, guest houses, guest homes, apartment rental, car rental, restaurants and even hotels.

As a result of the global financial crisis the tourist business is so bad that many of these apartment and guest house owners, et cetera, cannot even pay their basic bills, far less to maintain staff. How are they going to pay this new tax? How? Tourism in Tobago is seasonal and I want to explain. It is seasonal. December to April and July to August. How will these property values be calculated? In a falling market, property values have fallen by thirty per cent, how will these values be determined?

Given the wide discrepancy in size, type, location, services, room rates and accommodation levels offered at various times of the year, a very careful study should be made as to how the tourism sector should be assessed for taxation purposes. I remind you that nearly everybody in Tobago is into the tourism business. The hotels are old, most of them are in need of refurbishment, as many of the rooms are not marketable. Government's promises of room enhancement and small hotel incentives have not yet been delivered. How will these buildings be valued?

I was reminded by one of our elders that years ago people who owed years of back taxes which they could not pay went into default. That is a bad word in the ears of the Tobagonian. As a result of default, many of the poorer people lost their properties as the rich speculators were able to pay the taxes for the properties and buy them from the poor. Do we want to go down that road?

Senators: No!

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: No. "We don't". How does Tobago see itself re the new property tax? These are some of the comments and responses from the Tobagonians on the street, in the houses and even in the homes where the people are older and remember what happened long ago.
No new property tax until the whole tourist business in Tobago is sorted out. Because the island is tourism dependent, if property taxes are to be a part of the country's revenue source, these taxes should be phased in on a gradual basis. That came very reluctantly. For example, nothing in 2010; 1 per cent in 2011 and 2012; 2 per cent in 2013 and 2014; 3 per cent in 2015 and onwards, while in the meantime the Government puts things in place to collect the millions of unpaid dollars that are out there owing in taxes.

As tourism business is being taxed here and there, we are asked to pay much more money for food, building materials and even labour. The last old man said maybe, just maybe, now is the time to consider Tobago a tax free zone.

We move on. I move on to an area where I fear to tread. Mr. Minister of Trade and Industry, I can remember saying in this honourable Senate sometime last year, when your neighbour's bed is on fire wet yours. That quote was in relation to the crime situation in Tobago. Tobago had started to feature in murders, killings and other petty crimes. Did anyone hear me or did anyone listen to me when I made by plea? All we got were promises. That is why I like to give you a chance to prove yourself. That is what I am talking about. Look at Tobago today. Denise Plummer will say, "What is dis", twelve murders for the year. I am talking about Tobago and there are three months still left in the year. Four murders in two days? Four murders in two days in Tobago? I could not help but cry. Two houses burnt down in one week in Moriah, Tobago. Attempted murder on the Greenes, the British family, then their house ransacked two months later. I am looking for the man who promised me help. The Minister of National Security promised me help last year. I really thought that I was talking to him. Oh my goodness. Where is the Minister of National Security? Adam, playing Adam in the garden? No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. He would not do that to us.

This is the same Tobago where everyone came for relaxation and peace of mind. I am sure that you can vouch for that. The same Tobago where not long ago you left the door of your house open and went to the shop. You left your keys in your car and collected your newspaper at the corner stand. You left, or I should say, I would have left my clothes on the line outside to dry and my neighbour on seeing the rain approaching would take them off the line, fold them and leave them on my porch. That is the Tobago of which I speak. I believe if when we sought help, we got help, Tobago might still have been sweet Tobago paradise. Paradise itself.

The hon. Minister of National Security last year made a promise in this very Senate, that new police stations are going to be built in Tobago in Grange, Moriah,
Roxborough and refurbishment of the others. And may I tell you that to me, none of them because I have been visiting, not even the best of them is worth the while. I do not know how people operate there. I really do not. How the staff works there I do not know.

Then my police friends tell me that their strength is short by about 100 officers. Therefore, they have to work 48 hours, nowhere to even bathe. You run home "catch" a bath and come back. Working for 48 hours, extended long hours. How can they be expected to operate efficiently? How can they? And not to mention when there is an emergency, how can they function?

7.30 p.m.

We, in Tobago, want to be prepared and forearmed for any eventuality. We are not satisfied with the Commissioner of Police having to send up senior homicide officers to Tobago when certain crimes occur, as he had to do just last week. We need trained personnel in special fields on the spot on the island to react when something happens.

How much training is afforded our policemen in detecting and solving crime? The detection rate alone will tell you that it is very little. Is it a fact that training is for a select few, friends and families, and when they receive their training they go off to these special companies to work for big sums of money?

Mr. Minister, through you, Mr. Vice-President, what is being done to alleviate the shortage of staff in our nation's police stations? Can use be made of those alert, healthy and learned police officers who must retire at 55 years? Then, when matters go to the courts, it is the same story. There is a backlog because of the shortage of magistrates, judges, et cetera, so, by the time there is a matter to be dealt with, sometimes you forget how it went when you have to give evidence.

Matters are put off from time to time and the offenders have a field day because of weaknesses and loopholes in our system. I am asking the Government to give some more funding for the Judiciary, the department for which the Chief Justice has charge, so that we can have our Family Court attended to. For me, I do not know how you see it, priority must be given to crime in this country. It should be way up on the list; it should be very high up on the list. Priority must be given to crime.

Mr. Minister of National Security, or someone who will take the message to him, Tobago's house is now on fire, give us water to put out the fire. It is the Minister of Finance who, in her budget presentation, said that:
“The current level of lawlessness in our society is unacceptable. The Government will act to eliminate criminal activity at all levels.”

I sincerely hope that action will follow these words because the country is fed up of the rhetoric, especially where crime is concerned. We want to feel comfortable, at least where we live. We want to feel the presence of the offshore patrol vessels and the fast patrol craft, and in Tobago we want our version of the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT). We want one in Tobago, too.

Where is the community police unit, which, to me, did such a wonderful job in its short life? I am asking for a juvenile centre for our youth where they can be corrected in Tobago rather than be forced to live with hardened criminals who are already set in their ways.

There is a serious lapse of security at our sea ports, especially in Tobago, where vehicles come in and go out without being checked. Where are the sniffer dogs and scanners? How on earth can we achieve 2020 vision without ensuring a secure environment?

I have heard and read about maximum autonomy for Tobago. I hasten to let you know that many Tobagonians do not know what that means, so someone should explain what that means. I would like to ask the Government to put certain facilities in place until maximum autonomy comes to town. As it is now, there are a number of services that the Tobagonians must visit Trinidad to access. Remember, each visit to Trinidad carries a cost of about $600 to $800, sometimes $1,000. If you are coming with your granny to do a document, granny cannot walk, you have to hire a taxi from the airport. You go there, they say you have to go another place and you have to take another taxi. That is what we as Tobagonians have to undergo.

For those who might be in a position to help, please help. After all, this is one country. I am not going to continue with the other lines one behind the other. I am not going to say that another time. This is one country and residents are not supposed to suffer such inconveniences and hardships to take care of business. If we are coming to Trinidad for carnival or a show, that is for pleasure; we do not mind. But when it is business and you must come, it is hard; it is unfair.

When can we expect the following services in Tobago? “Who feels it, knows it.” Some Jamaican singer said that. Sometimes you are willing to pay to come and you cannot get a plane ticket because there are no seats; the boat is full so you cannot come, even if it is an emergency. You are stalled. How do you deal with that?
Town and Country Planning, Registrar General: I remember the Attorney General last year, I think, promised to look into it for me, Family Court, Industrial Court, service commission, Environmental Court, Forensic Science Department, prison service, Director of Public Prosecutions, a resident judge. There is something called “judge in chambers” that I have been hearing about all the time. There is no judge so sometimes they have to wait. Sometimes the judge does not appear for days. These are only some of the facilities lacking in Tobago, the sister isle, the one together with whom we all need to walk.

Lately, I have been hearing this slogan and I love it: “Eat what you grow and grow what you eat;” if only this country of Trinidad and Tobago could live it. If we could live it, how great would that be. Mr. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, while I would like to congratulate you for echoing the sentiment of the jingle, I urge you to strive to make it a reality. [Desk thumping] Let us not just utter the words, start the walk!

I look at mangoes strewn on the streets along the countryside, golden apples, guavas, plums, five fingers, you name them. We prefer to allow them to rot and to import red apples, strawberries, plums, peaches and so on. Fruits are left to rot when they can be used to make jams, jellies, preserves and wines, not only for home use, but for export.

Believe me or not, I never saw my mother buy orange juice in tins or grapefruit juice in tins. She used every fruit that was in season. She made plenty juices because she had eight children and had to find juice for us to drink. She made her juices; she also made her jams, jellies and preserves. If we were to do this in this country, do you think our import food bill would be as terrible as it is? No, it would not. I challenge the Government to employ strategies to ensure that we eat what we grow and grow what we eat. [Desk thumping]

I was at a meeting in an office in Scarborough and they brought a guava drink. I like guava, so I went down into the drink. I said: But where is the guava; I am only tasting the "va", where is the "gua"? [Laughter] The "gua" was missing. I did not want to ask the lady anything, so I spent some time looking around, and when I happened to see the container, it was made in South Africa, and she had some other juice made in Malaysia.

We have those fruits here; fruits that are full of nutrients. People would tell you about the guava; it is much more nutritious than any of the apples you buy. I try to force my granddaughter, and I am still fighting, to eat guavas instead of apples. If we were to embark on schemes like these, we should get some measure of success.
Sen. Joseph: I thank the hon. Senator for giving way, especially as it relates to the questions and promises made by this Minister and the Government with respect to the construction of police stations. Part of the challenge is that we are still to get access to the lands at Old Grange and Roxborough. I am sure that you are aware that we have had extensive discussions with the THA and that there are a number of matters still outstanding as they relate to the lands for Old Grange and Roxborough.

I heard you with respect to the shortage of police officers. That is pervasive to the entire system and we are looking at things to see how best to recruit additional persons to assist in that regard. I heard you. I have made note of all you have said.

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: There was a guy from Bethel I asked to make some furniture for me some time ago—a bed and a chair. Because of my knee problems, I wanted to sit on a high seat. He made promises from time to time, and I made a joke, really I just said it, “Take care you come and look at that shop and cannot go in there”. “You know he couldn’t go in there.” Take care you make a promise that you cannot keep and something happens to you.

Mr. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, I am pleading with you to keep your word so that nothing happens to you. I can tell you that I have witnessed the difference between the family that swears by eating local and the one that always went for imported stuff.

7.45 p.m.

One always had food in her refrigerator and the other one was always broke. That is a fact. One always had food, because even if it is lemonade she had that. One was always broke because she had no money to go out and buy. If we keep our little money-spending at home, we will always have something to spend.

Mr. Minister, have you ever thought about jacks in tomato sauce, instead of herrings in tomato sauce? “Look at how much jacks we catch in Tobago and I know that they catch them in Matelot, et cetera.” Those are measures that we can use to save our moneys; jacks in tomato sauce, instead of herrings in tomato sauce.

I am sure that your researchers and plant specialists could tell you of the benefits of the aloe vera plant. It grows all around here and you do not have to wet it. Not only is it good for making skin creams and medicines, it makes a very good wine. I do not know if you would have to pay any money on that; I do not think so. [Interruption] We have to pay on wine too? But, the money would stay here, because it is our wine. We could do that. The aloe vera plant strives in our climate. You find it all over the place.
In this country there are plants which grow without having to give them too much care and attention. The Heliconia family is your symbol; all those that we remember. They grow, they grow, they grow. What use have we been making of the plants that grow easily without spending money, care and attention? With respect to horticulture, people nowadays are not like long ago. Everybody wants to send a flower, a bouquet or an arrangement. We have them out there. Let us use them. I want to suggest that many of the ladies who go out there during the day could do these things at home, rather than going out there. Let us take advantage of nature and turn it into dollars and cents.

I am right at home now. There is a lot of talk about the rehabilitation of cocoa in this country. I might have told you that the schooling of Maurice and Margaret Nicholson's children depended so greatly on cocoa, that I can never forget the word. I became very emotional when the Minister was talking about the—not cocoa, we call it—chocolate tea. I am noticing that there is a lot of talk about it and I only hope that it is not only talk, because our 26 acres—I see them working hard on the land out there. I cannot help them much, but I encourage them to plant the cocoa, because I know the benefits to be derived. I am now trying to get my sons, I have three sons, to go into the planting of cocoa. They are shying away, but I am still going to work on them. I am trying to explain to them the worth of the cocoa.

However, in Tobago I have been told about birds which are wreaking havoc on the cocoa. There is one type of parrot and one of our national birds, the one called the Cocrico. This country has a problem on its hands if the Cocrico really turns out to be a pest. Which are we going to choose? I was reading the other day about changing your symbols—we would have to change that one. It is eating out our cocoa. It is a pest. It wakes me up in the morning, the Cocrico. [Laughter] It is not a joke. "What they say? Joke is joke, but", finish it. We will have to look at that. We will have to decide whether we want the Cocrico or whether we want the cocoa. [Laughter] The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources must move swiftly to deal with pests that would interfere with the rehabilitation of cocoa in this country, because if those birds are in Tobago they would soon be found down here. I remember the days when cocoa was king, and I believe he can become king again.

Mr. Vice-President, the Minister listed the number of things we can do with the cocoa, I would not recite them again. I listened to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, as he outlined grand plans for his Ministry in the fishing industry. However, I want to remind him that on building the facilities, you must always
remember the need for washrooms or bathrooms; whatever you want to call them. The men would be out there cutting up the fish and they would suddenly “get a call”, they would go and do whatever they have to do and then go right back to the fish! There are no facilities for them to cleanse themselves; not even to wash their hands. They would then go back to cut the fish to give me to take home. We need to look at that. Not in this day and age! We must have bathrooms around. We know where the fishing ports are, so we must set them up properly.

The country’s fishermen are under a lot of pressure. I see them on the television, so I am not only talking about those in Tobago, but those in Trinidad too. You would see them on the television from time to time, almost in tears. They need higher grounds on which they can leave their boats, because none of us knows when the weather is going to change and when the sea is going to get rough. Do you think it is easy to go down to where you left your boat, only to see pieces, or that someone runs to your home to say that your boat is under pressure? I have seen this. I grew up in Charlotteville. You would hear the shells and people would be running to save their boats. Sometimes, by the time they get there, there is no boat. Their boats need to be kept safe.

Also, there should be other types of security for boats and engines. You cannot take these things home every day. You might be able to take the engines, but you cannot take the boats home. There must be safe ports for saving these things. Piracy is high. Whether they are taking your boat to go down the island or to go to St. Vincent, for what God knows, or that they are just stealing it to sell, we need to help them to protect their property. In doing so, we are going to be helping poorer people, or the fishing people, with their livelihood and also securing food, which is fish, for the country.

I view agriculture as a viable alternative; one with great benefits for this country. Therefore, again, I urge the Government to put special emphasis on agriculture. Put it high on the priority list, because this country could only gain from such an investment.

Mr. Vice-President, do I dare close without responding to the list of gifts that the Minister of Finance has promised us in Tobago? You see, sometimes, when you say something and you make a mistake you have to be brave enough to take it back. I saw in the budget document, “the completion of the”, “the completion”, “the completion of”, I want to tell the Minister, I am sure she has not been to Tobago in a long while, because some of the completions she is talking about are not even off the ground. Do you remember when the Uff Commission came to Tobago and they asked: “Where is the building?” That was because there was nothing to be seen. You are telling me it will be completed in 2010. You cannot do that. The completion of the Scarborough Hospital in 2010? This is a hospital
that was promised since Dr. Williams came to Tobago in the early days when my mother used to walk behind him. That is one of the things he promised us. It was started about six years ago, Sir? [Interruption] Seven? Oh my goodness! Seven more months? Okay, I am happy for that. We are indeed happy because about a month ago a friend of mine, I taught her at school, took ill and before the helicopter could even lift off to bring her to Trinidad, she was dead. The days of bringing people to Trinidad on helicopter, when there are emergencies, cannot work. Therefore—[Interruption] I am very happy for the hospital to be finished. Just now, I would allow you. Let me finish. I would give you all the time, because I want you to put your money where your mouth is.

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. A. Nicholson-Alfred: They want to know what is happening. We are very happy to hear that the hospital would be ready in 2010. I would wait to see. It will be equipped; not only with equipment. What is concerning us in Tobago, there was a meeting—sometimes school friends are liming and they ask a number of questions. To ensure that our hospital does not begin acutely—[Interruption] I give way.

Sen. Narace: Thank you very much. Only, through you, Mr. Vice-President, last week Wednesday I was in Tobago. In fact, we visited the site and we are satisfied that we are bound to get a June finish. We met with the Secretary of Health, the Chief Secretary and the Chief Executive Officer and we are putting arrangements in place to start the commissioning. We are starting from now, so that we can commission that hospital in the shortest possible time, because constructing it and equipping it is one thing. We have made arrangements with respect to the medical personnel. Cabinet has approved 119 doctors and 450 nurses. We are putting an arrangement in place that would facilitate a dual operation, until we get the whole thing transferred and commissioned, then your hospital, long before the end of the year, would be constructed, equipped and commissioned.

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I want to ask though: Do we have personnel trained? Have we sent people? Do we have enough nurses? Do we have enough doctors? Do we have people specially
trained? Let me just ask the question: oncology, cardiology, and endoscopy? All these big names, they taught me them to ask here: urology. [Laughter] have we people trained in those areas? As I said before, we are not coming down in any helicopter again.

**Sen. Narace:** Thank you again. Not only are we looking to satisfy all those needs, not just that, we are starting a training programme with the ICT, because we have put the information technology equipment and we have rolled out all of the hardware. The hardware has been tendered and bought and is through all the institutions. The Tobago hospital would be properly equipped. We would be starting the training sessions. That is why we are starting from now, so when the hospital comes on stream, people would be trained and equipped and all that necessary specialist treatments, specialist personnel and specialist technology would be on track. That commissioning exercise—in fact Tobago will have the best hospital in the Caribbean. That would be rolled out to Point Fortin and Arima. We would use that experience, because we have not built a hospital for a long time.

8.00 p.m.

**Sen. A. Nicholas-Alfred:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Now, I suspect they are hearing you and looking at you. Let me just digress a little. I am not sure about that. Later, I am going to talk about that. I am going to take the message to them if they did not see or hear you.

Completion of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex: Mr. Vice-President, do you know that there is no place in Tobago for the staging of cultural activities? Now, you may not know, but persons who know me know that I am a cultural “peyoung” and if I tell you that there is nowhere for cultural shows, there is nowhere. I hope that the Minister is not fooling us. I hope she knows what she is saying.

In addition, I am now officially begging for our Academy of the Performing Arts. I sat here and a lot what was spoken about the Academy of the Performing Arts for North and South and nobody remembered Tobago. I am now asking for one in Tobago. You know that we are very rich in culture. In addition, when the tourists come we need somewhere to take them. We are asking for our Academy of the Performing Arts with a hotel, because we are the tourist place. [Desk thumping] When we were talking about it, they suggested that you ensure that who is going to be building it could do it well. [Interruption] Do you want to speak now? Are you not going to talk on that? Well, I am officially asking for the Tobago Academy of the Performing Arts. When you talk about performance, you
talk about us. We need ours too. At least, one could leave south and go to town or leave north and go to South—I told you already that it costs us $500—$600 to come here and then you have to spend the night in a hotel. Let us have ours now.

The completion of the Financial Complex and Buccoo Goat Race facilities are long overdue, but not yet in sight. Maybe if the Minister puts the money on it next year we can talk about that, but definitely not next year. I feel perhaps you should not put too many things down in the budget that you really cannot achieve, but put what you feel you can manage. Now, I used to work as a public servant and you would put in your estimates and so forth, but we must be more thoughtful when we are making our requests and expressions.

Extension of the Claude Noel Highway to Charlotteville: Mr. Vice-President, as a “Charlottevillian” who drives to and from Charlotteville very regularly, the news of a highway came as a surprise to many in Tobago. The Windward residents seem to be desirous of the realignment of the road. If you get rid of the banks and the extra corners, you are going to get into Charlotteville in less than an hour. So, let us not lay a path for the road carnage. Let us not set ourselves up for that. Just straighten the roads and we will be satisfied.

The completion of the new electricity generation plant in Tobago: In the Vision 2020 Operational Plan Progress Report, the Government claimed to have achieved 97 per cent electricity supply. Now, I suspect the missing 3 per cent is Tobago, and I am going to tell you why. [Desk thumping] I do not know if you are aware, that since last week Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and even this morning, I received a number of calls: “Girl, like we are not going to see you nor hear you because we have no current.” That is how it is going. We need better than that. Sen. Melville talked about what is happening at Cove, but something is not meshing. It is either Cove is not working or something on the other end is not working. We want to find out which one it is, because it is important to us.

Mr. Vice-President, I think I have tried my best to put my case, not only on behalf of Tobago, but on behalf of the country, but you cannot be vexed with me if I put Tobago in front. I have to come and talk for my island.

Now, I want to end by saying that these are crucial times, but I believe we can survive if we put our whole being into what we are doing. Do not fool people and do not try to do what you know you really cannot do. Do not tell us you can do it if you cannot do it. Put all your being behind it and a great part of the population is going to assist, because we love Trinidad and Tobago. We do not want to see
Trinidad and Tobago go down. In this that we are undergoing now, there is no room for “ol’ talk” or lip service, remember tough times do not last, but tough people do.

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

**Sen. Foster Cummings:** Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution to this budget debate. This is, indeed, my first contribution to a budget debate and it is also my first contribution in this honourable Senate. [Desk thumping] You will forgive me, lest my multiple indefinite visa to Tobago be withdrawn, that I add something on the point raised by Sen. Nicholson-Alfred in relation to the cost of goods in Tobago.

This PNM Government has purchased additional equipment—I speak of the *Warrior Spirit*, which is a dedicated cargo vessel operated by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago—to afford business people in Tobago the opportunity to transport goods to Tobago at a relatively cheap cost. In addition, there is the operation of the two fast ferries: *T&T Spirit* and the *T&T Express* which carry light vehicles and some small cargo. In many instances, it might be that the business people are not passing on these savings to the consumers, but the PNM Government has put the necessary equipment and infrastructure in place.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government, in its effort to facilitate the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago has identified five pillars upon which we intend to build. I am sure that these documents would have been circulated to all Senators so, therefore, it does not come as a surprise but I wonder sometimes whether Opposition Senators read these documents at all. In their contributions there is so much doom and gloom. I wonder sometimes if many of them live in this country. We all live in Trinidad and Tobago, and sometimes the stories and pictures painted on the other side, you would feel that we are living somewhere else. I wonder if they read these documents.

The five pillars are: Developing Innovative People; Nurturing a Caring Society; Enabling Competitive Business; Investing in Sound Infrastructure and the Environment; and Promoting Effective Government. I propose just to point to one or two of the successes of the PNM Government. My contribution is not going to be very long this evening.

With respect to the issue of tertiary education, Mr. Vice-President, I came from a very small village in rural Trinidad, a place called Indian Trail. Many of you may not even know where that village is, but it is in Central Trinidad in
[SEN. CUMMINGS] Couva. [ Interruption] You know where it is. It was part of your constituency when you were the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite. When I went to university, the village I came from, I think I may have been the third person from that village at the time who would have had the benefit of a tertiary education. Today, because of the policy of the PNM, in terms of tertiary education as of 2008, it was 39.4 per cent of students leaving secondary school that had access to some form of tertiary education and that is a success of the PNM Government. [Desk thumping] You can say what you want, but this Government has been spending the money of this country to develop the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

If I am to shift for a while to small business, we all remember when it was very difficult for entrepreneurs, small business people, to penetrate the system to get access and start up small businesses. It was very difficult. The failure rate was astronomical. Today, because of the policies of the PNM; because of the Government's Fair Share Programme for small business which has been increased in this budget from $1 million to $5 million contracts, small business people can now venture into areas of business where they could not have before. That has many spin-off benefits for the economy like creation of employment. It operates like a fertilizer for the small business industry.

NEDCO is another success story of this PNM Government. In this budget, first time applicants can now access up to $250,000 for business ventures, but not only that, NEDCO will also give developmental support and management advice. So, if you have a business idea and you do not know how to develop that idea into a project, you can go in and sit with an officer and they are going to counsel and advise you on how to put together the idea and after that you are going to get the money required to go into your business venture.

I want to spend two minutes on housing, because I think that the housing programme of this PNM administration is one of the most successful social interventions that has taken place in this country over the last few decades. [Desk thumping] When you come from a small rural community—[ Interruption]—the UNC did not do anything to improve their lives when they were in government—and a person can own a home for the first time which is something that for many would have been a dream before, it is the PNM Government using your tax dollars and the resources of this country to ensure that not the slums that somebody spoke about before, but properly planned developments are put in place for the benefit of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]
8.15 p.m.

I understand the anger because you see there are those who like to speak only of the negatives and then when they hear the positives, they would scoff at them, they cannot digest that, but this is Government, PNM style. [Desk thumping]

I think that the country, the citizens, many of them sit and listen to the contributions in this Senate and therefore, it is incumbent on those of us who have the opportunity to sit here, that when we speak, we are not only speaking to the persons in this Chamber, we are speaking to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So that your negatives must not only be spewed but you must have suggestions and what we do not get are any workable suggestions. You get criticisms, negatives and no viable suggestions coming from the Opposition Benches; none whatsoever.

Before I get really warmed up here this evening—[Laughter]—I want to say that one thing disappointed me. When I was reading it in the newspapers, I said it could not be true, this had to be something that certainly could not be true. When you travel and you go to foreign countries, you see people with a little Trinidad and Tobago flag positioned on their cars, no matter what ethnicity, or what class, or what race. You travel and you see little Trinidad and Tobago flag flying on cars, or hanging from doors, or something like that and you are happy to identify and to be patriotic.

So, when I read in the newspapers that the Opposition was meeting with a foreign organization, to practically “bad talk” Trinidad and Tobago, and say downgrade Trinidad and Tobago, I said shame. I said hang your heads in shame, because at the end of the day we are all citizens of this great land and we must be proud of this great land and not “bad talk” our country with foreigners. Hang your heads in shame! Hang your heads in shame! I say shame on you, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago say shame on you as well. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance; I want to congratulate the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, and I want to congratulate this Government, for a budget that will certainly do well for the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: I would just like to congratulate Sen. Foster Cummings on his maiden speech. [Desk thumping]
Adjournment

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Vice-President, it never ceases to amaze me what we are able to achieve if we simply put our minds to it. I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Friday, September 25, 2009, at 1.30 p.m.

The intention is to complete the debate on the budget. Time permitting, we may want to consider the debate on the Motions. The reason for that is, we have a number of pieces of legislation, one is the Commission of Enquiry Validation, but there is another that we must also do, which has to do with the Financial Task Force, for which there were some difficulties in creating the instruments, but which requires us to meet a particular time frame. We apologize for coming late but we have to do it.

I also wish to give the Opposition the opportunity to have Private Members' Day during the course of next week. So, it is really the intention to try and see, as fast as possible, how we can move forward on that particular agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Alfred: Mr. Vice-President, I just want to ask a question. I do not know of what you speak. What are we going to discuss? I did not hear what you said.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: I said that on Friday the intention is to finish this debate. There are Motions relative to the budget that we had hoped to do on Monday. Time permitting, I would like to start them and get as many speakers as possible, because we also have to do the Validation of the Commission of Enquiry legislation, which we want to do.

There is also a piece of legislation that is time sensitive, which is late, we have some difficulties with it. It has to do with the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, for which, if we do not pass it, the possibility of us being blacklisted is very real, and we are late on that but we want to move forward on that. By Friday, I would give you an up-to-date position on it, I just wanted to share with you some of the information.

Of course, I want to allow the Opposition to have Private Members' Day next week. I am just suggesting that there is plenty of work that we want to do in a very short space of time, and as time permits I may want to move forward on some of those matters. I just wanted to bring that to your attention.
Mr. Vice-President: Before we adjourn, on behalf of myself and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, we would like to wish all Senators and in fact, the country as a whole, a very enjoyable Republic Day tomorrow. Have a safe day and see you all on Friday.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.23 p.m.