SENATE
Thursday, October 20, 2011
The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS
[MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair]

PAPER LAID
Annual audited financial statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2007. [The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George)]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Presentation)

Sen. Dr. James Armstrong: Mr. President, I have the honour to lay on the Table the following reports as listed on the Order Paper in my name:

(Group II)
Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprise Limited
The first report of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group II) on the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited (PSAEL).

(Group II)
National Information Communication Technology Company Limited
The second report of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group II) on the National Information Communication Technology Company Limited (NICTCL)

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011
[Second Day]
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 19, 2011]: That the Bill be now read a second time.
Question again proposed.

Mr. President: Those who spoke: Hon. Winston Dookeran, MP, Minister of Finance, the mover of the Motion; Sen. Dr. Lester Henry; Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan; Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath; Sen. Basharat Ali; Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine; Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe; Sen. Helen Drayton; Sen. Terance Baynes, Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight was on her legs when we broke, she spoke for 33 minutes and she has 12 minutes of original speaking time left. [Desk thumping]
Sen. C. Baptiste-McKnight: I thank you, Mr. President. I was at the point of explaining the effects of GATE on our student population, and I was trying to show the effect that it would have on someone involved in the BSc nursing course, a four-year course which attracts most of its students from outside of Port of Spain, and when I say outside of Port of Spain, I mean Mayaro, Toco, Biche, Sangre Grande and points in the east and central.

Now, the recipient of GATE attending this course needs additional financial resources to meet the following expenses: transportation, which can vary from $30 a day to $60 a day. Then there are other compulsory fees— and COSTAATT is about the cheapest—that would run to about $600. Then there is the cost of essential books and I can tell you the individual book ranges from $375 to $995. So that essential books, that is, those that the student would necessarily need for the duration of the period of study and to carry through into her nursing career, would come to roughly $3,000 a year. There are a few books in the library but they are not in sufficient quantity to meet the demand and those that are there when they are accessed are often mutilated and therefore unserviceable. Now, in addition to this, in the student’s fourth semester they start practical and they are required to go into uniform. And would you believe that the uniform costs $45 a yard? The average slim student—and there are not too many of those—would need two and a half yards and pay to make it.

Now, I know the hon. Minister would say to me, “There is HELP.” But the student who tries to access HELP has to go to the bank, and one of the first things that the bank requires is a utility bill in the applicant’s name. Now, very few of them can surmount that hurdle, and those who do are faced with the amazed response of the banker when they ask for a $20,000 loan, because when you tally the expenses that they would need for one year without adding anything for living expenses, they need at least $20,000 a year.

Now, it is no surprise that the banker looks at the student, and thinks $20,000 for one year, they are going to need at least two more years. And this banker has no guarantee, one: that the person is going to successfully complete the course, and two: that upon successful completion if she is employed by Government her salary would allow her to repay the loan. So the question I am asking is who does HELP help? Not the people that we say we are putting GATE in place in order to take them out of intergenerational poverty.

So, that I am appealing to the Minister, that in addition to the measures that I see in the documentation; i.e, consideration of a book grant and peer tuition, that some consideration be given to having PTSC provide these students with a pass for transportation, because that would be a real contribution to their ability to pursue this course.
Now that is for those who can complete the course, who have the capacity to complete the course successfully. At the other end there is the problem of those who, driven by a passion for nursing and ambition, get into the course with the five CXC's but they are grade 3 and they are not obtained at one sitting, and find themselves by the end of the fourth semester, absolutely incapable of keeping up with the theory involved, because this is medical stuff that they are doing. This is chemistry at what would have been CAPE level, to which they have had no access before. Now the person fails the theory but has been judged very proficient at the practical, which means that there is some talent there, but under the current situation, if this person cannot get the resources to repeat, and therefore, cannot go on to third year, there is no alternative route to a nursing career.

Through you, Mr. President, I want to appeal to the Minister to consider dialoguing with the nursing fraternity and COSTAATT to introduce some measure that would be equivalent to say—I do not know what it is currently called, it used to be the State Enrolled Nurse in England, elsewhere it is called a licensed nurse, which is a step between the nurse’s aide and the registered nurse, and what we have now are nurse’s aides and registered nurses.

I think the value of something like that, is that the GATE investment is not lost, because a course that is more heavily practical with just enough theory to allow the person to function effectively provides the nursing service with a valuable resource. So that now that consideration is being given to have a nursing campus at El Dorado, could we with a view to improving the level of care for our citizens, as well as with an eye on—I think it is a stated goal of medical tourism—upgrade the whole nursing service, and you have your nurse’s aides, licensed nurses, registered nurses and at the top end you have your BSc nurses, who would be then involved in administration, as well as some hospital work. It is just an idea that I am throwing out in order to try and make the whole thing more coherent.

10.15 a.m.

Mr. President, I would like to, at this point, address a few questions in the realm of health—literally, questions—which I hope someone would be able to answer on behalf of the Minister of Health. I have got to state though, that looking at all the provisions for health in the documentation, given the fact that our Ministry of Health is now headed by an eminent medical practitioner, I was a little disappointed to see the traditional approach of more money for CDAP, more beds, et cetera. I really thought that we would have a departure from this and a greater emphasis on the preventive medicine.
So, I want to ask outright, $45 million more will be put for drugs; I know most of this is going to go to CDAP. But I am sure I am not the only person who has heard many complaints about the CDAP drugs not working. I ask: over the period, if it had not been done before, is there any attempt now to have batches of these drugs, when they come in, tested by government chemists and/or CARIRI to ensure that each batch contains, per dose, the required amount of active drug that is needed to deal with the condition? I say this because I am aware that on the BBC sometime ago, there was a shocking documentary about drugs being packaged with the labels saying one thing but the actual dose of the drug was a little less than what was required.

Mr. 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. B. Ali]

Sen. C. Baptiste-McKnight: I thank you, Mr. President, and I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to continue.

Now, non-communicable diseases in this country: if I am to be guided by the dictum of our various Ministers over the period, this would be approaching epidemic proportions. I just wonder, and this includes juvenile diabetes and obesity, and I ask: does the Ministry of Health have any role in, say, monitoring the quantum of sugar, salt and hydrogenated oils in the school meals? Because very often the breakfast and lunch that the children who get school meals are given, that is their source of nourishment for the day; so that if we do not pay attention to that intake, we are causing the problem.

And I go further. What measures are there in place to warn the general population of the dangers of these, in addition to MSG which is in every seasoning that you pick up in the grocery, and the excessive use of fast foods? I think we have got, at some stage, to make the population obviously aware that we are eating ourselves to death. And I ask: could the Minister of Health intervene, on behalf of a fair proportion of the population who would like to have access to virgin coconut oil, because this now is being touted as the best oil to use. We no longer produce enough coconuts with oil to be self-sufficient, Caricom does not produce it, but yet, we have a 40 per cent tariff on coconut oil. So I can go to the shops and buy hydrogenated oils that will kill me but I cannot find or when I do find virgin coconut oil in the health food shops, I cannot afford it. Something is wrong with that, Mr. President.
Just two more questions for the Minister of Health. Cataract surgery: what is the present status of the backlog on that? The Children’s Life Fund: now, I suspect that the Executive would be aware that with the introduction of the Children’s Life Fund, sources of funding for children in need of treatment overseas have dried up. What I want to know is, when one of the experts who decides that surgery or treatment cannot be done here, and is of no use to the child, rejects an application, is there any avenue for a review of this decision, because people out there whom this fund is meant to help, hurt on account of that?

Mr. President, let me move on swiftly to social development, and say simply that I am heartened to see that we are finally addressing the problem of children’s homes. It is a small start but I appreciate the fact that there is money set aside to design a model children’s home. In addition to that, after two years, from the information provided, it seems as though the Children’s Authority is about to take off. Congratulations! But I am a little concerned because there is provision for a needs assessment for a transitional home for persons leaving orphanages and children’s homes. Now that language is, for me, a little ambiguous.

I am not sure whether the assessment of the need for a home which would surprise me because there is absolutely none or the assessment is about the type of home because this is obviously going to be a model home; the start of something new. We cannot talk about being interested in our youth, et cetera, and the only government institution for youth, is the YTC for boys. I see they are going to build one for girls; enough said. I would like to ask that we be given a copy of the latest report on the Children’s Authority so that we can see how it is progressing.

Mr. President, I now move on to what has become a favourite hobby horse of mine, the Public Service Academy. I have spoken about that in every budget debate that I have participated in. Now, documentation this year tells us that the global competitiveness report ascribes our poor performance, *inter alia*, and I quote:

“Inefficient Government bureaucracy and poor work ethic.”

And yet, I see the same scant resources being allocated to the Public Service Academy. And this at a time when the most recent report of the Ministry of Public Administration, that is for the year 2009/2010, says that the academy, for that period offered a mere ten courses over 13 sessions—three of them, they did two courses—for 253 persons. Now, how do we plan to make a dent in improving the civil service when we are going to train 253 people a year? Are we serious? I guess I am expected to believe that the plan is to transform the public service into
appropriation bill, 2011  thursday, october 20, 2011
[sen. baptiste-mcknight]

an effective machinery that will implement the pillars of the development process. well, i have news for you. the pillars will crumble; the virtual superstructure will fall down and in the process annihilate the drivers. if this is how the public service academy is going to be treated, that is going to be the result.

now, i come to my favourite part of this little statement because it is really the only thing that i know anything about. this is the statement concerning the ministry of foreign affairs where, for the period 2012, the minister proposes a new mantra—small country, big impact.

mr. president, i am painfully aware of the fact that the current hon. minister was in one incarnation, an ambassador. so that i have come to the conclusion that he has arrived at this mantra on the basis of his past experience, and that it might even be a very eloquent evaluation of his own performance in that past incarnation. but i want to tell you that, personally, i accept this as a gratuitous insult, not only to his current staff but to my former colleagues.

i want to know whether the hon. minister recalls the quality of representation that we had as a country from people like sir ellis clarke, dr. patrick solomon, james o’neil lewis, dodridge alleyne, frank abdullah, eustace siegnoiret, wilfred naimool, annette des iles, reggie dumas, chris thomas. you notice that i am talking numbers; it is not one or two who are outstanding.

10:30 a.m.

in addition to that we had former foreign service officers at the level of fso iii and fso iv who were elected in their own right, and on the basis of their performance by their peers at the un, the oas, the acp, to chair prestigious committees. do i understand from this that the minister is saying that his current staff is not able to continue in that vein? no. i prefer to think that it is a matter of language, that what he really wants to say here is that they need to be trained to meet the new environment and with that i can agree, because i believe in continuous education and upgrading of standards.

i want to state here and now to advise him, that it might be worth his while to consider that in a day and age where we are operating in real-time communication, and what happens in trinidad and tobago at any level, especially if it hits the news, is travelling worldwide on the net, and i can assure you that there are persons who sit in offices with trinidad as part of their mandate who follow these things. so that he needs to advise his colleagues as our leaders, the leaders of the people of trinidad and tobago, to pay close attention to their pronouncements, to their posturing, because this can be more deleterious, and more compromising to the day-to-day diplomatic efforts of his emissaries abroad.
I could tell you that some of the things which are carried on the Web, if I were outside representing this country, I would have to duck, I would not know how to explain them to anybody, and this is not a matter of small country, big impact, it is a matter of unthinking leadership, disastrous impact—[Interuption]

**Mr. President:** Senator, could you wind up. Start winding up, you have reached—

**Sen. C. Baptiste-McKnight:** Very well. Oh yes, this is my last point. I would like to suggest that instead, the hon. Minister take the advice of my colleague, Sen. Ramkhelawan and think in terms of dealing with the ACS and the OAS, the Latin American countries to have some serious trade agreements, deal with the Ministry of Finance and have some double taxation arrangements, so that we can do positive things. I thank you, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of Planning and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. I must say that listening to the debate yesterday and this morning, the quality of the debate in this Senate was really taken to new heights by all Members, we had some really sterling contributions here. I do not want to mention names, but I think it would be reasonable to say that the hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs in making his contribution and in speaking of the issues of development strategy, within his own Ministry over the last year and going forward, gave us a good indication of how we might achieve some of the targets and objectives which we have set for that particular sector on which to place a lot of emphasis.

The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs also gave a sterling performance yesterday in which he really gave us some insight into what is happening in the energy sector.

And from Senators on the opposite side, we got criticisms which were—I would say criticisms based on the substance of the presentation which I think was important. From many Senators on the Independent Bench, we got an assessment of the Government in many ways as represented by the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance, indicating that the Government had indeed done well and had significantly contributed over the last year, notwithstanding the very difficult circumstances internally, regionally and internationally, but taking the view, of course, as Independent Senators that we could do better, that we could do more and that we could aspire to higher heights, so to speak. I have no problems with any of those positions, but I think it is important that hon. Senators, Mr. President, appreciate where the Government is coming from, and what we are seeking to do.
The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is very, very committed to this country and very, very committed to the people of this country, and we know that development really is esoteric, if it does not affect the lives of the ordinary citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] There are 1.3 million of us. We have come a long way; we are 49 years now as an independent nation and will soon be 50. We have come a long way and we have made progress, which is true, over the last 49 years. Given the world in which we live, the kind of leaps which you need to make, the kinds of strategies which you need to deploy, have to take into account both what has been achieved, what the deficiencies are in the system, and have to take into account as well where the world is going, and make the kinds of interventions which will allow us to connect with the trajectory of progress globally, so that we might rise as a country and all our people rise with us.

It is in that context, Mr. President, hon. Senators, I would like to pay tribute to the contribution of the hon. Minister of Finance not only in his presentation here, but in his stewardship over the last year and a half—[Desk thumping] and more than that in the articulation of the budget trajectory for the next year; a framework within which we will have to work as the moneys are allocated to the specific areas identified for progress and development.

Mr. President, international economic conditions at present vary considerably by region. Though global recovery is anticipated and awaited everywhere, the reality is that there is no general recovery in the world. Indeed, the situation has been virtually unpredictable with some advance economies anticipating slow growth, initially predicted to remain well below 3 per cent up to 2016, but with new predictions almost every day ever so often that recovery may well be slower, more difficult and likely to take longer.

On the other hand, some emerging and developing economies are growing at a faster pace with differences among regions depending on where you are. For instance, some countries in Central America—Sen. Ramkhelawan made mention of that—and in Africa are doing better than countries in other regions of the world. Growth in Europe, on the other hand, is expected to be slow, gradual and uneven as potential instability from fiscal crises and weaknesses in the banking sector were contained within the specific affected economies and, therefore, avoiding the contagion which everyone is afraid of. We know too that the US economy faces fundamental challenges.

Now, Trinidad and Tobago’s largest partners outside of Caricom are the United States of America, United Kingdom, Spain and Chile. All four of these countries are facing sluggish growth, and they are facing high unemployment and what that translates too, for us, is lower demands for Trinidad and Tobago’s exports.
Growth for Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole was expected to be just under 4 per cent in 2011 and 2012, and to fall just below 4 per cent in 2013—2016. For the Caribbean alone growth was projected at 4.5 per cent for 2012. Most persons are skeptical of these numbers now; whether these will be realized is another matter, because every day something can happen to affect the state of play. We must work with the world as it is even as we wish to change the world. In our own situation we have projected no higher than 2 per cent for 2012 in the medium term policy framework, but we have not ventured any projection beyond that.

While we take into account the unpredictability of the world around us, we have sought to address uncertainty by focusing on and emphasizing investments: public sector; private sector; public/private partnerships. Our strategy—far from being a spending strategy—for stimulating consumption in the economy is indeed a collaborative investment strategy to stimulate growth, to create jobs, as the hon. Minister of Finance said, and to breathe some buoyancy into the economy which went into decline, we must not forget, in 2009.

I want to address two issues which are very important to understand how the development strategy needs to be supported going forward, and that is the structure of the economy, the structure of the production system, and secondly, the structure of exports. Because it is from exports that we earn our foreign exchange, and it is from the way the economy is structured, that we are allowed to achieve the returns in foreign exchange, and it is true that the global environment is critical. It is true also the competitiveness capacity of our industry no matter how they are structured are also important. The fundamental considerations are: what do you produce and who is willing to buy it.

So let us for a moment take a look at the structure of our economy. Now, I will not go into any detail on this, because some of this is straightforward, but I do want to highlight the things which are important for consideration and also for public consideration in the sense of persons thinking about their daily lives every day must understand how we live from day to day; how we are able to afford this quality of life; why there are inequities in the society; why there are challenges that we must face and all of this relates to how we produce what we produce; how we structure what we produce; how competitive we are and who is willing to buy what we produce. The more you produce, the more you can sell to more countries. If your base is narrow, the more difficult it is to have buyers around the world, and we need to understand that this is basic to the whole process of Trinidad and Tobago going forward.
The petroleum sector of course is the main catalyst for GDP growth, and about 42 per cent has been the average contribution over the years 2007—2011. The services sector contributed and continues to contribute about 45 per cent to the GDP over the same period, 2007—2011. We know what energy is so I would not go into that, but in the services sector the major contributors are finance, insurance, real estate, distribution trades, restaurants, construction, quarrying, transport, storage and communication. Manufacturing over the period has contributed about 8 per cent, and Sen. Ramkhelawan talked about the consistency of that contribution in two ways: one that is a significant contribution to job creation and sustainability over time but that it has not significantly grown either, and he made the case for more manufacturing. But what constitute these industries, the manufacturing sector? We have the heavy industry and petrochemicals, we have food and beverage, which is a thriving sector, we have tobacco, we have what we call non-metallic minerals, and of course some assembly-type industries.

Agriculture both for domestic consumption and exports contributed only about half a percentage point to the GDP, but that has been targeted and is targeted as a growth sector, and therefore we will focus on that a little bit. The hon. Minister indicated what he was actually doing to make a difference in that sector. Now when you take into account that 37 per cent of the land of this country is in fact classified as agricultural land, and the contribution of agriculture to GDP is less than a half per cent, then it tells you what is possible if you begin to deploy. That is why the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs talks about land distribution. That is why he talks about the other things, why he talks about the ponds created on the landscape because you are really turning land into a productive asset rather than an idle asset.

So agriculture can grow and our target is a 3 per cent contribution to the GDP over the next three years. Land is being distributed, ponds are being created, greenhouses are being supported, investors are being invited for mega-farms and infrastructure is being improved. A range of incentives have been outlined to support this sector. But manufacturing can grow too. The manufacturing sector is now operating at about 64 per cent capacity; let us say 70 per cent. We would like to see manufacturing operating at full throttle, and we would like to see exports doubling over the next three years. We are committed to new downstream energy manufacturing—the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs talked about that—as well as expansion of existing plant and new manufacturing investments.
At this time new investments in this sector have been committed, and I want to indicate that. Others are being negotiated. A project on value chain strengthening has been initiated by the private sector itself, the manufacturing sector. Markets are being opened up through government negotiations, especially in the South American and Central American neighbourhood. The Minister of Trade and Industry and myself were in the Dominican Republic recently and one of those meetings there—the whole focus of the meeting was competitiveness. One of those meetings involved Caricom and the Central American Republics. And this is an area that can become an important regional neighbourhood, that is a zone of trade, investment and movement of skills, and therefore we have the opportunity to do things here both in the manufacturing and the services sector.

The services sector has the capacity to diversify investments and to grow through exports, and we are eager to see this happen. We know that a concerted thrust in ICT will make this possible and we are pursuing this both at the level of broadband expansion, and in terms of tangible investments in the ICT sector with vigour—and they are coming in, I want to assure you. The opportunity exists for increased oil production. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has spoken about this publicly and he spoke about it yesterday. There is opportunity too for increased gas production again being vigorously pursued. And of course, pursuing new oil finds as well as gas finds, as well as support for downstream industries, and some of these were mentioned by the hon. Minister of Finance in the budget presentation itself.

This is the economy we have built over the last 49 years, through a series of administrations starting with an administration for 30 years, from 1956—1986, and intermittently thereafter a number of administrations in-between. We have done well in relation to some countries but we can do a lot better, and when we see what others are able to do, we know that we can do more and we also know that we have to do more. We have benefited from this economy that we have built over 49 years and it has sustained us through booms and hard times so far. But this economy structured as it is, in the way that I indicated between energy, manufacturing, services and the limited role played by agriculture in the system, this economy is not going to sustain us in this world today. Because the world in which we live is a world of knowledge, it is technologically driven, it is research and innovation driven, it is innovation led, that is the world in which we live and this economy cannot sustain us in the long term.

So restructuring is necessary, but the idea is not to dismantle what we have but to work first with what we have to make what we have more productive, more competitive, stronger, and to stimulate more focused research and innovation in our companies and in our clusters of companies, and to make them strive. Not all will strive, not all will be able to compete; some of them will die. We are well
aware of that. So some “creative-destruction” to use the word of Joseph Schumpeter who is regarded as the father of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship thinking will take place, we know that, but you do not want to destroy it by intervention, you want to create the conditions in which they can survive as long as they can, as long as they can compete, and at the same time you create what the Minister of Finance likes to talk about, as the economic space for other things to develop and to emerge.

But some renewal within the existing industries and existing sectors will also take place as value chains and clusters are strengthened, and as new investments in carefully targeted sectors these things will help us to realize increased diversification and create opportunities for new clusters that will support expansion. So that the diversification process can be built on the existing structure to a limited extent, and the competitiveness capacity must be built in the industries and clusters that we have now even as we know that some will gain and some will lose. That is the nature of business. It is a global world.

So the first order of business, therefore, is to work with what we have and to make business better, stronger, more vibrant and to work in partnership with the private sector. Countries compete through the industries that they create and support, and government and private sector must work together. Beyond the existing order however, restructuring therefore requires us to focus on investments in new areas of business growth where export markets can pull us forward.

This is where the emphasis on diversification has to be more meaningful, because in this kind of investment, not in the existing sector but in new sectors, we have to be much more strategic, much more thoughtful, much more aligned to where a knowledge world and a technologically-driven world is taking us. This is where new export markets become critical in a situation where we have virtually saturated the Caricom market, and success for business now not only means productivity, competitiveness and strong performance, but innovation, business growth, market expansion and diversification.

This in return requires existing businesses and new ones to operate with a different mindset. Locally nurtured businesses must be “reborn again”, or if they cannot do that, as I said, they will face the possibility of extinction. They must be “reborn again” with a global mindset or they will face diminishing returns or possible extinction. New businesses, those new investments that we make, of the larger type must be now born global. They have to think in terms of a global market, they cannot think in terms of geography, that is to say, they must be created in the context of the global market, and small businesses on the other hand must strengthen cluster formation at home and within the regional framework.
Against this backdrop, therefore, of where we are in terms of the structure of the economy, and what we need to do in terms of the new investment strategy, I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, [Desk thumping] because his focus in the budget has been on action for transformation. I compliment him on the thrust of the budget, cogently delivered because Trinidad and Tobago’s economy is in dire need of transformation. Without transformation of the Trinidad and Tobago economy we will not be able to usher in the era of prosperity for all that we seek, and that we made a commitment to in our 2010 manifesto. I compliment also the hon. Minister of Finance, on what I consider a thoughtful budget which gave to many of our citizens, and, I want to emphasize, took very little from anyone.

The hon. Senator from Tobago, Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe, talked about the fact that I said that we had treated Tobago well. I do not remember saying that, I do remember saying that in terms of the distribution these were the main beneficiaries and I did mention Tobago in relation to that. I do not take the view that you have to treat this one well or treat that one well. I think you need to govern for the whole country, [Desk thumping] and you have to govern for all the citizens, and what you do is that you look to see where the strengths, the weaknesses, the deficiencies are; where people need to be given a step-up to move forward, where people need to be given a pathway to be able to move forward and upward. I think that is the way one needs to govern a country.

I think that if you allow a country to be dominated by special interest provision, I think that you are going to have a crisis, eventually, as indeed, we have seen many of the big countries fall into crisis precisely because of that. When special interests no matter what they are, become so powerful and the governance for the whole, and the connectivity of the fragments of the whole cannot cohere, you always have that challenge. And therefore, I want to say that Tobago is a major beneficiary. I said that there have been many, many beneficiaries and there have been absolutely no casualties in this budget.

11.00 a.m.

So Tobago is a major beneficiary. Tobago has 50,000 of our citizens who live there and I want to say that over $3 billion has been allocated to Tobago when you add up the numbers. This total works out closer to 6 per cent of the total expenditure, between 5 and 6 per cent. And I can give you what the numbers are just in ballpark terms for Tobago because I do not want the impression to be created at all that this Government is in any way looking at Tobago as if it were a smaller sister. Tobago is an equal partner in Trinidad and Tobago as a country.
[Desk thumping] and I want to say that for Tobago, $2.199 billion of which $1.861 million, that is to say, $1.8 billion will be utilized for recurrent expenditure $319 million will be used for capital expenditure, but in addition Tobago will receive $510 million under other various Heads of Expenditure.

So, if we are going to do the assessment, and I do not intend to spend any time on this, I just want to make the record clear that Tobago has been properly addressed for its development needs, but the nature of the game is you cannot ask for 100 and expect 100. The nature of the game is that if you govern for the whole country you take everybody into account in terms of what are the real priority needs of every entity. And all of these Ministers gathered in the Senate and the House of Representative as well, know that we could not possibly have met all the demands and all the things they wanted to do, good intentions as they were, it just was not possible.

But other people have benefited too and I want to say the differently-abled that have been singled out for special attention, as should be the case in any society that aspires to a higher purpose, and there are in this country about 100,000 such citizens.

The poor have been singled out, not only do the social support measures continue, but some have in fact been enhanced, and a 2 per cent reduction of poverty per year strategy signals our intention to reach for 1,500 households and 6,000 citizens to help them to step out of poverty, to step up to dignity and economic viability and totally out of poverty. [Desk thumping]

Unemployed youth are another target group for special attention. We have taken the view that we must not fail our youth, that state intervention is possible and desirable, and that youth renewal is a worthy goal as our young people pursue dreams of achievement and success in constructive environments.

Fifty-three thousand students are in tertiary institutions at this time; the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, I am sure, will speak to those issues. Unemployed youth exist across the system, there are challenges with the absorption of educated youth in this country, and there are challenges with those who have dropped out of the secondary school system, but we know that and we want to deal with that.

Three per cent of the unemployed—and the unemployed rate is 6.3 per cent at the end of 2010, and notwithstanding what has been said about the CSO, what happens as I explained in this honourable House is that, we are in Government for 18 months, I have been in this Ministry under whom the CSO falls, for just under
six months, and the CSO is what it is over a long period to time. Therefore, what we are trying to do is to address it, trying to correct it, and we have IDB funding to transform that institution, and we have the statistical support of the statistical institution in Sweden to help us to make that possible. And we will make the transformation, and we will ensure because the statistical basis for planning and for decision-making is very critical.

All of the Ministers in this Government understand that, and you can tell by the way the Ministers presented, the precision with which they focused on certain things. They know that at the end of the day it comes down to results, and you can only measure results if you have numbers, and you can only measure what you have achieved by knowing where you are, and those numbers are important. You cannot plan for a country unless you know the numbers of the people, unless you know the statistics about the state of the landscape, unless you know so many other things that are critical, the profile of individual families, the profile of the individual sectors of this society; it is important to do, and therefore, we are going to that.

We are talking here about 20,000 youths in that category of unemployed, approximately, and therefore, there are special strategies that have been outlined to deal with that particular issue.

Low income citizens have benefited, middle income citizens have benefited in terms of home ownership—both sectors; small business people, entrepreneurs and business generally. More entrepreneurial activity, promotion of a culture of innovation, all of these are essential to a sustainable success of a country as an economy and society, and they have been specifically targeted, because, Mr. President, hon. Senators, the State has become, in my view, too all-encompassing in its reach and dependency has become too pervasive in the society.

That is part of the restructuring that we have to do, a restructuring first of all of the mind and the mindset; a restructuring of the disposition, and a restructuring of the acceptability that responsible self-governance demands that we win our independence in the marketplace as far as that is possible, while the State takes its primary responsibility to ensure that those who fall are supported. But the idea must be that people use enterprise and initiative, use their skills, get education in order to support themselves in the society.

This will make a better society, the restructuring is not only about industry, the restructuring is about the mind-scape, the restructuring is about the way we think; the restructuring is about the extent to which we are prepared to choose independence and self-sufficient development rather than dependence, and those are very important things. [Desk thumping]
With the all-encompassing view of the State and the dependency that we have created in the society as part of the culture, we have been shooting ourselves in the foot, in both the society and the economy. We are suppressing the creativity, the drive and the ambition of our citizens. We are undermining our wealth-creating potential, and so we have opened the doors to farmers and agricultural producers.

We are creating incubation capacity for small business nurturing, we are establishing an innovation facility for ideas to become a reality in terms of commerce and business creation, and for the human imagination to thrive making an intervention in East Port of Spain that can bring creativity, entrepreneurship, heritage, arts and culture together in the context of a sustainable city, this is a different way of approaching business of development with people at the centre.

In the health sector the focus is on patients and patient care improvement as well as on health workers—I am sure that the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education will speak about the nurses and what is happening with doctors. More nurses are going to be trained, support facilities for further training of doctors will be established, infrastructure will be built and strengthened.

Pensioners from the public service and the teaching fraternity have been given a boost and the stock market is being opened up. Small and medium size businesses can use the opportunity to grow and citizens will have more opportunities to create multiple streams of income and to grow equity participation in the national economy. State-owned entities will be offered for wider ownership.

Is that not good for the country, that people will own things? That people will become more independent, that the economy will be one thriving opportunity for economic engagement and economic inclusiveness?

Which are the sectors that have been hit by the budget? Mr. President, hon. Members, not one. The answer is none. Which group of citizens have been hard hit by this budget? Who are the losers because of this budget? Nobody, not a single group. [Desk thumping]

What we have said to our citizens and what the Minister of Finance has made clear, because on his first page of his presentation—first few paragraphs of his presentation he said we are talking about accountability, responsibility and so on, okay.

What we have said to our citizens as a Government is take initiative, do an honest business, do not break the law, pay your taxes, do not commit crimes, do not flout or skirt the law, be a responsible citizen. [Desk thumping]
Indeed what the budget 2011/2012 has done is to ask our citizens to believe in our country, to believe in themselves and to contribute to it, to invest in it now to create a better future for all of us and especially the young.

We have also said we will create conditions for a fairer, more transparent, more participatory system, but we ask you to take your citizenship seriously, observe the law and be responsible and take accountability for your responsibilities seriously.

We are bringing a different spirit to the business of governance, a few may not like it, but I think the majority of citizens will welcome it. Mr. President, it is important to understand what we produce and how it helps to pay for the quality of life we enjoy, but it is equally important to understand which countries we sell to and how we earn our foreign exchange. In other words, we need to understand our structure of production, we need to understand what needs to be restructured in terms of the mindset and disposition, and therefore in terms of the transformation what is required for more entrepreneurial and innovative interventions, but we also need to understand the structure of exports because that is how we earn our way in the world.

Trinidad and Tobago exports a range of products to over 20 countries in the world. The basket of goods that we export consists of minerals, fuels, lubricants, chemicals and a range of other manufactured goods in which food and beverage feature prominently. The creative sector is also one that needs to be taken note of.

Carnival for instance is the largest and best known Caribbean festival worldwide although we have much to do to rival in the global, public imagination, Rio and New Orleans. Now in my view we have a more creative Carnival than these two. The others might be more structured, might be more organized, but ours is more creative but ours does not rival them in the mind-scape of the population that may come to Trinidad in order to visit us here, except for the diaspora and people connected with the diaspora, that is to say people who interface with the communities aboard.

Carnival generates high levels of returns to the country through visitor arrivals, expenditures, cultural exports, media and destination branding, because we have spawned about 20 Carnivals around the world, and the potential for growth in this sector, given the multicultural appeal that we have in a world hungry for diversity and authenticity and distinctiveness, is immense.

We have other things, Divali for instance, which we are soon to celebrate, and I do take this opportunity to wish the entire country Shubh Divali. Happy Divali. It is a wonderful festival of lights. It is something that has drawn the whole country together around these lighting deyas. It really is a wonderful festival.
Divali has huge possibilities, and when you go to the Divali Nagar, especially this year, you begin to see what the potential is in terms of that. Within the space of a week, it is not just the venue that is there, but it is all the multifarious activities and products that you can create around it.

But so does the Tobago Heritage Festival. Properly managed and well orchestrated that thing can be an immense tourist attraction. It can win a tremendous amount of creative, entrepreneurial endeavour to support it. Things, however, do not happen just so. They have to be led, they have to be managed; they have to be organized.

The UNCTAD Creative Economy Report, 2010 recommends that developing countries look to the creative economy as a feasible development option since hard evidence suggests that the creative industries constitute one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy and offers great potential for economic diversification. So there are possibilities and there is potential.

But what is our situation now? That is why we have expended so much time and energy over the expert panel for culture and the arts, and that is why we have taken their recommendation seriously and are going to make sure that some of these things come to reality.

Our three top export markets are the USA, Caricom and Spain. We also export a fair amount to Colombia and to the United Kingdom. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was indicating to you that some of the export potential of Latin America is now being exploited and because of arrangements in the marketplace having to do with energy, Asia is now becoming a factor in terms of our exports from Trinidad and Tobago to these countries.

Based on the 2010 numbers, these countries would constitute our five major markets: the USA, Caricom—I am treating Caricom as one country—Spain, Colombia and the United Kingdom.

What do we export to the USA? Well the normal: gas, natural and manufactured, petroleum products, organic and inorganic chemicals and steel. To Caricom we export gas and petroleum products, beverages, steel, cereal and cereal preparations and paper-based manufacturing products.

To Spain we sell gas-based products, steel, organic chemicals, metal ores, scrap and beverages. To Columbia, we export gas, natural and manufactured; petroleum and petroleum products; organic and inorganic chemicals and beverages. To the UK, we export gas, natural and manufactured; petroleum and petroleum products, organic chemicals and beverages.
You may wonder what I mean by chemicals. These would be the things that we know like ammonia, methanol, urea, et cetera. You begin to see immediately, as you look at the exports, that we have two problems. We have a narrow base of exports, mostly in the energy sector, which bring in 80 per cent of our foreign exchange; and, secondly, we have a narrow range of countries that are willing to buy the things that we export.

So what is our problem? We have to produce more goods and services and we have to get more countries than this narrow range of countries to begin to buy the things that we produce. That is the other challenge of restructuring. What we need to do is clear. We need more markets and we need to produce additional goods and services.

In this regard the Competitiveness and Innovation Council—

Mr. 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. F. Karim]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, hon. Minister, Fazal Karim, President and Senators. I have more than I can say in 15 minutes and I will try to speed through what I want to say.

I would like to say that the Competitiveness Council Economic Development Board has been given very specific mandates. If I were to summarize, I would say that the Competitiveness Council is driven to focus on making our industries more competitive, driving our exports and doubling them in the next few years. If I were to say what the Economic Development Board, that is to say the non-energy export, would do, I would say it is economic advice to the Government and the Ministry of Planning and the Economy to make diversification happen and some things are happening there. Pretty soon we will see some action in alternative energy—wind, solar, wave. We will begin to see some action in terms of trying to assess what is the potential of these things. They have very different mandates: one is competitiveness; the other one is diversification and investment, more than anything else.

I would not speak of anything in addition to that except to say that, besides what they are doing, one of the areas heavily being pursued is the IT sector. Pretty soon you will see investments in that sector. Commitments have been already
made and the kinds of investments that are taking place are investments that will propel the sector in such a way that we can create a cluster out of it because that is where we need to go with that kind of industry.

The other thing we need to understand as we address the question of restructuring is where we stand in terms of the world and the things that matter in the world to pursue the things that I am talking about, that is, to export more and to produce in a more diversified way; to get more investments in areas that tap the quality of our skills coming out of the system, which, by the way, is at the rate of 5,000 a year from the tertiary sector. These people need to be absorbed or, as Sen. Drayton indicated, we will lose all of them. There are magnets waiting to absorb them. We have to create the economy to address the throughput from the tertiary sector.

In terms of competitiveness, as has been mentioned here, we are 81 out of 142. In terms of technological readiness, we are doing pretty well in terms of Internet bandwidth and more will happen in terms of that. In terms of control of international distribution, we rank about 45 out of 120, for countries. In terms of availability of local supplies and suppliers, we rank about 55 in the world out of over 120 countries. However, Trinidad and Tobago requires support as the availability of latest technologies is low. What does that mean?

One of the factors that causes us to lag in competitiveness is not just low productivity issues. When I say low productivity, sometimes people in the labour movement get upset because they feel I am talking about workers. Productivity is more than just the workforce. So one of the elements is the extent to which the latest technologies that bring efficiencies and effectiveness to a system are being absorbed by the economy. We do some of that because we have many multinationals here; but in the local industries that export, we are lagging behind and we have to begin to address some of that.

Now I want to talk a little about innovation. The hon. Prime Minister, in the House of Representatives, made reference to the medium term framework and she outlined the vision, the mission, the seven pillars and the priorities. She also indicated that the economic move and emphasis of the Government is to drive the economy’s growth by innovative interventions and by innovation itself.

Innovation necessitates strong collaboration between the academic and business sectors, combined with high company spending on research and development. There are incentives for research and development that have not been used by the private sector and we have to find a way of partnering with them to begin the process of using them even as we introduce new things such as the innovation facility.
When innovation happens, it ensures that research is translated into marketable products, so the links are critical. The other thing is that the processes need to be reinforced by strong intellectual property protection. The Minister of Legal Affairs is very big on this, and focused on this.

The Government’s support of innovation is critical so that, through the procurement process, if you support innovative companies, then you reinforce the business of innovation. So you have the purchasing power on the one hand; you have the research on the other; you have the linkages and you have the industrial innovation and the human capital development out of the tertiary sector.

The extent of our success in innovation may be seen in the number of utility patents that we have been granted. From a regional standpoint—I did have the benefit of getting from one of the hon. Senators the UNESCO Science Report, 2010. Sen. Prof. Emeritus Ramkissoon shared this with me and I was very interested in what it had to say because it brought us up to date to about 2009, where we were in the system.

Of course, we have to be much more current because we need to know what is happening on a timely basis. From a regional standpoint, Trinidad and Tobago has obtained the most utility patents. We also have, in relation to the rest of the region, a fairly high number of scientists and engineers locally.

Taking all this into account, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has highlighted this aspect of our innovativeness as a great competitive advantage both regionally and internationally. This means that we do have the capacity to build; not just competitiveness, but innovative capacity. What is missing are the connectors and that is why designing a system which begins to connect the dots in the system becomes so critical.

That needs to be done, not by Government alone, but by all the stakeholders in the system. One of the connectors in all this is not just the research institutions, but an institution like CARIRI, which has the ability to take research, work with industry and apply it. We will see how this will go in the near future.

What about competitiveness? Competitiveness can be defined as a set of institutions, policies and other factors that determine the level of productivity in the country and, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the level of productivity in turn is the fundamental driver of the growth rates of a country. So the more productive, the more innovative an economy, the faster it is likely to grow over time and this gets us into our medium-term framework, Innovation for Lasting Prosperity and that is why we have taken that kind of approach. This articulates a vision, a mission, seven interconnected pillars, five priorities as we move forward for the rest of 2011 until 2014.
What is the vision? The vision is that through creativity, innovation and collaboration, we shall prosper together. So it is a collaborative, creative—

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senator, you have another five minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** So, I will put aside my papers, Mr. President. Sen. Hinds, I suppose, might be affected by the fact that in my contribution I do not have too many jokes: I am not a good joker. In my contribution, you might say that I do not take too many political potshots because I think, quite frankly, that many times that is a waste of energy. [Crosstalk]

11.30 a.m.

What I do think are important are ideas, clarity and action and, more than that, I think the unity of purpose, the harmony that you can bring to a country in order to get things done is a very important thing.

What I wish to say in closing, hon. Senators, is that the Government’s vision for this country is very clear, and we have articulated it in the medium term framework. The budgeted plan for the year is very clear, and that has been articulated by the hon. Minister of Finance. If you look at the back of this document, the *Medium Term Framework*, you will see that every single Ministry—from the Prime Minister’s Office across the board—has identified its priorities for the medium term. So every Ministry is clear.

Where we are headed after the medium term is that we are going to take an integrated approach to, first of all, achieving the individual priority items of the individual Ministries driven by the Ministers, but also a clustered approach in Ministries that have to deliver around the seven pillars. So it would be individual Ministries as well as the clusters of Ministries having to do things. So that if there is a factor in the Ministry of Health that has to support something in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, but an economic factor as well by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, these things will be brought together to achieve the seven pillars that we have identified from human development to the role of foreign relations in terms of our development strategy, and there is where we are heading as we leave the budget debate.

The next thing that is important is that we have designed an outcomes framework, a results-based framework for this medium term that is built around the seven pillars, and that has been done with the help and support of my very, very, able public service colleagues in the Ministry of Planning, and the Economy. [Desk thumping]
You know, Minister Bharath said it well when he was talking that, as Ministers, we come here and speak in Parliament, and the television takes note of it or the press may take note of it and they may write something, and we get our picture in the papers, but the real support that is there comes from the public service that, in my view, is professional, that is thorough and goes beyond the call of duty.

I remember when we were doing this many people in the last week of the preparation had very sleepless nights, because they were all hours of the night operating to do things, and once they got it and we had to package them and so on, together with what was being done in the Ministry of Finance, they were all there. If it took 24 hours, that is what they took, they made themselves available, and I do want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the public servants in the Ministry of Planning and the Economy. [Desk thumping] More than that, with respect to the medium term framework, the contributions have been made by all the Ministers and all the Ministries, and I want to thank them for their contribution as well in making this possible.

I would say that, as we go forward, the ingredient that we have to get together is government and public service together as government; government business sector, labour and civil society working together behind a national agenda to achieve results. Thank you very much, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Before Sen. Deyalsingh starts his contribution, I just want to let you know that in terms of planning the day, I was proposing to take a break at 12.30 p.m. or after the last speaker finishes, I should say. We would resume at 1.30 p.m. is the plan. We would see how it goes. Sen. Deyalsingh.

Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Today I make a double debut of sorts. I make my debut in this Chamber for the first time, and also my debut as a first-time contributor to a national budget debate. [Desk thumping] Before I do so, Mr. President, it would be remiss of me if I did not offer my heartiest congratulations to, not only the Hindu society, but the wider society in saying Shubh Divali. Divali is now owned, not only by Hindus, but rather by all of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, before I go on to the meat of my debate, I would also like to offer congratulations to the staff for the move, but I do have one little request and, through you, I would like to suggest that portrait of Mr. Leo Des Vignes that hangs on the western wall of the Chamber be brought to this Chamber so we could remember always what we stand for and what we overcame on July 27, 1990.
Mr. President, I had no intention of dealing with matters of health in my debate, but I was encouraged to do so out of a contribution by Independent Senator, Corrine Baptiste-McKnight, and that has to do with CDAP. Mr. President, when CDAP was first launched some years ago, many of those in Government now cried shame on us for the bringing of generic pharmaceuticals to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You had UNC operatives even saying that these drugs were going to kill people. Mr. President, to date, as far as I know, no one has died, and if those drugs were so dangerous, why after one and a half years in office they have not removed those dangerous drugs from CDAP? Mr. President, my contribution on this matter—I think I am well qualified to talk on CDAP, given my professional training—is to explain to the national community some of the confusion that surrounds the use of generic drugs as you would find in CDAP.

Mr. President, you might be aware of something called the “placebo effect” meaning I can give you something, tell you it will work, and it may work on you, whereas the product has no active ingredient. The use of generics, Mr. President, especially amongst—and I do not want to be dismissive or insulting to anyone here, but the vast majority of users of CDAP, the vast majority of CDAP medications may not be as au courant with medicines and compliance as we would like. What I have found, because I studied the field and I did research on it, was that when you give people CDAP medication today, and the tablet is pink and then you get the same drug tomorrow and the coating is blue, those patients now feel, “Well you are trying to poison meh; the drug eh working”. There has been no empirical evidence to date—I am defending today, not the PNM’s policy on CDAP, I am defending my profession of pharmacy of which I am a proud member. Many people who claim that CDAP drugs do not work make that claim, because today they get one batch which is blue, and tomorrow they get one batch which is yellow. They feel that they are being poisoned. They feel “My neighbour has the blue one and I have the yellow one, wha going on here?” It is just a coating.

What is important with the use of CDAP drugs is something called bioavailability, whether the active ingredient in the generic version closely approximates that of the brand name. I think the sooner we stop playing politics with CDAP the better. [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. President for that. [Desk thumping] If CDAP was so bad and was killing so many people then stop it. Simple! Stop it! Stop it!

Mr. President, let me make a few introductory remarks to my good friend, Sen. Dr. Tewarie’s contribution, where he spoke about restructuring the dependency syndrome. When we started CEPEP, we were accused of slavery, dependency; this Government has doubled CEPEP to 10,000. Where is the rationale in that? I ask.
Mr. President, I go on now to my substantive contribution on the budget. Mr. President, in making my contribution, I have said before when we were in the old Chamber, that every time you pelt a stone across on my side and you blind me, and I throw back a boulder and hit you in the groin, all we end up with is one half of people blind and the other half of people holding their groin and nothing gets done.

I was hoping that the Minister of Finance, whom I have the deepest respect for, as a Minister of Finance, who represents us internationally, would have been more sober in his language from budget to budget. I go to his 2010 budget presentation where he says “an early transition from a discredited conduct of politics to a new pathway of good governance and inclusive development.” Is this the same Minister of Finance who sits in a Cabinet, where one of his Cabinet colleagues calls for the firing of PNM people? I ask. When his colleague does not fire the PNM people, she is no longer in her substantive Ministry. I just ask.

The Minister in his last year’s budget spoke about pie in the sky projects. The Prime Minister on a whim and fancy talked about an airport in Couva. Have funds been allocated in this year’s budget for an airport in Couva when we have an airport which is already underutilized? Is that a pie in the sky project?

In this year’s budget presentation, he talks about, at that time as we stood on the cliff looking down and looking up, we are going to fix the economic foundation. Mr. President, these are words from my Minister of Finance, and when he speaks internationally, people pay attention. Why is this constant bad-mouthing of this land we pledge allegiance to? During my budget contribution I will show exactly what foundation he inherited.

Mr. President, I would like to see the hon. Minister of Finance, whom I have the greatest regard for, also Sen. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, Sen. Fazal Karim, the hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, and the hon. Minister of National Security. They are gentlemen. What I noticed with the hon. Minister of Finance, he is suffering from a disease called “UNCification” where good men, honourable men, when they become “UNCCified” all logic flies away. The disease has not yet caught on to Sen. Dr. Tewarie or Sen. Bharath, and I would show you why, Mr. President. [Interruption] The hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs has seen the light and he is changing his ways. I must congratulate him on that. [Desk thumping]

If we are to restore confidence and credibility to our discussions, I would like to know how a Minister of Finance could predict a growth rate of 2.5 per cent and then 12 months later come back and say we have a shrinkage down to 1.7 per cent, and that is the official figure as we know it, the real figure could be even less than 1.7
per cent. To illustrate my point, I draw attention to these two draft estimates; 2011 and 2012. I go to 2011, the blue book: value added tax on page 4, 2009; actual, $5.1 billion. So in 2009 we collected $5.1 billion; 2010 estimate, $6.7 billion; 2010 revised estimates, $5.8 billion. This is when they took over the reins of power. So you see what happened to VAT collections; they declined. He estimated for 2011, $6.4 billion. On what basis is the hon. Minister of Finance—on what macroeconomic indicators is he basing a 2011 estimate of $6.4 billion?

11.45 a.m.

Mr. President, I now go to draft estimates for 2012. In 2010, the actual was $6 billion, which was an 18 per cent increase over 2009. So from 2009, the policies of the last administration went over into 2010, VAT collections went up 18 per cent. After the first year of this Government, the 2011 estimates are $6.4 billion. Do you know what the actual was, the revised estimate? It was $4.6 billion, a 28 per cent decline. But this Minister of Finance, who is good at numbers, after a 28 per cent decline, for 2012 his estimate is $6.5 billion. He is seeing a 41 per cent increase in VAT collection for 2012 over the 2011 estimates. I ask you, Mr. President, on what basis are these rosy figures predicated?

Not only that, the VAT ceiling has also been increased. So businesses that were formerly under the VAT regime are now not under that regime. I would like to know, I would like a clear answer from the Minister of Finance to tell me and this country, on what basis is he seeing a VAT collection for 2012 of $6.5 billion, given the trend, after one and half years of his stewardship?

Mr. President, over the years when looking at budget debates and looking at the run up to budgets, I have always heard members of the population, NGOs, special interest groups, talk about what goodies they could expect in a budget. I am not one of those who believe a budget is about goodies, and I am sure hon. Sen. Dr. Tewarie and Sen. Bharath would agree with me. We in Trinidad and Tobago as citizens have got too spoilt about looking at a budget for goodies. A budget is not about goodies. A budget is about showing us a clear path of where we are going, what worked last year, what did not work this year. That is why I am always surprised at how hon. Minister Dookeran says things, because he talked about this cliff. But I want to go to Minister Tewarie’s Medium Term Policy Framework to illustrate to Minister Dookeran what he inherited.

I go to page 5, if you would permit me, “Introduction”:

“Trinidad and Tobago has benefited from a range of initiatives in the past, but it is now embarking on an entirely new phase of development.”
I am sure that Minister Tewarie means the range of initiatives in the past are prior to May 25, 2010. [Interrupt] Thank you. I go to page 58 of that same report. Sen. Dr. Tewarie has not yet been “UNCified”:

“In recent times Trinidad and Tobago has weathered the global economic crisis well relative to other Caribbean and small developing countries, and macroeconomic conditions are now stable with real GDP growth.”

I am sure in weathering, it had to do with some initiatives of the past administration. The world was not created on May 25, 2010.

When this Government took over, there was $11 billion in cash balances at the Central Bank. There was $20 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, undeniable facts that would hold to scrutiny. Where was the cliff that Minister Dookeran saw that frightened people, that paints us internationally as some banana republic? Is that the sobriety that we want in a Minister of Finance, that type of sobriety? And not to forget that we supported the 2010/2011 budget. We supported it.

This goes to show that the foundation was not as cracked as the hon. Minister of Finance would have us believe. So it is incumbent upon this Minister of Finance to try and restore some faith and confidence in me personally. I like the man. He is a decent man, an honourable man. He withstood bullets on July 27, 1990, I would admire him for that always. I would have thought that experience in 1990 would have brought a sense of patriotism, where he would not continue to paint Trinidad and Tobago as this economic basket case. It was never a basket case. It was not a basket case on May 24, 2010; it is not a basket case now, please.

So we turn to the figures again. The last budget was predicated on an oil price of $65 per barrel and $2.75 for gas. The average for the last year was $95. Prices fluctuated between $80 and over $100, and the average gas price for last year was about $3. This year it was predicated on $75 oil and $2.75 for gas. Let me throw something out for the national community to consider. Last year’s actual prices were higher than the budgeted prices. Given our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, we are supposed to deposit some money into that, and they did. They deposited TT $2.3 billion, I believe, but some spokespersons tried to make it look like US $2.3 billion. We quickly put paid to that.

This is good, but with this figure now, at a higher oil price of $75—and the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs on a post-budget programme said that our economy is 60 per cent oil and 40 per cent gas. So a price of $75 per barrel of oil means that if this holds true, there would be less money to put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and more money to spend. I just threw that out for the national community to look at.
Mr. President, I now turn to the issue of deficit budget financing. When the PNM had started for the first time a few years ago to look at budget deficit financing, and we started the first of three consecutive years recently, the then Opposition had everything negative to say about deficit financing. Now they see no problem with it. Let me illustrate the difference between their method of deficit financing and ours.

When oil prices and gas prices were buoyant and revenues were more than expenditure, we would deposit excess money into our current account in the Central Bank. For the first year of deficit financing recently—we are now into the third year—we did not borrow for that, we used the reserves built up in the Central Bank—fact. The second year, when this Government is in power, they again engage in deficit financing. Again, they used the reserves in the Central Bank which they found. Let us remember they were saying in their election campaign that the Treasury was empty. They were able to engage in deficit financing for their first budget because of Central Bank deposits. Central Bank is the banker to the Government.

So we as a country budget to earn $10, we get $15, we put the difference in the Central Bank, so we could draw down on that extra $5. That is what we did in our first year of deficit spending budget. They were able to use those same saved up funds that we put in there and engage in deficit budget financing, but this year is a crucial difference. It is deficit budget financing, but this time by borrowing, not using up reserves that were built up by the last administration. That is a crucial philosophical difference between that type of budget financing and this type of deficit financing. For the first time in three years, our deficit is to be funded not by saving up money, but by borrowing money.

That deficit of $7.6 billion is to be financed 52.7 per cent on the domestic markets, so we are going to borrow approximately $4 billion domestically, 47.3 per cent on the external markets, so we are now incurring $3.6 billion in foreign debt. We did not incur foreign debt for the last two years of deficit financing. So if you boil it down to the man in the street, for the first time he has to go and borrow money from the bank to fund his expenses and incur debts, as opposed to using his savings. That is the crucial difference between last year’s deficit budget, the year before and this one.

The question to be asked with deficit financing—and the hon. Minister of Finance is not here—is how sustainable is this level of debt financing? How is it to be repaid? Has he considered all the attendant risks: currency risks, political risks? What is this deficit to be used for? So we are borrowing money, but what
are we going to use this borrowed money for? We are incurring all this national
debt, but what are we using it for? Is it to be used for productive purposes? Is it to
be used for the Point Fortin Highway?—which was only opened to take the
Reshmi Rammarine affair off the front news?

We are borrowing at the same time when we are going to divest some state
corporations. Now let me say up front, philosophically, we have no problem with
the divestment of First Citizens Bank, the further divestment of Plipdeco,
Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank, Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance
Company. As hon. Minister Dr. Tewarie said, it puts some wealth in the hands of
people. Philosophically, we have no problem with that. However, and this is not
being political, this is just being realistic, any time we go to the market to float
these things, we are subject to factors beyond our control. How does the market
behave? I think we have to be careful, and just sound a word of caution, in that, if
the market does not respond favourably to these IPOs, initial public offerings, or
the further selling of shares in Plipdeco to the public, what happens to the credit
ratings and the ratings of those organizations whose shares are not taken up? It is
a real market risk which any government of the day would have to face, not only
this one. Just a word of caution.

Another word of caution in offering these shares to the public is the issue of
pricing. I do not expect in a budget debate for the Minister to go into pricing, that
is much more detailed. I look forward to his further explanations on how these
shares are to be priced, so they could encourage widespread participation by the
man in the street, because I would hate to see these shares concentrated in the
hands of a few.

My question on deficit financing to the hon. Minister is this, and I hope
somebody takes note: is this method of deficit spending sustainable, in light of
selling off these assets, where wealth is moved from one to another? I bring up
this issue of deficit budget financing in light of a recent IMF report warning to all
Caricom, all Caribbean countries, all small economies, to be careful with deficit
budget financing. It is a general warning which the IMF has put out. I do not think
we are close to that as yet, but it is a warning that we should be careful. How
many more years of deficit budget financing can we accommodate? Mr.
President, I move on to the issue of energy. [Interruption]

**Sen. Dr. Tewarie:** Will the hon. Senator give way? If you look at the deficit,
you will see that it is almost equal to the amount that was allocated for the PSIP,
and 75 per cent of the PSIP allocations are focused on construction or construction
related projects.
The second thing, just quickly, is that we have the capability of using savings to finance the deficit. The Minister has simply indicated very clearly to the population that he is taking the option; he is making the choice of going for borrowings to finance the deficit.

12.00 noon

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** I thank the Minister. If we go back to the PSIP, if these funds are to be used for Public Sector Investment Programmes, we saw last year where they could not even spend the money allocated for PSIP. [Desk thumping] And do you know what the cry was then?—because I have the clippings at home. They said that the PNM public servants were stymieing their efforts to spend money. That is what some of your Government spokespersons said. [Interuption] Not you, some of your colleagues, and I have the clippings at home. I will bring them for you tomorrow. Some of your ministerial colleagues said the reason PSIP funds could not be spent and fall down the chain was that you had senior PNM public servants sabotaging the process. And I will bring the clippings for you, hon. Minister. [Interuption] Not you, Sir. I call you, honourable, and I mean it. Anyhow, let me go on. That is what I say, when you have the “UNCfication” of good people, it leads to bad results.

**Sen. Hinds:** Ooh! “Well putted, well putted.” [Desk thumping]

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** And I hope hon. Minister Tewarie does not fall prey to that disease.

**Sen. Hinds:** He already has.

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** No, no, no. He is much too honourable for that.

**Sen. Dr. Tewarie:** I am happy to be part of the People’s Partnership in which the UNC is a major partner.

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** Mr. President, there is no such political entity as a People’s Partnership. I could take anybody down to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. There is no political party called the People’s Partnership. On the ballot papers in 2010 there was no party symbol for People’s Partnership. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Hinds:** Oh God, man; facts!

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** People’s Partnership is a figment of the imagination. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Hinds:** Yeah!
Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Could I proceed undisturbed, Mr. President?

Hon. Senator: “Is your people who disturb you.” [Laughter]

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. President. I now turn, with your permission and my colleague’s permission, to energy. For the first time in recent memory in a budget debate in a Lower House a sitting Minister of Energy did not make a contribution. Is that not staggering? This country, whose GDP is largely based on energy, you have a budget being debated in the Lower House and a sitting Minister of Energy does not condescend to go to the superior House, in my view, which is the Lower House—because they are elected; that is the voice of the people; that is the superior House—to make a contribution. Staggering!

He needs to contribute and talk to the people’s representatives in the House of Representatives. [Desk thumping] We are merely political appointees. We represent nobody. Nobody voted for us. He needs to go down there. This country was built on our national resources, whether it is the land with agriculture or oil and gas. The PNM did not put the oil and gas there. No, we did not, but we had the brains and foresight for Point Lisas, to monetize gas.

Sen. Hinds: In the face of opposition.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: In the face of their forefathers. I do not hold them personally responsible, but their political forefathers crucified Dr. Williams, Mr. George Chambers and Mr. Patrick Manning for their energy policies. [Desk thumping] Crucified them!

The PNM has always had a vision to follow through and develop and monetize our energy resources. We did not put it there; we admit that, but we know how to use it. So our fortunes are still largely tied to energy, whether it is gas or oil, and in developing our energy sector, we can never forget economic diversification which I will come to, and the unfortunate emasculation of the Tamana e TecK Park, because that says we had no policy for diversification. But that was what Tamana e TecK was supposed to have been, and I will speak to that in some detail a little later on.

Our current scenario with energy is one of low oil production, and a lukewarm response to bid rounds. We offered 11; three were taken up. We had to go cap in hand begging one to come and revisit, and many of the reasons for the non-take-up of those bid rounds has to do with our damaged international reputation stemming from cancellation of contracts, like for OPVs, even though the Medium Term Policy Framework now speaks about two long range vessels. Our very close and unfortunate connection to world football has not served us well; the deferring...
of the AUM 2 complex; the deferring of the Essar Steel Project. Trinidad and Tobago has never had a reputation of reneging on energy deals from government to government, and for that I praise the NAR, past UNC and PNM. The policies have always remained constant. Each new government has always honoured the energy commitments of the previous one until 2010, and we continue to pay a heavy price for that.

What is the solution? Because, as I said, Trinidad and Tobago was never known to be flip-flopping on energy. We have a decline in gas reserves. The Ryder Scott Report points to nine years. Even if in the near future you may have some migration of probable and possible to proven, that is not good enough. The contracts for many of those significant downstream producers which were negotiated under the past administration, many of those gas contracts which benefit all of us—because the income we get from these petrochemical industries goes towards paying wages and salaries, building little things to hospitals, in the marketplace; we all benefit, from small, to big, to medium—many of those contracts will start to expire between 2012 and 2018.

They will come to us looking for favourable gas prices, so we could continue to buy drugs for CDAP, which they maligned; so we could continue with CEPEP, which they called slavery. By the way, one of your supporters recently talked about agriculture and humane slavery. Yes, one of your Government supporters, talking about humane slavery. Imagine that! A government supporter in Arima, in 2011, is talking about the introduction of humane slavery for agriculture. I leave it at that. [Interruption] No, you want to fire PNM supporters from the civil service. So these producers, we have to start negotiations with them now. A question to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—and he is not here: how are these increased costs of production to be treated? What is being done now to guarantee the revenue streams from these petrochemical plants in the future?

Let me show you what has happened to energy in the past 18 months. In the document, Review of the Economy, 2005/2006, drilling at that time was 40,000 metres in exploratory activity—40,000 metres. In 2008, it went up to 45,000 metres; there was a crash in energy prices in 2009, we know that. It went down to 11,000. Prices recovered in 2011. Under this Government it went down further to 2,700 metres. That was the level of exploration being undertaken by this Government.

The annual review, the annual average for exploratory wells typically averaged between 10 to 12 between 2006—2008. Do you know how many this Government has drilled—exploratory wells? Does anybody know? The answer is zero. None! None! What is their policy for energy?
We have to also ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs: what has become of the negotiations with our partner, our neighbour, Venezuela, for the Loran-Manatee gas field? This is a gas field which has approximately 10 trillion tcf. That is a lot of gas. Which means that our population, if we monetize that gas, we could continue to provide goods and services for the man in the street; we could continue to buy hospital beds; we could continue with the standard of living to which we have been accustomed. A lot of things that the Minister wants to do in his Medium Term Policy Framework, we can do them to benefit everybody. You could expand CDAP if you want. That is what that field will do.

The past administration had set up the terms and conditions of negotiations. They began. Administration changed. The then hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan had the foresight and good sense to continue it. After she—did she demit office; forced from office; left office? After she was no longer the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—because she did not want to fire the two PNM people, I assume. After she was removed from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, these discussions with Venezuela came to naught—nothing! This Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has to come before the country and make a statement. What is the status of discussions with Venezuela for the monetization of the gas in the Loran-Manatee field, so that we could continue to earn revenue?

So what are some of the solutions we propose? We propose the acceleration of crude oil exploration production, both onshore and offshore. We would like to suggest the fast-tracking of all pending drilling projects on land and offshore—in the sea—the necessary approvals from EMA and CEC notwithstanding. We would like to continue to explore for new gas reserves in shallow waters. Shallow waters, for the people who might not be familiar, I think it is water under 1,000 feet. Recomence discussions with Venezuela to monetize that Loran-Manatee field so we can get revenue; review the criteria for concessions, especially deep water drilling to make sure people have the ability to drill, because what has been happening, people are winning those bids and they are found wanting as far as capacity to drill and financial resources.

The final proposal I come to under energy is an idea for which I think the time has come, and we can use the model of Petrobras in Brazil, and that is the possible unification of all our energy companies into one national energy company. [Desk thumping] That means bringing Petrotrin, Trinmar, NGC, under one umbrella so that we do not have to rely on multinational corporations. This national entity will be responsible for exploration, drilling, transmission, liquefaction, everything. It is an idea whose time has come in 2011, and I would like to hear this Government’s position on that; as I said, patterned after Brazil.
The other proposal we make, as far as energy is concerned, is to seek equity investment in Africa, because that is one of the hot spots for energy. The last administration had started this initiative with Ghana. I would like to know what is the status of that initiative; what has become of it, and if this Government intends to deepen that initiative. There were also initiatives with Latin America, Suriname and Guyana. What is the status? So that is our clear philosophy as far as energy is concerned as I could encapsulate in less than 10 minutes, but I think it shows a clear difference in policy between that side and this side.

I now turn my attention to three smaller matters, two of which I raised in our old location at the Red House, and you were away on other duties at that time, Mr. President, and we missed you, but I must say, Sen. Lyndira Oudit was an excellent replacement.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago like all economies which are dependent on oil, energy or any commodity, whether it is tin, copper, whatever, any commodity where you do not set price but you take price—in other words, I cannot determine the price of oil that I extract from the ground, I have to take whatever the international markets say I must take. We are always going to be oscillating between highs and lows and we have done that in the past. We have seen the good times and we have lived through the bad times. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—and I come back to this issue because I know Hon. Dookeran and myself are on accord with this.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Minister Dookeran.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Minister Dookeran, sorry. I know he and I are on accord with this and I would also like to commend Sen. Bharath on this, he has also indicated to me that he proposed this, I think back in 2007, so there is no philosophical difference between us. But the time has come to separate the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund into two funds: a heritage fund and a stabilisation fund. [Desk thumping]

The stabilisation fund would allow any government of the day to drawdown, possibly with Parliament’s approval, so that when prices are depressed they could have injections of funds into the economy and bring us back up to an even keel, and when prices are high we deposit into it. That is distinct from the heritage fund. The heritage fund is to put aside for future generations. Those funds must be sterilized from political interference, where the principal in that fund—so if we put in $10 billion into the heritage fund we must ensure that 10 years from now
that $10 billion is at least there. So we are not going to go off and invest with Bernie Madoff and so on. That fund is to give our grandchildren, the grandchildren of Quashie, the grandchildren of Maharaj, the grandchildren of Da Costa and the grandchildren of Mr. Lee some money in 50 years from now—[ Interruption] and Sen. Faris Al-Rawi’s grandchildren. [Desk thumping]

I am trying to call the whole diaspora here: Quashie, Maharaj, Da Costa, Mr. Lee, Sen. Al-Rawi. Have I excluded anybody?

**Sen. Bharath:** Hamel-Smith.

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** Mr. Hamel-Smith, thank you. [Laughter] Right, so we include everybody. All our grandchildren will have access to this heritage fund for their use then.

Mr. President, I now turn attention to the Central Statistical Office—

**Mr. 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. P. Beckles]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you kindly, Mr. President; thank you kindly Sen. Beckles and colleagues. I raise the issue of the Central Statistical Office at our old location and I was disheartened to hear the Minister of Finance in his wrap-up in the Lower House, when we questioned the absence of data from the CSO, blame it on the PNM. This is in direct contrast to my hon. friend, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, when I questioned the non-publication of unemployment figures and he said, and I accepted his explanation, it was because of the workload in doing the census. [Interruption] I accept that. I accept that!

But I cannot accept the Minister of Finance blaming the People’s National Movement for the non-publication of unemployment figures. The two arguments just do not mesh and it is time, as I have recommended before, that the CSO be taken out of political control and follow the Jamaican and the UK model and set it up as an independent authority, so that these arguments about PNM, UNC, COP will not tarnish our premier data collection agency. Mr. President, again, it is an idea whose time, I think, has come. [Interruption]
I now turn to the issue of the National Infrastructure Bank. I know I cannot refer to certain things on this issue so Senators need not get their Standing Orders books. I implicate no Government Minister in this, but there is a video on the Internet where a woman from a country called BVI—I do not know what BVI stand for—

Hon. Senator: British Virgin Islands.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: British Virgin Islands—is listening to a presentation and every time the speaker in that video talks about funds and if you do not want it, she keeps putting up her hands, “Me me, me”. Three times when the presenter on that video says, “If you don’t want these funds or if you are pious open a church”, she puts up her hands and says “Give me the money”. [Interrupt] Could you imagine, Mr. President, if that FIFA official became a Minister in British Virgin Islands?

To use a phrase from Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds, and I do not have the actions, “If they put God out of their mind and make that woman a Minister and give her an infrastructure bank”—frightening “eh”? I say no more on the National Infrastructure Bank.

Hon. Senator: I will.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, I now come to the ultimate flip-flop of this Government and it is an issue which this Government is going to have to face head-on in the near future, it has to do with crime and the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Crime initiatives of the last Government were many in the last budget: grants to community-based organizations for youth mentoring. “We will implement a national security operation centre linked to officers on mobile patrol to offer a response time of less than 10 minutes.

Comprehensive crime statistics: on page 13 of last year’s budget, the new Commissioner of Police would bring fresh ideas in law enforcement, community policing and security intelligence. The only fresh idea he has brought is a state of emergency.

Hon. Senator: That was not his idea, he is not the Government.

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: It was not his idea?

Hon. Senator: No, no, no. [Crosstalk]

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: The chairman, but he would have recommended it?
Hon. Senator: No!

Sen. T. Deyalsingh: But that is what we have now. That leads me to the Caribbean Court of Justice, the ultimate flip-flop, the Basdeo Panday administration sanctioned, sought and got Trinidad and Tobago as the headquarters for the Caribbean Court of Justice; Treaty of Chaguaramas—

Hon. Senator: Mervyn Assam—[Inaudible]

Sen. T. Deyalsingh:—led, I am hearing by Mr. Mervyn Assam. They sought it, they got it and we funded it. It is on Henry Street. They lose the election, PNM comes into power and we bring up the issue of the CCJ, what is the response? Total flip-flop on the idea. They conceived a baby and then aborted it. That is what I am saying about confidence and credibility in the utterances of members of this Government.

The hon. Attorney General was sitting very uneasily when Sir Shridath Ramphal QC, recently gave his speech on Caribbean jurisprudence, and I am paraphrasing what Sir Shridath said. He said it is time for countries of the Caribbean to stop loitering on the doorsteps of colonialism. Those were his words. One of the law lords has told us, time to leave; so my discussion here is not about the merits and demerits of the CCJ. We have to go! This Government has to make a statement, a clear, unequivocal statement, what is your stand on the CCJ which you sought? We need an answer, because Lord Phillips says:

“…former Commonwealth countries—including those in the Caribbean—would stop using the Privy Council and set up their own final courts…”—of Appeal.

Mr. President, why do I bring up the issue of the Privy Council? The Privy Council is not going to uphold any decision to hang anybody, because they have imported into their legislation via the Human Rights Act, 1988, the European Convention on Human Rights, and Protocol 6 of that convention talks about the abolition of the death penalty. So, if it is this Government’s position to hang people in Woodford Square and sell tickets, the Privy Council is not going to help you with that. If they want to hang people in Woodford Square they have to stop going to the Privy Council but, you see, Mr. President, if they conveniently go back to the CCJ, what they would do now is tarnish the CCJ as a hanging court. That is the position they have put themselves in. They would take an honourable institution like the CCJ and tarnish it, turn it into a hanging court, and the hon. Attorney General, who sat very uncomfortably while Sir. Shridath was speaking, has to make a statement.
Mr. President, as I sadly make a contribution today under a state of emergency, if you would allow me, because I have to get permission to speak in public now—[Interruption]. As I come to my close, to quote some lyrics from a song by a gentleman by the name of Labi Siffre. He wrote this song in 1986 when he was witness to a grave injustice at the time. Although the injustice was legal, legality does not make it morally correct. So when the Prime Minister seeks a legal solution to a moral dilemma with somebody it is wrong. And I quote to you some lyrics which encapsulate how I feel about Trinidad and Tobago in 2011. This is why I asked earlier at the start—and I want the picture of Mr. Leo Des Vignes hanging back up in this Parliament, so we will understand what we almost lost on July 27, 1990. The lyrics by Mr. Labi Siffre go like this:

“The higher you build your barriers
The taller I become
The farther you take my rights away
The faster I will run
The more you refuse to hear my voice
The louder I will sing
You hide behind walls of Jericho
Your lies will come tumbling.”

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

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I propose to take the lunch break at this point and we would return at 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.
1.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: I believe when we broke Sen. Dr. Balgobin was about to get on his legs.

Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin: Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to begin my contribution today by just saying a few words of congratulations to the people and communities I think are deserving. First and foremost, of course, congratulations to the Hindu community, Shubh Divali. [Desk thumping] I would also like to echo the sentiments expressed here earlier by Sen. Deyalsingh, and congratulate the staff of the Parliament for a very speedy and excellent job that they have done in relocating us here.
I also wish to congratulate the Opposition for the loss of the pin and the replacement with very nice ties and so on, which really give a nice national character to the appearance of things. And just two more, very quickly, I do not think that it would—it might have escaped our notice, Mr. President, but I think I would like to congratulate the Clerk of the Senate, Mr. Neil Jaggassar who I think a week ago celebrated 4 years of public service to Trinidad and Tobago. [Interruption] Forty, some—4-0. [Desk thumping] So apologies to Mr. Jaggassar for taking away 36 of his years there, I am sure he would not mind. And finally, of course, congratulations to Sen. Dr. Lester Henry whose birthday it is today. [Desk thumping]

Right, very good, all of those pleasantries having been dealt with, I would like to make a few comments on the budget and on various aspects of it as presented by the hon. Minister of Finance. I propose to speak a little bit about some specific sectors in the budget, particularly as they relate to health, national security, education. I would like to speak a little bit about governance and so on as well. But just to begin, I think we should recognize as a society, that many of the benchmarks that Trinidad and Tobago used to augment or structure its various plans over the last 10 years or so, have faltered. Ireland, Dubai, Malta, we have fashioned plans, our sectoral plans, national plans on the “success” model of many of these countries and now we look at them and we say, we are very glad that we are not like them at all. And this, of course, is so because this budget is presented against a backdrop of global economic recession, financial turmoil; regionally all of the economies of Caricom are flat, and so I thought that the hon. Minister of Finance tried to do a very great deal in the circumstances.

The theme, Mr. President, is “Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” and to the extent that it suggests that a disaster has been averted, I would want to say to the national community that we are not yet out of the woods. It will take more than one and a half years to turn any economy around. In our case we are not trying to turn an economy around, we are actually trying to restructure it. That is always going to be a significant task, and in fact, the budget on page 13 actually says the structure of the economy has not changed. That must really occupy our attention.

I was very pleased to see the State Enterprises Investment Programme document because it helped me to understand where the money is being spent in this economic transformation. So it helped me to understand the very—I would say the excellent medium-term policy framework that has been put forward by the Minister of Planning. What has happened I think, if you read the budget alone, it is short on specifics. But I think if you really detail through the attendant documents there is quite a rich profile put forward.
But my view is somewhat modified if I compare it to that of the Minister of Finance who is speaking about safety jobs and investment. I would say that it is essential for us to focus on these things, but in particular on efficiency and productivity. I would make a departure from what has been said here before, and say that we ought to be able to confront critical stakeholders and labour in particular to say, we are not as productive as we need to be, we need our labour force to be more productive, we are not pulling our weight. And the reflex response to that is usually, “That is, management’s fault.” It cannot just be management’s fault. It never can be.

I was looking at one sandwich-making franchise, Mr. President—I would not say which, I mean one can deduce it easily enough there are not that many in Trinidad—and they were saying in Port of Spain, at peak hours, they are able to make 80 sandwiches an hour. They say in a developed metropolis—in a city in a developed country—the exact same layout, square footage, equipment and staffing, with the same experience profile, they produce 380 sandwiches an hour. That is the very significant gap that we have to confront and contend with, when we are talking about productivity. So I want to build on what the Minister of Planning and the Economy has said: yes it is about science and technology, yes it is about automation, but we also need people with more industrious attitudes, people who are prepared to work and work hard in order to build wealth.

I have said before, Mr. President, the global competitiveness report for this year ranks Trinidad and Tobago as 81st in the world. But if you look at GDP per capita calculations and you check down from the top, Trinidad and Tobago ranks number 31. What is the difference? What is the explanation for the difference between what we are ranked at in competitive terms and what we are earning? Really and truly there ought not to be much of a distinction. But in Trinidad and Tobago’s case there are 50 spaces. And the answer for that lies almost squarely in the portfolio of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and that is oil and gas. We have been blessed, we have been lucky, but it also means that we are punching above our weight—well, we are outside of our weight class. We are light heavyweight and we are in a ring with heavyweights. And we are looking like a heavyweight, but it is because of oil and gas. We have not earned the money that we are spending. I would, therefore, say that critical to the success of any budget at this time, would be a focus on productivity and efficiency, because that is what will help us to narrow or bridge the gap. And out of those things will come jobs, investment, and with the appropriate climate, safety.
I think that we must tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the entire world is in crisis with very few exceptions and that we have hard work ahead if we are to weather the storm. We cannot run deficit budgets indefinitely regardless of the statistic or the percentage of GDP. The fact is, if you continue to spend more than you earn, you are going to have a problem.

Now, the deficit looks almost the same as the PSIP, which only strengthens the point because you do not invest if you are not going to get a return. So at some point that deficit finance, PSIP, is going to have to bring some return to Trinidad and Tobago—when, we do not know, it does not say, but we need to have some sort of idea about that. The people of Trinidad and Tobago need to understand that we are living on borrowed money in part and therefore, to an extent, on borrowed time.

I think that we ought to avoid the mistakes of the past, and this is why I am emphasizing the point, Mr. President, because it occurred to me in rereading Dr. Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* and then you look at *From Columbus to Castro*, and you look at what happened when you read biographies of Dr. Eric Williams and so on, what happened to Trinidad and Tobago when we gained Independence at least to me, I am not an historian—it would appear as if we felt very strongly that the people of Trinidad and Tobago should benefit from the resources of Trinidad and Tobago. Somewhere along the line, though, I wonder if we have not developed a culture of entitlement here which puts enormous pressure on any government—People’s Partnership, PNM whatever—to keep the gravy train rolling, to keep the goodies coming to help and sustain everybody.

But, I think instead we have to do that. But we also ought to be telling citizens that we must work harder and work smarter. I do not think it is fair to anyone to say well you know citizens, sit back, no change is required from you, the Government will handle it. I think the citizen has to bear some measures of responsibility for what is going to happen in this country going forward. I think that message is very necessary to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the Medium Term Policy Framework.

I want to say something about that very quickly. I think that framework usefully sets targets and I think that these targets ought to be front and centre, not merely an aside or an adjunct, but front and centre. Because what the Ministry of Planning has done—and has done well—is they have recognized the need to come up with a set of measurable targets against which we can judge Government’s performance. Now, that is a dream for any Opposition and a nightmare for any Government, but that nonetheless is the standard to which we should hold ourselves, surely.
So I think that the policy framework is a very good start; it of course needs much tighter linkages between that document and the actual draft estimates; but for a first run I thought it was very good. And it is a good step towards competitiveness, because, Mr. President, what gets measured gets done.

I think it is very important as well, because it helps to move us away from budget hysteria towards a focus on strategic objectives. You look at the media coverage on the budget and so much of it is borderline, vacuous. What goodies did we get? What pain did we impose on the population? No one is asking, well, where are we going? You have people talking about, well you know this part of the budget is positive and it is negative and really you look at the examination and the analysis of it. It is done on a micro rather than a macro level. It is a very fine grain almost to the point of being irrelevant. We are so close to the paintwork that we cannot see the picture and we need to have some sort of articulation, as a country, of where we are going, what is it that we are doing and how does this budget take us there. And so I think that is very important.

1.45 p.m.

In this regard, on page 14 of the budget, one sentence is devoted to the necessity of improving the quality of the Central Statistical Office and I have heard that here for years—well, not physically here, but in this House for years. I cannot imagine that that is something that would take more than one year to fix. So I am hopeful that this year we will see a very significant change in the resourcing of the Central Statistical Office.

So assuming that we have measures in place and we are searching for answers of what do we do next, I am clear that we do not have those answers and I think the people of Trinidad and Tobago ought to be clear on that to. We know we have oil, we know we have gas, and we are searching for solutions, we are searching for another way forward, and we are investigating multiple options—multiple options—but we have not yet settled on what we are sure would work.

So then how do we get competitive? There are actually some prescriptions. I think the first and simplest one would be that we need to get the basics right, whatever those basics are. I was very pleased to hear the Minister say that there is an amnesty for people who are late in filing annual returns. I would like to invite the Minister to form a company and go and try and file an annual return with the Registrar of Companies, because you would grow a beard as long as Dr. Chase—the Dr. Chase almanac beard—before you have any success. And they send you back every time. You know, “Here is a form, it is not filled out correctly, go
back.” When you go back and you come with it filled out the way that person (a) told you to fill it out, you run into person (b). Person (b) then says, “This is not properly filled out, the way you filled it out originally was the right way, go back.” So you go back, you fill it out and you come back again, and that is how it goes. It is enormously inefficient and frustrating when—

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is not my experience at all.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: Well, maybe they are PNM supporters or something Faris, I do not know.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is because I am a lawyer. That is not my experience at all.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: All right. Well, you see, you need to be armed with a law degree in order to contend with the formidable adversaries that one would encounter in such a place, and so efficiency is very, very important.

So get the basics right, it ought to be easier to register or de-register for VAT, to set up a company, to deal with NIS, to deal with the Board of Inland Revenue and particularly to deal with the Registrar of Companies. So I am hopeful that at some point in this transformation we get to a place as a Government where we say we are going to spend less and get more. There are significant benefits to be had from greater efficiency, from an improvement in efficiency.

The other two things that I would say we can do to improve competitiveness, would be to reduce State involvement in employment—and as counter intuitive as that sounds, I will tell you why in a moment; but the last one I would suggest which nobody seems to really be talking about anymore, but which has proven to work, is we need to be thinking about clusters; setting up clusters. Point Lisas, that area is a cluster, it works, it is successful.

Some people define what is happening in Ariapita Avenue with the food and beverage sector there as a cluster, or the beginnings of one. It probably is not because the supply chain is not located there or nearby, I do not know. But that clustering logic would really help accelerate the growth pole thinking that was enunciated last year and which, presumably continues to be a lynchpin of Government policy. But if we can reduce the involvement of the State in employment, just to come back to that, I think that we would begin to force a kind of relevance between the skills we have in the economy and the demand for skills that we have in the economy.

Also, we need to guard against the phenomena of what I call the “working poor”. The working poor are people who are working, they do not show up as unemployed in the statistics, but in fact, they cannot afford much of anything, they are barely eking out an existence and those are the people, unfortunately, who are most susceptible to fraud and being conned.
I saw one case just a week or two ago, where a lady who was a patient at Mount Hope somehow found the strength to con nurses and doctors treating her. And how she did that? She calls the name of someone in the Housing Development Company, says, “Look if you give me a down payment of $15,000 I will take you and show you this house and you will have the keys by Thursday”. Takes you to the housing development—to some development somewhere, wherever you say you want a house, puts you to stand up in front of an empty one and says that is yours—money; takes your money and then moves to another health facility. Maybe the person is not even sick. And those kinds of things happen all the time, and it happens where you take advantage of people who cannot afford, who are not earning a decent enough wage, they cannot afford to live, they cannot afford to pay a decent rent, they cannot afford to eat.

In terms of efficiency and competitiveness, I also want to say to the Minister of Finance who may be watching from some vantage point or the other, that I am very pleased to have seen the VAT refunds; that they have been processed. [Desk thumping] I think that is very, very positive. I will say to the Minister that he needs to institutionalize some sort of arrangement, because in the future people in need of refunds will remain at the mercy of a Minister of Finance and that needs to be looked at and addressed.

I was also glad to see that ASYCUDA is finally coming on stream—I think that the delay is quite unacceptable—and it will improve productivity and also decrease the potential for corruption. I hope that that comes to pass. I got an invitation for—through someone else—a demonstration of the ASYCUDA system in a few days, so I am hopeful that that is near to rolling out.

Mr. President, some people have offered the question—and attempted to answer—of why is business not investing? Why is business not investing? The answer is, something is wrong. Why would you invest if everything was right, something is wrong. Trinidad and Tobago’s business people and companies are investing and looking further afield, outside of Trinidad and Tobago, even outside of Caricom. I think that Caricom and Trinidad and Tobago need to sit down and think about, well, why? And I will say this, Mr. President, one way to motivate the private sector to invest, is not to demotivate them from investing. In other words, understand what are those things that are keeping the private sector away from investing. It is not enough for us to stand and address the private sector and say, “I invest, we have done our part, you need to invest.” Entrepreneurial insight, entrepreneurial spirit will invest, if the conditions are good, the context is right and the returns are reasonable.
There are a lot of people in this country who are looking for investment opportunities, why are they not feeling comfortable to invest? We need to ensure that the State is facilitative of business and of investment, and very supportive of it.

I will give you a very—I know that I gave you this story before, but I will give it to you again because I think it is quite relevant in this context, where a local manufacturer had gone to a Central American country—in this instance Costa Rica—and set up a plant and was importing raw material duty free. By accident, one of the people in his plant took some of the used by-product of the raw material and sold it—but you cannot do that, because you imported it duty free. So, in a fright they went to the people who were controlling that industrial estate and who give these concessions and so on and said, “We think we have breached the law.” And, the ladies—two ladies, sat down dealing with these people. They said, “This is a very serious thing that you have done, we will have to get legal advice.” They said “Well, you have a cup of coffee before you go” and before the cup of coffee was done they came back to them and said, “This is the legal advice that we have got, so you need to go and see the people in Customs.” They said, “But we have already called Customs and made an appointment on Friday and we will go with you.” They went with them and resolved the matter.

Now in Trinidad and Tobago that would take years, and we need to understand that there are other parts of the world that are far more interested in and accepting of capital, business capital. We need to make ourselves more interesting. That is where jobs and investment come from, the environment has to be enabling, it has to be interesting, and then the money will come. We have to get the basics right.

The budget sets an ambitious target I think of reducing poverty 2 per cent year on year, and we are at 17 per cent now, our unemployment rate is around 6 per cent, which means that we have actually a lower unemployment rate than most of the developed world, except maybe Japan. So I think, Trinidad and Tobago continues to look reasonable, we are looking well, but if we want to make a dent in that 17 per cent, I will tell you my view is that for the reduction of poverty the economy has to grow. The economy has to grow, that is where jobs are created. And, I think that the State ought to make an explicit decision to try to reduce the size of itself and let that growth come from the private sector.

I would like to turn my attention now to health, and what I want to say about health—the Minister of Health is grappling with a very significant and challenging portfolio. I have looked at what is put forward in the budget and I want to make an appeal for people in rural areas. We are hearing talk about strengthening Mount
Hope; yes, strengthening San Fernando General; yes, but when you look at outlying districts like Sangre Grande, Toco, Mayaro and Rio Claro, they need better health care coverage. So I could not quite understand why we would want to put a new hospital in Arima, which is 10 to 15 minutes from Mount Hope, when there is a clear need for significant expansion or a new hospital in Sangre Grande. I also am of the view that Rio Claro deserves a hospital—I mean a full, proper hospital. The Minister of Finance is from Rio Claro, unless I miss my guess, and therefore he ought to be sympathetic to the needs of people who have things happen to them along the Naparima/Mayaro Road. I would say 200 beds are a significant kind of health care facility along that eastern seaboard, very important, and of course the natural place to put it is in Sangre Grande.

2.00 p.m.

I myself have had the odd cut or two while on the beach in Mayaro. They sent me to Mayaro and Mayaro said, “Well, we cannot stitch that here; go to Rio Claro” and Rio Claro said, “Well, we do not have anybody here, you have to go to San Fernando or Sangre Grande; take your pick”—pick your poison as it were, and really, that ought not to be. These are heavily populated districts and if we want to stop the kind of urban drift we have been seeing in recent years, some attention ought to be paid to that.

Like Sen. Baptiste-McKnight, I share the view that I would have liked to have seen a little more money spent on education and prevention, so that we do not have to spend so much money dealing with the health crisis later on. It will, over time, ease the strain on the health care system.

Mr. President, I would like to encourage the Government to consider making a clear statement to the population on what services really a citizen has a right to expect from the health care system. Because it occurs to me that some citizens present themselves with very complex problems and somewhere along the line, I think the national expectation is that, most or all of your health care needs can be treated from primary to tertiary in the public health care system.

And while that may be true, I think that the Government has an explicit decision to make about what is the minimum standard it will provide and what is the maximum standard it will provide. So, what I am looking for is a floor and a ceiling because health care systems all over the world are the financial equivalent of a big black hole that you shovel money into; and we have to be mindful of that here, so that we do not create an expectation that we can never ever live up to as has happened, say, in the United Kingdom with the NHS.
So we have to manage expectations. Because if you do not—I was looking at this pressure that the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath is facing whenever there is a flood. And the pressure is always for the Government to compensate farmers for the crops that were lost. I am a little confused about that, Mr. President, because if I have a business and the business got flooded out, am I entitled to demand compensation from the State? I do not know, and perhaps I should try. But, you know, if you are in a business, perhaps through—is there not some instrumentation that the Government can come up with to help farmers insure their crops? I think, again, these are things where if we do not manage expectations well, people seem to just come to the Government with the bill.

I was looking on TV the other night at the news and someone’s house roof blew off and she was talking to the TV camera and saying, “Well, my house roof blow off five minutes ago and rain set up. I am waiting on the Government to change my roof.” I was aghast. This is the culture of entitlement that we have here. So how is it that the Government is responsible for that?

So, I think, Mr. President, we have to be mindful of setting up these expectations, you know, every time there is a flood—some people are planting on a flood plain, so, if you get one inch of water more than you expected, you are going to have difficulty, and then the State has to pay. So it is always the State: it is always the Government. How do we fix that? We need labour to play a part in helping to fix that mindset. Because this is one of—I think this is the only place in the world where you see labour taking a position or having a discussion about salaries based on what an employer’s perceived capability to pay is, as opposed to the productivity of the person doing the job and that productivity part needs to come into the discussion. The more productive we are, I am willing to bet, the less dependent we will be.

Mr. President, in terms of—I noted with positive interest the thrust to develop the port and maritime sector, page 30 of the budget statement says that the scope is there. I would have liked to see in some of the supporting documents—it was not available—what is the size of the sector that you are looking at. Who are the competitors for this shipbuilding sector that you are looking at? I would commiserate a little bit with the Minister of Transport in saying that the Port sectors are horrendously politicized. It is very much an imperfect sector, and I think that the best thing that anyone can advise a government to do is to get clarity on the Port sector, and what it is it wants to do with it.
Pages 41 and 42 of the State Enterprises Investment Programme 2012 gave me cause for pause, because it says here that Port of Spain has moved 388,000 TEUs which is equivalent of 20-foot containers for the year—maybe last year. The Port of Point Lisas would have moved about 184,000 in the same period. So we are talking about a movement of just over 550,000 TEUs, total; but you already have that capacity. Any investment that is contemplated is going after transhipment business, and here is the kicker with the transhipment business.

Mr. President, it is, with the exception of hyper-efficient ports in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Finland, Rotterdam, Singapore, transhipment business is exceedingly unprofitable. Just to give you an idea of the scale, if you get US $168 to move a 20-foot container from the boat to the shore, transhipment will give you about 30. You are already not making any money on the $168, and I will show you how much you are not making money.

The subsidy for the Port of Port of Spain is somewhere between $60 million and $100 million a year. The whole of Plipdeco—the Port of Point Lisas has revenues of about $150 million or $160 million a year. The wage bill alone is about $110 million or $120 million, and that is in a capital intensive industry. And because of the history of the Port of Point Lisas and the Port of Port of Spain where they have been antagonistic; they keep prices artificially low, everybody loses.

So, I think it is very important for the Government to arrive at clarity so that the taxpayer is no longer burdened by heavy subsidies. One or two suggestions that I would have had, would be since the Government is considering selling its shares down in Plipdeco, I think what most people do not get who invest in Point Lisas is that, if the estate has $60 million in revenue, it will make $50 million in profit, but Point Lisas will report $10 million or $20 million in profit because the port lost $30 million or $40 million.

So, that Port ought to be disaggregated from the estate business, and I think that if the Government wants to be involved in the port business, then take over the Port of Point Lisas, take over the Port of Port of Spain and rationalize what goes where. So one port becomes a container port and another one becomes a cargo port or something like that. Either that or you have to sell the Port of Point Lisas to a shipping line, because the only people who can make a small port like ours work like that would be someone who has traffic that they can guarantee to come into the port. So, I would caution against expansion of port capacity because at its peak standard, that is non-TEUs traffic, really did not seem to me to exceed half a million TEUs and we already pretty much have that capacity; So, something to think about when we are thinking about that.
In turning now to education, I would like to support the views expressed in the budget and in the various discussions in various places about what is happening with GATE. My own view is that GATE is being very, very significantly abused, both by providers and by recipients; very, very significantly abused. It grieves me to see the plethora, the smorgasbord, the panoply, the multiplicity of no-name degrees offered in this country. You look at them and say, “But, I have never heard of that institution in my life.”

So, on one of my trips to the United Kingdom, I actually found myself in a city that had a university—well, purported to have its degrees down here and so on—and I went and I stood up in front of the university, the building was not bigger than this room and it had one storey. The only thing I did not see was a man making red mango in the yard. They are offering degrees here and GATE is paying for it. I remember raising this issue years ago and the then Minister of Tertiary Education tried to resolve the issue by the introduction of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago. Well, I do not know if the ACTT makes site visits abroad or whatever. But, these institutions are not strong—many of them are not strong; they are not ranked. So, I started looking at that and thinking, “Well, where is this coming from?” What I want to say, Mr. President, is this—and I know that the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education will respond in his usual erudite way and set me straight for which I am grateful in advance. I thank you. What I want to say to him before he responds to me is this: there is a big difference between an organization for profit and an institution. I would rather put State funds—public funds—into development because an entrepreneur who is running a school could fold up the school at anytime, push his hands in his pocket and say, “Well, I have my retained earnings and I am going to make doubles and sell”, and that is what it became.

When the Minister of Planning and the Economy spoke about special interest, I listened and I thought, “Oh, well, you know, that is one case where special interest did play a part”, because you had a set of entrepreneurial players who are in this thing for profit—profit is not evil, you know. But when you are offering a whole heap of degrees of questionable quality, you are going to have a run of a few good years before people work out it is not good. In the interim, what you are going to end up getting is supernormal returns because the national inferiority complex ensures that young people will equate a low quality foreign degree with a high quality local or regional one.
That is the tragedy of this post-colonial society which we are living in, or at least one of several facets of what has happened today, but that is just on the provider side. You know, you have had instances where accommodations are poor, faculty is weak and—I do not know where we get faculty to teach all these people, I really do not. Someone asked me a couple of days ago, someone asked why ACCA is not taught here full-time? And the answer I got was: “Well the good teachers all working, so they could only teach in the evening. If somebody turns up to teach you during the day, be suspicious.” I hope that is not a general truth—

**Mr. President:** The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

**Motion made:** That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. B. Ali]

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** Thank you, Mr. President, and colleagues for the courtesy. We are dealing with a situation where we want to educate our people, we have a shortage of faculty, and persons who are entering tertiary systems do not have a command of basic math and English. [Desk thumping] They do not. If you talk to anybody in any tertiary system worth its salt, they will tell you the first thing they have to do before they even say hello, is sign you up for remedial work; introduction to mathematics. You basically have to go back and—there are some disconnects there, but okay, enough about abuse by providers and there are many ways that happens, and I am sure that is well known.

Mr. President, I also feel very sad when I see the general sense of ungratefulness of the recipients. You know, I wonder whether enough is being done when we mentor people and we are talking to people about being better members of the community, do we really appreciate the amount of money the State puts into each and every citizen to give them an education? GATE programme is massive and you look at some of the students in those programmes, you look at how they behave and you think, well, what is that? And I think what we have ended up with already, even if we stopped it now, we have already begun to see the rise of the papered but uneducated society. [Desk thumping]

So you have a set of uncultured brutes running all over the place brutalizing persons, because they have a piece of paper which says “I am more qualified than you”. This society cannot run on qualifications, Mr. President, it has to run on performance. We want our educated persons to have the right attitudes to be
productive, to go with humility and join organizations and add value; that is what we are looking for. I think somewhere in all of this education which we are giving them, in all of this certification we are not explaining that enough to them. I think there is a very big quality of education issue here. I have said before that UWI is bigger than Cambridge University in terms of enrolment, and there are going to be quality issues attendant to that.

Mr. President, the core issue remains this, there is a significant mismatch in my view, between the education system and the economic system. So when you graduate, the economic system is not going to provide an easy fit for you as a product of the education system. The mismatch is quite significant and what that then does it imposes a tax, a cost on the economic system which then has to take you and train and develop you; that squeezes SMEs which do not have that latitude and extra resource. When an SME hires a person with a degree in manufacturing engineering or risk management or accounting, you expect them to be able to do some accounting; you expect them to be able to manage risk. If you have a degree in project management, you expect them to be able to manage a project; at least of some small size. I think that is one issue with the education system I see which is quite challenging.

The other would be that there are four dimensions at least which Danah Zohar in a book called ReWiring the Corporate Brain, identifies to a person; it is mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. I think most of our education particularly at tertiary level focuses on the mental and we are, therefore, graduating persons who lack balance. We are depending on the family to give them that balance, but you know what, once they are getting A grades, Mr. President, they are on autopilot. So our education systems need a bit of work.

Just turning very quickly to national security, before I close. I would humbly and respectfully like to suggest to the Minister of National Security that much more has to be done with private security firms, much more. I usually get home too late to catch the news at 7.00 p.m., so I look at it at 10.00 p.m. By some happy circumstance there are security companies running ads around then; and what you see makes you cringe; it makes you cringe. They are training with firearms. If you point a firearm at your friend you are “flagging” them; they are pointing firearms at their own colleagues while they are pointing up to the bandit.

Now, when you are frightened, of course, you know, your reflex is to snatch, so you will probably shoot your colleague; there is a good chance of that. When they were doing some exercises I saw them take a guy, flip him and throw him to the ground, and as he landed on the ground, do you know what the guy did?
“flipper” not the “flippee”, as he landed on the ground the “flipper” taps him on his back [Taps the desk] and helps him up; that is a training scar. You will meet a criminal one day, throw him down on the ground [Taps the desk] and do that. [Laughter] [Interruption] No, that is called a training scar. The Minister of National Security can rebut me if I am wrong, but you—and they are advertising!

They are advertising these services and you cringe. They are racking a gun, and they hold the gun, rack it back and then they push it forward [Demonstrates the actions] which any gunsmith will tell you is a recipe for a jam. So you would rack it, lock it, rack it like that [Demonstrates the actions] forward, then point at a bandit and nothing will happen. Well, he will then take it from you, clear the jam and probably kill you with it. Something has to be done where these private security firms—

I think we also ought to watch casinos. I have seen enough to suggest to me that several casinos are involved in money laundering. If they are upset, I am very sorry about that, but I think that that is there.

I think that our latent murder rate is still very high. The Prime Minister said that the murder rate is down 70 per cent; if that is the case and you have approximately 500 murders a year, that means it is down to about 150 a year, which is still too high. It is still too high. So we still have to solve the problem of why we are manufacturing criminals in this society. Whoever is in power, whoever is running the country; the country, the society, is manufacturing and graduating a type of criminal who has the ready capacity to commit murder. I think we need to confront the society about those things and have a mature discourse on the causes of those things.

Mr. President, the state sector is huge and I just want to turn to that for one quick minute, to say that in terms of governance it presents a very significant challenge to the Government. You have in the state enterprise book provided here, 70 state enterprises which are owned, or controlled. The ones which are controlled meet the legal definition for owned. So even if they own 51 per cent, the minority really has no say. That does not include all of the bodies corporate which we have, which have boards of directors; the Regional Health Authorities, the Airports Authority, the Port Authority—it is not listed under state enterprises. So the state enterprise sector is actually quite significant and we need to have a better standard of government.

I would like to throw out a warning and a caution there. You know in some state enterprises which I have seen, you have a director or two walking around and saying [Points] “He’s a PNM”, and I think—I will tell you what, you are always going to have some of that, but I think if it is done on a systemic scale, or basis,
you are really trampling on a fundamental democratic right, which is a right for somebody to support whichever political party they want. [Desk thumping] That for me is as fundamental as religious freedom.

So, of course, we also have to set a standard for persons who may not support the party in power, for them not to be obstructionists, [Desk thumping] for them to do their jobs, for them not to—because whatever your political affiliation they should be first and foremost on the job as a professional. [Desk thumping]

So I think we ought to train directors in these entities, organization by organization, and we ought to say explicitly to non-executive directors; non-executive means you are not an executive. It means you cannot commandeer resources; you cannot give instructions; you need to confine your involvement as much as possible to the boardroom and board meetings.

In that regard, Mr. President, I want to suggest quite strenuously—it was not in the budget, but I thought I would make the suggestion and hope it finds favourable ears—that all state enterprises which have significant revenues should get a credit rating. There is a Caribbean Information and Credit Rating Services Limited (CariCRIS), a regional rating agency, they should get a credit rating; because oversight by the PA(E)C is not enough. Let them get a credit rating, let the credit rating agency assess industry risk, assess management quality, assess all of those things; take the politics out of it. When they come in front of us here in the Parliament, or they go and they stand in front of the public we are very clear on the standard of management which we are looking at, how credible and how strong this company really is.

I would like to close, Mr. President, thanking you, of course, for your indulgence by saying that you know there is some talk about gender—and I am saying gender but it could be about ethnicity, it could be about Tobago, it could be about anything. We are talking about—I heard one activist say it is a gender forward budget or it is not gender enough, but phallic absence does not better decisions make. There is no research which suggests to me that it is definitely proved that women make better decisions than men. I think we have to be careful about setting quotas and saying 31 per cent, or 40 per cent, because somebody from Tobago, or from San Fernando could say well, I have a right to a representation as well, 50 per cent of the population living down here. Or this is my ethnicity and everybody in there is looking a particular way. No, competence matters. What we should be striving for is not equality—and this is what I like about the budget, it gives the opportunity for equality, and that is what we should be striving for, not equality, but equality of opportunity. We give every man and
woman, every boy and girl a chance to advance based on their own merit. This is, in the end, my great hope for the outcome of this budget. As we consider economic transformation, the social transformation which attendant to it is based very much on merit, on performance, and in some measure an individual’s commitment to the collective and to the whole.

Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity. [Desk thumping]

2.30 p.m.

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. Anand Ramlogan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, the preceding contributions make my task somewhat easier; for the most part they were illuminating, analytical and informative. I have only heard three contributions from the Opposition Bench that have been lacking in substance, somewhat illogical and sometimes bordering on the irrational but, thankfully, those are only three from the Opposition Benches: the rest were fine. I think the theme of the contributions from my learned friends seem to be “oppose but not propose”, and that is a significant shortcoming in the contributions because if you only oppose but you do not seize the opportunity to demonstrate the credibility of your claim to be an alternative government by also proposing, espousing new ideas and letting us know what you would have done differently to fix the problems that you focused the spotlight on, then you are failing in your duty.

The hon. Minister of Finance must be commended for his outstanding effort in what has now been widely acknowledged and accepted as a comprehensive and creative budget at a most critical juncture in Trinidad and Tobago’s history. [Desk thumping] One word comes to mind and that word is “stability”. This budget continues to lay a very solid foundation for economic transformation in Trinidad and Tobago, and that in the context of what we inherited. And what did we inherit? We inherited a ship that was left adrift in some very choppy economic waters, and before we could change course we first needed to get a sense of the state of the ship. The ship was one that had nice carpet, fancy decorations, but when one looked at it closely, one could see that the carpet was soaked in certain areas, and that was because there were leaks in the ship and in some cases there were rust spots that were threatening to spring leaks. And among the many leaks that we inherited and the many rust spots in the ship would have been the billions of dollars owed to contractors.

I do not think people in the country understand, of course we would like to do a lot more, we would like to give a lot more but people must understand. When we assumed office it is as if you were ducking; because from all different angles you
had invoices coming in, contractors, lawyers, consultants, quantity surveyors, you
name it, they all started coming like arrows from all different directions and not to
the tune of small amounts, these are billions of dollars unpaid for work they claim
was done during the tenure of the last administration.

What we discovered was that the money that they had in the Treasury when
the general election date was announced instead of doing the prudent fiscal and
responsible fiscal thing, which was to pay off your debts, what you had was an
attempt to create new work and pay off those. So it was not on a first-come, first-
served basis, you suddenly started creating new work and whatever money you
had you spent it out there in the new work and you left all the backlog to come
cascading down upon the new Government.

It was almost as if they anticipated they would be out of office. When we
could not pay or when we were trying to say: “Well, look give us some time let us
get a feel for this thing because in some cases the work that you are claiming you
did we are not seeing it”, or we were saying to you: “It was not done properly,
give us a little chance”, do you know what happened? Lawsuits! Lawsuits from
every Tom, Dick and Harry; lawsuits coming in from all the contractors; everyone
that felt that they have a claim against the State, lawsuits were coming up. In
many cases when we are looking for the persons—Sen. Dr. Balgobin spoke about
the professionalism. In many cases when we are looking for the professionals to
stand up on the side of the State to ascertain the veracity and integrity of the bills
that are being submitted, in some cases many months or in some cases a year
later, in some cases those persons do not want to attend the lawyer’s office, they
do not want to come and visit the Ministry of the Attorney General, and they do
not want to provide any instructions.

In some cases I have had to ask the legal officers: “is there some sort of
conspiracy here?” How could public officers in some cases serving in State
enterprises who would have known about this work, who would have known
about the contract, not come forward to simply verify whether the work was done,
whether this invoice represents what was done or not? We are new; we cannot
tell. But what we do know is that we are seeing houses built and the walls
cracked, we are seeing tiles popping up like if they built it on a fault line, we are
seeing louvres with the blades sliding off, and we have to spend money to remedy
the work that they are claiming they did. So that was the predicament.

Of course, apart from that we then had the financial headache, the financial
migraine of the Clico and Hindu Credit Union fiasco. Something again we
inherited, and the headache was amplified because of the way it was dealt with in
the first place. Because the bailout that was put forward and the moneys injected into Clico, I think it is generally understood now that they went about it the wrong way. There was a complete misdiagnosis of the problem. What they thought and misdiagnosed as a liquidity problem was in fact a solvency problem that ran deep into every vein of Clico—the “Clico empire”. Had they understood that it was not a question of liquidity or cash flow but it was a more significant problem that went into the very root and core of the Clico Empire that had to do with its very solvency itself, they obviously would have approached it differently.

And more importantly, they allowed Mr. Dupreý to cleverly negotiate and hive off all of the assets that were viable and earning an income—everything else, and they took a security, without realizing that that which they were banking on as a security was already encumbered to banks in the United States: there were debentures, mortgage and charges, and really it was worthless security.

We then had, of course, legal battles galore, outside the courts, inside the courts, and we had to contend with a system that acquired and purchased things for the State that we now have to decide whether we want to keep or not in light of the prevailing realities.

The offshore patrol vessels were one such matter. The vessels were defective and we were being asked to accept them. And whereas, as a responsible Government, we had to separate governance from politics and politics from the integrity of the State and our international image, and whereas we would have been prepared to go along if the contract was one that was followed to the letter, what we found was the coast guard, the experts were telling us that the vessels were not built in accordance with the contractual specifications. That has led, of course, to an international arbitration in London over the offshore patrol vessels; Trinidad and Tobago’s claim in that matter is £1 billion. And we intend to pursue that to the hilt come what may because we cannot continue. It is almost as if the PNM went through transactions and completed them blindly for the sake of completing them, and there is only one explanation when that happens. When that kind of inexplicable commercial behaviour occurs, when you want to complete it regardless of, by any means necessary, at any cost, it is because “there is more in the mortar than the pestle”.

Add to that, another leak on the ship, a huge rust spot that they ignored and that had to do with the outstanding public sector wage negotiations. Again another ball dropping in our lap. And of course, the big one, the one that causes a lack of confidence in every single facet of public life and that had to do with the uncontrolled crime rate that was soaring; the astronomical murder rate and the effect it had on confidence at every level in the system—every single level.
Prosperity without security is meaningless and that is what Trinidad and Tobago had been reduced to, where law-abiding citizens were driven, were made to retreat into their own homes and barricade themselves in their own homes and gingerly peer from behind burglarproof bars, whilst the gang leaders and the bandits roamed the streets freely. There was already an undeclared state of emergency in this country with self-imposed curfews for the majority of the population; that was our reality.

And, of course, last but not least, the rampant corruption that had permeated every sphere of public life under the last regime.

Mr. President, before we could actually begin to change course of ship T&T, we had to rip out the carpet, plug leaks, identify the rust spots, prioritize fixing, and we had to do all that we could to steady the ship. And that is why I think the hon. Minister of finance, with his normal composed cool self, has been of great service to Trinidad and Tobago because he has brought about a certain measure of stability and calm in what could have been a dangerous situation for Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I say that because it is easy to govern when there is an oil boom and a gas boom—very easy—but rising tide lifts all ships.

Mr. President, let us look at what they had when they were in office to govern. During the period 2001 to 2008, the oil price started off at US $17 a barrel in 2002 and peaked at US $145 in July of 2008. That is a 500 per cent increase, from US $17 to US $145. So that was what they had. The gas production from 0.6 trillion cubic feet in 2002 to 1.5 trillion cubic feet per year in 2008. The average national gas price during 2002—2010 was US $5.81 per MMBtu. This year you know what we are forced to contend with?—not US $5.81 but US $2.75. So we have to manage this ship at a time when the climate and the economic weather are very inclement.

They had to manage it when money was flowing out of their ears. That is how the squandermania took place! That is why it took place! Money was flowing like water and they allowed it to pass through the economy like a dose of salts. You see, Mr. President, we had to remove the element of uncertainty, and to remove that element of uncertainty, what steps did we take?

2.45 p.m.

The first—to deal with the crime situation, we had Hon. Brig. John Sandy. The first thing we did to address the uncertainty and lack of confidence because of the crime situation was to appoint someone who people would respect in the
army forces and in the security agencies. That is the first thing we did. [Desk thumping] By virtue of the appointment of John Sandy, that was the first step in the right direction and I say that without fear of contradiction because when you compare that name to the predecessor, Martin Joseph, well—

Hon. Senator: Chin Lee.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan: —and Mr. Howard Chin Lee, what you really have is chalk and cheese, there was not that kind of relationship and respect. You cannot have it.

We took that bull by the horns with respect to Clico, we dealt with the wrongdoing aspect by appointing a Commission of Enquiry, and of course we have the civil case before the courts. The Minister of Finance has come up with a very innovative proposal that will give significantly back to those who have suffered losses in Clico through the Executive Flexible Premium Annuity products.

We have projects that have been announced that will give the economy the kind of injection it requires. And, of course, the Minister of Finance has outlined them, and perhaps the one that is closest and most personal to me would be the Point Fortin highway project because I live in south. I think it is going to be a significant contributor to economic activity and the construction sector and that is a leading sector in the recovery cycle as we know.

We have re-energized the energy sector by concluding bids on a number of deep water exploration projects. The message has been sent to the international community: Trinidad and Tobago is once again open for business and real business.

We have diversified our energy exports away from North America—a point that is overlooked. We have diversified our energy exports. North America used to constitute and comprise 25 per cent of our energy exports.

Hon. Senator: Thirty-three per cent.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan: My friend says it is even higher, 33; and that has gone down. I remember Sen. Dr. Balgobin spoke about the casinos—you would see that in this budget we have made an attempt to introduce some measure of regulation for the casinos, and we will now for the first time tap into an area that has hitherto gone unregulated in this country.

We have maintained interest rates low and kept Government away from crowding out the private sector for funds from the market.
Mr. President, one of the indicators for economic activity and confidence has to be the stock exchange, and it is interesting to note the level of buoyancy in our own stock exchange. When you compare what is happening internationally, for the last year, October to October, the return on the Dow Jones Industrial Average was a paltry 3.02 per cent. The SNP 500 was a negative 2.1 per cent, the London Stock Market Index and the FTSE 100 posted a return of a negative 4.68 per cent, and during the same period our own local stock exchange, as compared to that, posted an impressive 17 per cent return.

Mr. President, the measures announced in the budget have planted seeds that will bear fruit but they are there to lay a foundation for sustainable, long-term economic development. But the most important one that I mentioned, relevant to my Ministry, had to deal with the issue of corruption. Corruption drains the lifeblood of the economy. It takes it away, it syphons and diverts resources that can be used to buy beds for the hospitals, buy laptops for children, bring water to homes, it takes that away; puts it into somebody’s pocket.

You know, they speak about corruption as if their hands are clean and as if this country has a very short memory. But I was looking at the Vision 2020 document which was their template for developing the country, and I found for the first time a recognition and an acknowledgment by the PNM that corruption was a feature of their politics. Permit me to quote page 38 from that document, it says:

“In addition, inefficient bureaucracy, crime, theft, and corruption are identified as some of the most problematic factors affecting the business environment in Trinidad and Tobago.”

They knew. They knew that they were hurting the economy because there was corruption in public life under their administration. They put it in the 2020 document but ask them what did they do about it. Ask them what they did about it. What did they do?

Mr. President, corruption is the scourge of a modern, functioning, democratic society. It takes away the will of a people to progress on the basis of a meritocracy; and what do we have?

When I drive home and I pass by that Tarouba Stadium, such a tragic edifice, a symbol megalomania and “Manning-mania,” the image of an egotistical dream of a leader, and that egotistical dream, that tragic edifice is now coated in resplendent moss. How many people could not believe their eyes when Dr. Roodal Moonilal visited and the cameras focused on what was inside the Brian
Lara Stadium. No one could believe because when you are driving at nights and the lights are on you really think that this is some fantastic baseball stadium or something you would see in the US and so on—it looks really nice—but if you actually go in there and you look at it, you really wonder did they really spend $1 billion on this. “And where the money gone?”

There have been so many corruption scandals under the PNM that everyone has a pet peeve, or one that really irks them a little more: for some it is the $2 million flag that they put up and say that is a source of national pride, the country wanted it—Minister Gary Hunt. Others, it was the Brian Lara Stadium. For my friend, like Sen. Cudjoe, I know it hurts her that the Scarborough Hospital, corruption kept it back and up to now we have to come and clean it up again to finish it off. I know the people in Tobago hurt for that.

So, Mr. President, these are the parameters. We could have perhaps had five more hospitals—I heard Sen. Dr. Balgobin quite rightly saying, Sangre Grande should be fully functional and I agree, and maybe that should have been done five years ago. But instead what you have is a stadium that is a symbol of waste, profligacy, and a powerful, stark, tangible reminder of the PNM’s impotence and unwillingness to treat with political corruption.

The Treasury became the personal “thiefdom” or some may say “fiefdom” as they built structures that the country did not ask for, did not want, but the delusions of grandeur of one man fuelled.

The perception of corruption index has a distinct and undeniable correlation with the development index. Barbados is the only country in the Caribbean ranked in the top 20, and they are perceived as being the least corrupt among the Caribbean islands and conversely, or correspondingly, they are ranked very high on the human development segment of the United Nations Development 2010 Index.

But when you compare that, why is it that people feel this way about Trinidad? You know why, Mr. President? When we were in Opposition and we spoke, when the public pressure mounted on the Government to say, “Let us do something about this”—you know that I am debating the budget, you know why, you know why we are debating the budget? Because we wanted to have more money to do more for the people of this country, and that billion dollars did not need to be put into that stadium.

But look at the attitude! When we say that there is lack of confidence, this is part of the reason because when people come and bid for jobs and they know the international contractors, they know what this is going to cost, and when they see someone just walk in, he did not bother to line up for the race, he did not enter the
race but he is on top the podium with the trophy in his hand before the race is finished, that affects them! They go back and they tell the construction industry internationally, “Doh bother to waste your time”.

They told them that the Prime Minister on Thursday, January 9, 2010, when confronted with the mounting public pressure, frustration and outrage, that he had the unmitigated gall and temerity to say in the nation’s Parliament that Calder Hart could be Chairman of the Integrity Commission. Let us not forget that.

Their Prime Minister said on Thursday, January 9, 2010 that there was a likelihood that Calder Hart could be appointed a member of this country’s Integrity Commission. That was their response to the cries of the people and the protestations against the kind of corruption that was taking place.

So, we have to cleanse this nation of the corruption that littered our democracy. And now they come to say against that backdrop, “Well, this is a witch-hunt, why they going after these people, what they doing?”

Mr. President, I make no apology whatsoever as Attorney General in this People’s Partnership administration for going after those who are guilty of exploiting, raping, plundering and thieving from the public purse! I make no apologies for it! [Desk thumping]

And you know it is known that financial crimes and fraud require specialist expertise. Trinidad and Tobago does not possess the required expertise, that is a fact. They know that, yet still they try to create all this smokescreen. And let me tell you why they know that.

The Piarco Airport construction case: the Sunday Newsday of May 8, 2011, estimated that to date the pursuit of justice in that matter at that time had cost $72 million. Remember there was a precursor Commission of Enquiry and then you had all the investigations, and you had to have forensic accountants, you had to have quantity surveyors, you had to have all the experts—$72 million in the pursuit of justice on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago arising out of the airport construction.

We say, “good move! No problem! “But then do not come and say we could do it but you must not do it, unless you want to carry the sentence to its logical conclusion and say, “We want to protect those whom you wish to go after,” and then tell us why. Tell us why you want to protect them.

You see, my learned friend, Sen. Baynes, said it, in his brilliant maiden contribution yesterday. [Desk thumping] Brilliant contribution! He said that there is thinking, this psyche, that this is PNM country in Tobago and in Trinidad, that no one else has the political legitimacy and the political and moral authority to rule
this country except the PNM, and that translates into these corruption probes. It is as if they can do it, they have the right to do it, they somehow have the legitimacy to do it, but you must not do it. Everybody else must be subject to the law but the PNM must be above the law. That will not happen under the People’s Partnership administration, come hell or high water. [Desk thumping]

And let me demonstrate it, the Piarco Airport is just one. The Clico matter was being investigated under them when they realized that they made a boo boo. When they realized they made a tragic error they started an investigation and let me tell you today, for the first time let me reveal—you know how much money has been spent on that matter?—$105 million!

3.00 p.m.

I will give you the breakdown:

$56 million for Bob Lindquist, Forensic Accountant;

$31.5 million to lawyers; and

$17 million to specialist fraud experts whose evidence would be required.

The large majority of that money was spent under the People’s National Movement through the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. It is accepted and known that to pursue complex, complicated financial schemes and corruption matters, you have to engage the services of qualified persons. They did it; they knew about it. All that money was spent and when we came into office we took control of it and that is how we filed the case that is presently before the court against Mr. Duprey and the former treasurer of the People’s National Movement, Mr. André Monteil.

I will give you the figures, but they are the ones who spent $50 million in the Uff Commission of Enquiry to find out what anyone in Trinidad and Tobago could have told them; that all was not well at UDeCott and there was corruption taking place. What did they do? They created it, facilitated it, strengthened it and encouraged it; and when that horse had already, not just bolted, but made a full lap, they wanted to close the door.

Listen to Calder Hart’s strength and power under the PNM. He was the Executive Chairman of UDeCott. He was a Director of Home Mortgage Bank, Director of National Insurance Board, Director of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company, Director of NIPDEC; five key companies in the state sector and every one of them had the common denominator, Calder Hart.
All five had problems and the one common corporate denominator was Calder Hart’s presence on each and every single one. He was in charge of a virtual corporate kingdom, and this outside the structure of the democratically-elected governance framework of Trinidad and Tobago.

The line Minister was nowhere in sight. He was allowed to roam freely, and so freely was he allowed to roam that when the commission of enquiry was going on, he was allowed to use public funds to file for judicial review to try to put a stop to it.

When they try to distance themselves, we must remind the country about the strong connection. We must remind the country that Calder Hart was the political alter ego of the PNM. Calder Hart created a virtual parallel, artificial government structure outside the democratically, constitutionally elected Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what he did. What did they do when the people complained?

After the evidence emerged in the Uff Commission of Enquiry, not before, that Calder Hart had awarded a contract to a company owned by his brother-in-law, do you know what they did? They raised his salary. Incredible but true. They raised his salary from $85,000 to $90,000 per month. They gave him a $5,000 increase; almost as if to pat him on the back for giving his brother-in-law the contract and not telling anybody about it.

Really, who in their right mind would believe that a man named Calder Hart came to Trinidad and Tobago and, on this entire planet earth, he just so happened on this side of the globe to select a company on the next side of the globe, from Malaysia, which coincidentally happened to be owned by his brother-in-law and he Calder Hart, poor fellow, did not know. “Like he never asked he wife, ay, gyul, you have any bredder, sister, whey yuh from? Yuh drop from a fig tree? Wha’ going on with you? He never ask she nutten.”

It is inherently incredible that he would not have known that this man was his brother-in-law. It is absurd, but when that emerged they gave him a $5,000 increase. His monthly remuneration package, by the way, Mr. President, was $230,000 per month, almost quarter of a million dollars, when you add all the perks. He was paid $150,000 by UDeCott and the rest for board directorships. In fact, Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira had to answer a question in Parliament posed by the then Leader of the Opposition. Then the facts came out that he earned $6.3 million in less than three years and that is legitimate money.

I am showing the shameless, ruthless, raw, in-your-face manner in which they dealt with corruption. The political arrogance was such that with corruption they did what they wanted and more. They rubbed salt in the wounds of the people.
You complain, they give him a $5,000 increase. You complain more, they put him on a “next” board. You complain more, do you know what they did? In the height of the commission of enquiry, there was a picture on the front page of the newspaper, the former Prime Minister toasting with a glass of champagne, with Calder Hart, in the middle of the commission of enquiry.

This man is the subject of a commission of enquiry and the Prime Minister decides to toast with champagne and it is on the front page of the newspaper. Almost as if they want to send a signal to the commission of enquiry that this man was one who was specially protected; he was their golden boy. Nowhere in the world would a man who is the subject of an ongoing commission of enquiry find himself toasting champagne on the front page of a newspaper with the Prime Minister of the country.

It is unheard of, but that is the kind of political arrogance that was met with. When you complained, they said, “Well, he is a candidate for the Integrity Commission and they were serious about it. Had the PNM remained in office, it would have been Calder Hart, Juliana Pena and “we going down the road”.

That is why, when we spoke about the report from the Equal Opportunity Commission, I noticed that the response was that the report should not be public because the matter is now in conciliation. I do not think the hon. Leader of the Opposition quite understands the structure and scheme of the Equal Opportunity Act.

When you make a complaint, the commission investigates that complaint. If the complaint is found to be unmeritorious and without basis, they dismiss your complaint. There is nothing further. But if, upon investigation, the Equal Opportunity Commission finds that a prima facie case has been made out and that the complaint is genuine and legitimate—you have proven your case as it were—then they send the matter to conciliation.

If you cannot achieve a result at conciliation, then it goes before the tribunal. In this case, the commission found, in its report, that the complaint had merit. That is why they forwarded it to conciliation.

Minister Devant Maharaj applied under the Freedom of Information Act to get a copy of the report and that is how we knew the facts of the matter. Of course, a copy was also sent to the Ministry with responsibility for the scholarship fund and that is how we learnt about it.

I could not, for the life of me, understand the argument of the Opposition that the matter was still a live one. What are you talking about it for? Nobody is disputing the facts in the report, “yuh” know. Nobody was saying it was not political
discrimination; it was not racial discrimination; it was not a PNM slush fund. Nobody was saying that. Their concern seemed to be form, not substance, as always. Ignore the truth, let us focus on the process and we will see if we can find something to confuse the population.

But the population cannot be so easily confused—93 per cent to 7 per cent and the majority from PNM constituencies, so it sounded like music to my ears when I heard Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin speak about the need to have equal opportunity, equal access. That is why at the corruption probe we focus on equality before the law. No one is above the law. I even found that, in the other place, Miss McDonald, the defence put up bold headlines, screaming headlines, the response to this was, “Not under my watch”.

She does not remind us, really, under her watch that she was appointed Minister for Community Development in 2008. She is really saying it did not happen under her watch from 2008, but before that, well of course that is a different issue. “She take sheself out. She wiggled sheself out of that picture.” Pardon the use of the word “wiggle”, but “she take sheself clean out of that picture and she said: ‘Not under my watch’.” She did not say, not under the PNM tenure in government; not under the PNM government; she said, “Not under my watch”, and she was there for a small slice of time.

Of course, the substantive Minister who was there for a large majority of the time, Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams, the ubiquitous and loquacious Joan Yuille-Williams, is nowhere to be found. She has gone AWOL. The media cannot find “she” for a comment. They are looking all over, but you see, when the facts come out, the mice run away.

The budget for legal fees for the Ministry of the Attorney General: they say they want to know who are the people getting the briefs; $200 million briefs they say. I do not know where they are getting the information from. I would love to have $200 million.

These are the facts, but before I go there, let me remind my learned friends on the other side, inasmuch as they are demanding information, which I am going to give, permit me to remind the population of what was their stance when we were in Opposition and asked for similar information. Permit me to quote from the Newsday of Thursday, June 05, 2008. The article is entitled “March to secret Govt” by Andre Bagoo. It says:

“Attorney General Bridgid Annisette-George was yesterday accused of taking the country one step closer to a secret government as lawyers, constitutional and public service experts criticised her for...blocking parliamentary questions on the legal fees paid to private attorneys for State briefs.”
‘It strikes me that this is yet another step in the Government’s march towards secrecy; to keep the citizenry in the dark while using the citizens’ funds,’ said Reginald Dumas, retired head of the public service…

‘That is unacceptable in a society that has a proper respect for democracy and for its principles.’”

Senior Counsel, Martin Daly, President of the Law Association, highlights the fact that they deferred that question and 14 weeks later came back to say that they are not providing the information because it could conflict with the constitutional rights of the lawyers to privacy.

So they did not give the information about how much money they spent in legal fees. They never gave it to the Parliament. They said that it could infringe the lawyers’ right to privacy; the public’s right to accountability and the public’s right to know how their money is being spent.

Of course, a further reason was given that it would divert too much resources from the office. I am in that office and unless something radically changes, I can say that is not so because the accounts department keeps records. I was able to get this, quite frankly, in the space of three days.

Mr. Daly said:

“What other information is the Government going to withhold by self-adjudicating that the Constitution itself is a bar? This is really self-adjudicating…

Here you have a situation in which a lawyer is hired by the State; he’s not in public office but he is receiving public money for carrying out work on behalf of the public because he is carrying out work on behalf of the Government…

You are dealing with public funds; public money and the taxpayer has a right to know...

How can you say it is a matter of privacy for the lawyer? What about the client? We are the client!”

That is what Mr. Daly said.

The former head of the Public Service Commission, Kenneth Lalla, Senior Counsel said:

“…government is certainly required to account for the way it spends the taxpayer’s money. I…find it difficult to see a…breach of privacy…”

I think it is totally irrelevant.
Mr. 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. E. George]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, when I mentioned before that the contractors started sending invoices and so on, it was not just in the Ministry of Housing and the Environment, it was everywhere, and I was not immune to that. As the Attorney General, I found there was a gaping hole, the size of which you could not dimension, in the Treasury. That is why I used the analogy of “the nice carpet to hide the rust spots and the leaks.”

You see, the debt I inherited when invoices started coming was $30,724,145 for unpaid legal fees. That is not for work that anybody did when we assumed Government, that was for work done before; $30.7 million unpaid legal bills under the PNM. In the last three months since the general election was called, they paid out about $20 million in legal fees, briefing out everybody. “Briefs share out and money pay out, but people who already do work, they leave them in the queue.” So, what could I do? I had to pay these bills. So $30.7 million went to pay your bills. That is what the Opposition did not tell the population.

Mr. President, the total sum paid—this is a question they have asked on the Order Paper in Parliament, and I saw an editorial in the Guardian saying that I should answer it and so on. I was prepared to answer that question at the first and earliest opportunity when the Parliament convened, but it being the budget debate, the convention is that you do not answer questions, but this is the answer, and I would give it to you now.

The total sum paid in legal fees for the period June 01, 2010 to August 30, 2011 is $45.5 million. The exact figure is $45,502,626. Of that figure, however, $31 million went to pay legal bills incurred under the previous administration. In other words, 67 per cent of the money I spent on legal bills was to clear off debts that I inherited. A mere $14.7 million was paid for work done under the People’s Partnership. Those are the facts.

What was that money being paid for, that 67 per cent that I had to pay? Mr. President, $31 million, do you know what it was for? It was for all sorts of crazy investigations; all sorts of matters. I mean, things running in parallel, duplication. I had to pay bills for investigations by the Ministry of the Attorney General into a
man named Dr. Keith Rowley, the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He was being investigated. The PNM was investigating Dr. Keith Rowley. They were investigating other members of their own Cabinet for certain international financial transactions. If you accuse us of being on a witch-hunt, ask yourself—look at the four fingers pointing back the other way—why your own Government was investigating you? If your own Government could not trust you, how could the people of this country ever trust you? [Desk thumping]

Money was spent on the Justice Anisette Sealy Commission of Enquiry into the Landate matter to deal with the allegation that State materials were being siphoned away from the Scarborough hospital project into Dr. Rowley’s private Landate development. And the Commission of Enquiry—Justice Sealy found that there was a prima facie case to be answered, and that matter, I say no more, because it is still alive and pending before the Anti-Corruption Bureau.

To add insult the injury, Mr. President, when I thought the worst was over, I got a letter dated April 14, from Charles Russell & Company, our standing Privy Council agents for the State from London, and I was shocked. As I said, leaks continuously spring. You plug one and you feel you could sail, and then you see three more appear. After I paid out $31 million to clear out their debts, I got a letter dated April 14, 2011—I will make it available. Anybody who wants to see it, I have walked with copies. They said for the period 2003—2010 they have bills that are unpaid amounting to $7 million, so I have to find that now.

You see, let us get down to brass tacks. What is causing all of this is the fact that the budget catered $50 million for the probes, and they are worried for those probes. “They are real worried; they jumpy.” It is the political Achilles heel of the PNM, because they know that corruption is entrenched in the PNM, and it is part of their political DNA. That is the reality. Mr. President, $50 million for 14 corruption probes! I just quoted figures, $72 million for the Piarco; $50 million for the Uff Commission of Enquiry; the Anisette Sealy Commission of Enquiry and the Biche Commission of Enquiry. They could investigate everybody, but nobody must investigate them. I want to tell them that the Constitution and the rule of law say that no man or woman shall be above the law, but shall all be subject to the rule of law. [Desk thumping]

The money will be spent on these probes, but the idea is that they are legal fees and I would give them out to partners all about. Let me tell you something, the majority of the money on these probes, as they well know, goes to the forensic accountants, the auditing firms and other experts who are required to testify. My budget for this year including that is $94.5 million.
Let me remind you of some of the corruption matters: T&TSEC, Sport Company, Petrotrin, UTT, Scarborough hospital, e TecK, HDC, UDeCott, Calder Hart. MV Su, NIDCO, the G-Pan matter, the church at Guanapo Heights and the sale of BWIA slots—14 matters.

They then say friends, they are calling names. I asked the accounts department to give me the top 15 in terms of payments made, and not one of the names they called featured. I will give them:

AlixPartners, for the period June 01, 2010—August 31, 2011. This is the period they asked for in the question on the Order Paper in the other place, and this is the breakdown for the top 15 payments. What is paid and what is owed, I tallied it and I gave a total. AlixPartners Forensic Accounting Firm: they did all the work on UDeCott, e TecK and Petrotrin and so on. In total they were paid $17.7 million. That is a forensic accounting firm.

Charles Russell & Company, Privy Council agents, coming in second, $14.75 million. That would, of course, include all the inherited bills from the PNM that they did not pay the people for.

Ernst & Young Accounting Firm, $11.8 million; Vincent Nelson, Queens Counsel from Jamaica—well, he is really a member of the UK Bar, $4.264 million.

Astigarraga Davis, a US law firm, again, involved in working under the previous administration, $2.826 million; Lindquist Forensic Accounting Services, $2.8 million; AFA Law, UK firm of solicitors, $2.588 million; Mr. Avery Sinanan SC, $2.5 million; Mr. James T. Lewis QC, $2.322 million; Miss Dana Seetahal SC, $2.154 million; Mr. Russell Martineau SC, $1.730 million; Mr. Alan Newman QC, $1.591 million; Mr. Douglas Mendes SC, $1.589 million; Sir Fenton Ramsahoye QC, $1.464 million and Mr. Kelvin Ramkissoon, $1.395 million. Those are the top 15 payments.

I am not going to do like the PNM and say they have a right to privacy, “ah cyar tell yuh”, because this money comes from the public purse, it is the public paying it and they have a right to know, and that is why the People’s Partnership is committed to transparency and integrity in public life and we will disclose what you have failed to disclose, but have the gall to demand that we now disclose. [Desk thumping] We have nothing to hide; we have nothing to hide, but all of this added up together would not even give you the cost of one of the corruption investigations they pursued; whether it is the Piarco Airport project; whether it is the UDeCott Commission of Enquiry, nothing! You know, we are so proud to open that Biche High School after what they did with that commission of enquiry and the children of Biche. We have no qualms about it; we will pursue these corruption allegations.
You see, Mr. President, it is very rare to find one country where you have a coalition government: the People’s Partnership and a coalition Opposition, co-existing in the Parliament. You see, the Calder Hart matter has split them down the middle. Some want to stand and continue to protect him and others do not.

We have been wearing proudly, under the distinguished and visionary leadership of the hon. Kamal Persad-Bissessar—she gave us all a gift when we assumed office and the gift she purchased herself was the flag of Trinidad and Tobago. We have been wearing the flag of Trinidad and Tobago on our jackets to show this country that inside our heart when we discharge our public duties it is Trinidad and Tobago.

We see for the first time our friends on the Opposition giving hints and making political overtures that they want to come and join the People’s Partnership. They are now wearing a tie with a national flag. They have discarded the balisier tie. [Desk thumping] It has become a political litmus test to determine the extent of the split in the coalition in the Opposition, because you have a lot of them—well over here, of course, they are all appointed, and they have to follow the leader and they have to wear that tie otherwise they could be “dis-appointed”, they could be moved. But look at where the real power in the elected Chamber resides and you will see what is going on. You have a man and a woman proudly wearing that balisier tie to support Mr. Manning and two or three of them supporting Dr. Rowley. So the coalition in the Opposition, it seems to be that the fissures and the cleavage is showing, and what we have really is a split down the middle with two persons wanting to be two Opposition leaders, and right now one is de facto and the other is de jure. [Desk thumping]

You see, Mr. President, they are the ones who have raised the issue of the corruption probes. They are the ones who have raised, “Who is getting all this money”, forgetting that they never told the population. They are the ones who forget that they have come full circle from Johnny O’Halloran to Calder Hart. They are the ones who want us to forget that they were the ones who hounded Sat Sharma out of the office of the Chief Justice and had a “next” enquiry. They forget these things.

Mr. President, the civil action will take place simultaneously. The DPP has his work to do and we respect that, and the criminal cases will be a matter for the DPP, but let us not forget, there was never sufficient evidence to convict Al Capone in a criminal court. It was in the civil court for tax evasion and, I think, mail fraud. OJ Simpson escaped the murder charge, but he was found guilty in the civil courts for wrongfully causing the death of his wife and he was made to pay. So, we know what we have to do. The rule of law requires that we pursue it and pursue we shall, Mr. President.
Mr. President, we have announced a series of actions that we will be taking like Petrotrin, the Gas-to-Liquids project, UDeCott for the Brian Lara Cricket Academy and the Ministry of Legal Affairs Towers. That Petrotrin matter is a disgrace. How can you move, on the one hand, from entering into a joint venture business partnership with a company that is expected to provide finance while you provide the expertise and, at the end of it all, you will take all the risks and sign a guarantee for the other company and yourself and the thing is being called in without any due diligence being done? The claim against the former board members in that Petrotrin matter is in the vicinity of $600 million. Six hundred million dollars, that is the claim.

In the e TecK matter, they went in with Bamboo Networks and paid them US $5 million and that company turned out to be a whole straw company. They have no assets; they have nothing! It is a sham! A sham corporation! No investigation, and they paid US $5 million! We are trying to trace the funds, but do you know what happened? Like it disappeared into thin air! “Every man, jack, gone off with it and you are seeing the boomeranging, coming straight back to Trinidad and Tobago.” We know what went on.

3.30 p.m.

In the other House one man beats his chest and says, “Allyuh jail meh nuh,” like a “bad john.” But I want to remind him that in the Express of July 01, 2010, in an article written by Darren Bahour it said:

“The Integrity Commission has forwarded a confidential report to Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Roger Gaspard, recommending a criminal probe on former prime minister Patrick Manning and former government Minister Hedwige Bereaux.”

Gaspard last night confirmed that he had received correspondence from the Integrity Commission to this effect on Monday relating to the Maha Sabha radio licence case and that he was in the process of reviewing the report.

A year has passed since that time, but we know that is a matter that will take some time, and we respect the DPP’s decision in those matters, but rest assured, as night follows day, it will come.

Mr. President, when I spoke as I stood here a year ago, I indicated that I was committed to carrying out the responsibility vested in me by section 76(2) of the Constitution of this country, to represent the State, to assert the rights of the State and to vigorously defend the State, but also to have a measure and dose and splash
of compassion for the man in the street, when he has to take on the State and do battle with the almighty Goliath. I am proud to say that I have done that in the almost two years that we have been here.

The one bugbear that has bedevilled the budget debate, as it pertains to my Ministry, has to do with those corruption probes. I make no apologies to anyone, with the support of the Prime Minister, her Cabinet and my colleagues on this side, to pursue those corruption matters. I want to remind Trinidad and Tobago of what Lee Kuan Yew said about Singapore’s recovery. He said:

“Singapore can survive only if ministers and senior officers are incorruptible and efficient…Only when we uphold the integrity of the administration can the economy work in a way which enables Singaporeans to clearly see the nexus between hard work and high rewards.

Corruption control is not viewed simply as a moral issue.”—It is not simply—“a matter of virtue...”—It is a matter of absolute “necessity.”

We may be the children of history, but we are the parents of the future. Let us join hands to create a better and brighter future for our children, and let us pursue corruption to the hilt.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds: Mr. President, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in God’s sight.

I too would like to join my colleagues in this Senate who spoke earlier, to extend warmest and sincerest Divali greetings to members of the Hindu faith of Trinidad and Tobago and the world. To all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago I say Sita Ram, Shubh Divali. [Desk thumping]

Sadly, at this time of celebration, the Government has performed in such a manner that I must put on record that the budget presented by them for the last fiscal and this fiscal, appears to have had no “barakat”. What a shame and what a pity.

Hon. Senator: “Dey doh know what barakat mean.”

Sen. F. Hinds: Instead of providing you, at this time of celebration and since the last budget, with “pani” they have given you vinegar. [Desk thumping] They have giving you wine to drunken you. [Laughter]

I did not propose to be distracted by the contribution of the Attorney General, but he has made a few comments that I am obliged to respond promptly and properly to. For one, he spoke of the Scarborough Hospital. He directed comments to my friend, Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe. I want him to know there were issues around the Scarborough Hospital project; there is no doubt, that is common knowledge. At
one point there was a claim by NHIC, the company involved, for $260 million against the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The upshot of that was that he was able to prevail for far less and we saved this country $154 million.

But more importantly, I want the Attorney General to understand that today, as we speak—and there was a report in the newspaper this week where a court made an award against the very contractor—that very contractor is performing contractual works building schools for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, since they came to office. [Desk thumping] A very important point.

We saw a similar situation with the runway at Piarco. It was paved, apparently badly done, by a big company in this country, and that company is still today performing work for that Government in this country. Only to demonstrate, as I think Sen. Dr. Tewarie may have broached, and certainly Sen. Dr. Balgobin may have also broached. We have some more systemic problems in Trinidad and Tobago that require a far deeper and closer analysis, if we are to take this country from one stage to another. There is a small pool of these major contractors that we find ourselves relying on constantly, and on the occasion when we sought to get those skills from outside, local operators complained about foreigners. We have some problems.

As I have said to this Attorney General and this Government before, to open their eyes from the narrow and myopic approach that they would often take, corruption has nothing to do with a political party. It has to do with the sinful and greedy nature of the human being, who is an opportunist, and he has taken it under the NAR, he has taken it under the PNM and he has taken it under the UNC. In fact, it is in their very bosom, I pointed it out to them already. A Minister of Government for that Government left early, one Mary King. So do not get “tie up” with this thing called corruption. Let me say for the record, in conclusion on that particular point, you will never have a crime free or corruption free world unless you can achieve a sin free world.

Not only Mr. Panday, “it have” plenty other people in this country who are willing to sleep with the devil. They “ent” get a chance yet. I guarantee, in conclusion, when they go out of office, which will not be very long, there will be more corruption to investigate. [Desk thumping and laughter]

I also want to say, Mr. President, en passant, yes we spent $52 million on the Uff Enquiry, but that gave the people of this country the high expectation that in the full public glare all the allegations they made about UDeCott were ventilated on television, on radio and documented. The expert Uff was brought to bear on the
matter and a team. Arising out of that $52 million exercise, 91 recommendations were made for our future direction and benefit. What have they done with it? They have not even been able to pass improved procurement legislation in the 18 months they have been there. So are we building a nation or are we building a hut? Where are we going?

I am satisfied, that is why I would not be distracted by him. This country is tired of the toing and froing and who “tief” and who corrupt. That is why I do not want to be too much a part of that. I want to press on.

But before that, he told us that during the Uff Enquiry, the Prime Minister at the time, Mr. Patrick Manning, was seen toasting somewhere with Calder Hart. That might be bad, but you know what? Not only that the current Prime Minister, is toasting with a certain individual who is under a police enquiry in their Cabinet, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, but she left him to act as Prime Minister recently. [Desk thumping] So toasting is one thing, but to leave him to act as a Prime Minister in charge of the Treasury and the cheese is quite another. [Interruption] I know, innocent until proven guilty. “Yuh hear de Minister of National Security?” But when he sent the police to lock up 464 men and women across this country, with no evidence, under the anti-gang legislation, he did not know innocent until proven guilty. [Desk thumping] He did not know that. [Interruption] I am not giving way.

Sen. Brig. Sandy: I did no such thing. I am not the Commissioner of Police.

Sen. Ramlogan: Mr. President, on a point of order.

Sen. F. Hinds: What is the point of order?

Sen. Ramlogan: Please take a seat and listen to it.

He is imputing improper motives to the Minister of National Security by saying he directed and he caused them to go and arrest “fellas” without evidence. The police performed their duties and they arrested. That is a matter for the police. The Minister of National Security gave no such directive and the Minister of National Security does not play a role in police enforcement and the operational aspect of policing on the ground. It is improper motives, and it is wrong.

Hon. Senator: What is the point of order?

Mr. President: Senator, I will not allow you to make those statements regarding the Minister of National Security. [Desk thumping]
Sen. F. Hinds: Mr. President, the Attorney General also boldly told us, perhaps truthfully, “Calder Hart did not know who was he brother-in-law? I mean, he did not ask he wife?” You know something, recently members of the media in Trinidad and Tobago approached a Minister by the name of Stephen Cadiz, the Minister of Trade and Industry, asking about the fact that he was involved in the rental of equipment for all his years. Suddenly, now that he has become a Minister, his wife is building houses—repairing schools, sorry, under a Government-funded programme. He said he knew nothing about it, and he going home and sleep every night. “Never ask he wife.” I want the Attorney General to investigate that. [Desk thumping and laughter]

As I told you, I did not want to be distracted with that, so let me go ahead with my budget contribution. [Laughter]

Just as a corrective, en passant, yet again, the Attorney General is schooled in the law, but I want him to know that in the United States—he spoke of Al Capone—tax evasion and mail fraud are criminal offences. Therefore Al Capone was prosecuted criminally for those and not civilly, as he is now engineering, a matter to which I shall later return.

Finally, you see this tie? These are the national colours of Trinidad and Tobago. They existed before you were born and certainly before “de ting” called PP ever came to be known in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] This is not yours, and no national pin “eh” yours. [Crosstalk] “Dat is all ah we own.” [Interuption]

Sen. Ramlogan: There is room for all in the Partnership, my friend. Room for all.

Sen. F. Hinds: I want you to know as for me, I Fitzgerald Hinds, my email address is fhpnm56@gmail.com. They call me “PNM Hinds”. [Desk thumping] I want you to know, I have about one dozen Balisier ties. I love them all and I will wear them when I am ready. You cannot change that, you cannot stop that. [Desk thumping] I was PNM since “ah born”. I am PNM now and I will be PNM for the foreseeable future. “I doh want no part of PP. I doh want no part of UNC.” I am PNM. [Desk thumping] I am PNM. I am proud of Dr. Williams and what he has done. I am proud of the PNM and what it has contributed to this party. That is why I present myself here regularly to articulate the philosophy. [Interuption]

Sen. Ramlogan: “I now see why Manning say you are an apprentice.”

Sen. F. Hinds: And to articulate the positive contribution we have made, and educated most of the people who “bad talk” the PNM, including the PP Government in this country, if today I choose to wear this tie, it does not take
away one iota from my “PNMness”. As a matter of fact, as my friend, Sen. Deyalsingh, told us today, there is no political party called “PP”. Yours is a concoction, a figment of your political imagination. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] “You cyar set no tempo for us with this. We wear it when we ready.”

Sen. Ramlogan: I dare you to wear the Balisier tie and come here. They will brand you a Manning supporter.

Sen. F. Hinds: Mr. President, let me for the parliamentary record and for the record of the national community, the Leader of the PNM, as it stands today— [ Interruption ]

Sen. Ramlogan: Which one? Which one?

Sen. F. Hinds:—gave us no instruction or no direction. We have chosen. That is not your business.

Hon. Senator: Which one of the leaders?

Sen. F. Hinds: The PNM has one leader. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I do not want to waste my time on that Attorney General. [Laughter]

Hon. Senator: That next leader will deal with you.

Sen. F. Hinds: You will notice that in the other place and in here, all my colleagues of the proud PNM, really have raised the standard of this budget debate. [Desk thumping] We have dealt almost exclusively with an analysis of the budgetary proposals. We have done that. It is the Government who raised these issues about UDeCott and Mr. Manning. It is the Prime Minister who raised the question of race, and you heard the Attorney General raise it again today, talking about 93 per cent and 7 per cent under the little assistance programme out of Community Development.

Hon. Senators: Awww!

Sen. F. Hinds: I want to say one thing to Mr. Attorney General and the Prime Minister, this question of race is a very touchy and sensitive issue. You do not play fast and loose with it.

It explains largely why we seldom deal with that question here, notwithstanding the fact that we know it can be dealt with and must be dealt with intellectually without the wild passions, and a Prime Minister, in particular, has to be particularly careful in dealing with those matters. All over the Internet, all over
the talk shows for the last 48 hours has to do—and some horrible things are being said—about this question of a very sensitive matter in this multiracial society—very, very sensitive.

3.45 p.m.

Sen. Ramlogan: The truth shall prevail, my friend; the facts are there.

Sen. F. Hinds: So you all go ahead playing with it; go ahead stoking it. Go ahead, you and your Prime Minister; go right ahead!

Sen. Ramlogan: You cannot scare us. The truth is the truth: 93—7

Sen. F. Hinds: Mr. President, the Prime Minister, in the other place, did not respond to the issues raised from the Opposition regarding the budget. One of the points the Leader of the Opposition made was that if you continue—you know, Iwer George has a song: “Fete after fete, after fete, after fete.” If you continue with debt after debt, after debt, after debt, there is a thing and a place called the IMF that is waiting on you. [Desk thumping] We raised that question. We warned the Government, tell us; yes we are now running three consistent years of deficit financing, how and when are we going to segue out of that? Tell us the plan. The Minister of Finance did not; the Prime Minister did not, instead she chose to tell us something about race.

There is trouble ahead if we cannot work out a meaningful departure from this three years of deficit funding. You heard this morning, the first two years the deficit was funded from our savings, our surpluses. On this occasion it has gone in the other direction now; it is by borrowing. In fact, it is the largest borrowing ever in the history of the country. The figures are there, from 2003 onward, one point something billion dollars borrowed; this one, $7.6 billion. And we can borrow. We are an attractive borrower, because Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s have given us ratings that would make many other countries envy.

Hon. Senator: Thanks to the PNM.

Sen. F. Hinds: So we can borrow. But borrowing is one thing; you have to be clear about how you will repay. And when they accused us of wanton spending, we were doing it at a time when we had surpluses. To be spending like they want to do now—you see, but they do not want to take hard decisions.

I understand that there is a fight going on in their Cabinet where there are those who are saying cut back on certain social recurrent programmes and expenditures, and the Minister of Finance is saying—I understand he is one of
them, but there are other forces in the Cabinet saying, no, do not cut them. So they are borrowing to carry on. The day will come—and this is why we know they are deceitful, you know. We know that, you know. We have seen it with the Reshmi affair; we have seen it a thousand times. Things are never what they seem with that Government. But truths are stubborn things; they do not go away.

Long before the Attorney General got up, I had some notes here regarding the $95 million budgeted to his Ministry to deal with his forensic investigations. He gave us a long and impressive list today about all the attorneys: Russell Martineau, Dana Seetahal, James Lewis, Bob Lindquist, and all the others. I had a brief or two from the State myself; nothing in the realm of this.

Sen. Ramlogan: Because you are not in that realm.

Sen. F. Hinds: That is all right. But I will tell you one thing, in all these cases I am almost certain these lawyers were contracted by the Ministry of the Attorney General to pursue actual cases that were in the courts or about to go to the court, case numbers included. The difference between this and the $50 million, of which the Attorney General spoke, is that his so-called A-team—and let me just remind us. He identified for us an A-team which consisted of Sir Allan Newman, a Queen’s Counsel, well known to Trinidad and Tobago, and better known to him, the AG; worked very, very closely for many years. In fact, I am being told that he is a door tenant in his Chambers.

Let me get the names for you: one Akbar Ali, a Guyanese attorney-at-law, but operating in the United Kingdom; again, very close to Sir Fenton Ramsahoye, very close to the Attorney General—no problem—Mark Seepersad, a local and Gerald Ramdeen, a local, and a forensic accountant by the name of Martin Hall. That is his five-man A-team.

Fifty million dollars—now, last year it was $33 million. He said that $30 million of that was used to spend on old debts, but he came midterm—he did not tell us that—and got an extra $45 million. He only spoke about the $33 million, you know, and that $30 million went to pay old bills. He did not remind us that midterm he came and got $45 million. And last year he spent $108 million. So $108 million plus the $95 million this year—this is why we identified in two years it is $200 million. [Desk thumping] And not for any case like Mr. Martineau’s and Dana’s where they go in the Court of Appeal or they go in the High Court and prosecute on behalf of the Attorney General; something that has been happening since Independence and probably before; that is just to go inside T&Tec and Sport company to dig up the books on a search mission—$95 million
in this fiscal. So whether they find or they do not find, $95 million spent, and therein lies the unique difference. When he was questioned about it—it was put to him in the other place that those people are his friends, he was bold enough to say—and I am quoting him, “I don’t know if Dr. Rowley expects me to hire my enemies.” “Nuff said.”

So we will wait and we will watch. At any rate, that kind of investigation into the conduct of public officers, Ministers and board chairmen, is the duty of the Integrity Commission under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. But in this fiscal, they budgeted a mere $30 million or $35 million for the Integrity Commission, starving the Integrity Commission, while $95 million goes to him, the Attorney General, to decide who to give, how to give, when to give and who to go after. Therein, too, lies a simple difference. It is the Integrity Commission that ought to be doing this, but not so with this Government. This has to have a political element to it. It is the Attorney General, a supreme politician, ace politician, who is driving this, and going after people with his so-called civil suits. The DPP told us recently that up to now he has not seen any file to contemplate any criminal issues around UDeCott or Calder Hart. He told us that.

So the Attorney General is experimenting at great cost with civil actions, because he realizes that there are no, or possibly—at least at any rate at this stage—criminal elements to prosecute. So he has found a new way, civil actions. So I was a Minister of government; I made a decision to purchase a building on behalf of the government or the ministry, two years later the Attorney General comes now to second-guess what I did as a Minister, and to take a decision that I should not have done it and sue me now in my personal capacity. Where will I get the file and the facts to defend myself? Who will pay my legal bills? I acted as a Minister or a board chairman. Who in this country will want to be a board chairman again, with an Attorney General like that and a PP thing like that in Government? [Desk thumping]

And I will also tell you, a UNC Attorney General built files against his own colleagues. You never know, the Attorney General may one day want to second-guess some of you, so you all better keep a good relationship with him, like he has with the Prime Minister. But I do not want to be distracted with those things, you know; I want to concentrate on my budget analysis, and I will not be distracted.

Sen. Vasant Bharath spoke very loftily a couple evenings ago, or last evening, I think it was. He was complimented by Sen. Dr. Tewarie. He boasted that the largest distribution of land that has ever taken place in the history of this country was the 4,500 acres that he made available to farmers recently. I did some research and found that as far back as 1960 when the Yankees left this place, in Wallerfield and
Carlsen Field, the then PNM Government distributed 22,000 acres of land for agriculture. [Desk thumping] So I just wanted to correct the record in that regard, because they “does” forget, you know. I also want to tell him that over the years—“leh meh doh waste no more time with him, eh. Leh me doh waste any more time with Mr. Bharath”, except to say that yet again—to tell you how these people are vicious and deceptive and would not stop. Sometime ago, that same Mr. Bharath, well-spoken as he is, got up in this Parliament and made an issue about a $50 million investment in an EFPA with Clico, made by a man called Utharo Rao of the EMBD, and I took the official record from a Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, which I chaired, and read the record. Questions were put by Sen. Karim and others; Sen. Panday, as he then was, before they kicked him out to end the Panday dynasty, which they feared, and still fear.

4.00 p.m.

We asked questions of the EMBDC and the answers were patent and clear, unambiguously clear, that while the EFPA had to be invested in the name of an individual and Mr. Rao did it, the payer was the EMBDC, the beneficiary was the EMBDC and Mr. Rao gained no personal benefit from it. Having said all of that, you know this PP operator came back last night and repeated it again. Mr. President, what should I do?

This is not about me; I have no brief for Rao; I have never met him; I do not know him; I am not interested, but my leader has taught me on the principle of—and talking about principle, the PNM was founded on two principles which we stand by resolutely: morality in public affairs and interracial solidarity as it was then called. [Desk thumping] My leader taught me as I came to Parliament in 1995, Dr. Keith Rowley told me, “Young man, one thing you must understand when you speak in the Parliament you must speak the truth. You cannot lie here.” [Desk thumping] [Interruption] But for them anything goes, and when I say anything I mean anything.

I saw the Minister of Finance entertaining his colleagues in the other place, having a good laugh. They could laugh. Things are nice with them, they have good jobs; well-off, well-fed, highly paid, but there are people in Trinidad and Tobago—last Saturday I was in the Maraval area speaking to a group of persons and they were reminding me that they are—they were telling me, I mean, and this is common knowledge, it “ha” poor people in Trinidad and Tobago; people who have it difficult to make ends meet. So while they laugh, the reality is the people out there want to know what we as Government and Opposition are doing at this level to make their lives better? Some cannot find food, some cannot buy books for their children, some have no shelter, some are losing their businesses, while, as I said, they have cushy jobs, and these people have nothing to laugh at.
The state of emergency as it now exists does not make anything any better. Does not make it better! Many people as a result of it have been losing their jobs. The restaurants and the entertainment industry are suffering as a consequence of inexplicable or yet unexplained justification for a state of emergency. I looked out of my window a few nights ago and when I looked at the main road and stood there for about 10 minutes and saw not a car go by, not even a dog, I asked myself, what came upon this Prime Minister to shut down my country? [Desk thumping] What came upon this lady—sorry, the Prime Minister, to just shut down the economy and shut down the country because you want your crime statistics at the end of 2011 to look good? [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, we asked a number of serious questions in the Lower House, we did not get it. Let me just remind this Government what they met when they came. I have already alluded to it, Standard and Poor’s and Moody’s, it was A, A-, A+, high up in the rankings; credit ratings very, very tall. The budget before they came to office was $49 billion now they have gone to $54 billion, almost $55 billion; unemployment when they came to office was 4.8 per cent, the lowest in any Caricom country; foreign exchange reserves stood at US $9 billion or TT $56 billion; the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, US $3 billion, approximately TT $19 billion; combined US $12 billion, combined approximately TT $75 billion. That is what they met! Debt to GDP ratio, the enviable 38.5 per cent. In some countries, you heard yesterday, they are grappling with a debt to GDP ratio of over 100 per cent. In other words they have to pay back more than they are earning.

Those are some of the facts that they cannot escape from. Business was booming, admittedly things had started to go down internationally in 2008, but in Trinidad and Tobago, you know we walked through this international recession with relative ease. The people of Trinidad and Tobago did not, up to that point, and perhaps even up to now, feel the full brunt of the international downturn. In some parts of the United States whole areas are like ghost towns, “for sale” signs everywhere, people have moved out, unemployment is double digits in the United States, I am told.

In the United Kingdom they are cutting back on social benefits, people are suffering, but we were able on the basis of the savings that we had accumulated, during all the years of big spending that they told us about, to save enough money so that in our first two deficit budget years, we were able to draw down on our savings to keep the thing going as normal. Now they have started to borrow to keep the thing going. I wish them well, but we knew how to grow the economy, “we knew what barakat was, them have no barakat”. [Desk thumping]
If I put it in Christian rather than in Hindi terms, we understand and practice the philosophy of the two fishes and the five loaves that fed the multitudes, all happily. You just look on the citizens, fat cheeks, well dressed, looking good all over this country for the most part [Laughter] except these who are inflicted with drugs and other natural ailments and so on, and those matters I should come to shortly again, if I have an opportunity. The restaurants flourished. If you go anywhere along Ariapita Avenue, all along the main road, all in Chaguanas, San Fernando; entertainment and restaurants, lavish, the thing was happening; confidence was high. That is what they met. That is what they met, major developments in the major towns.

Whether it was the Waterfront, which was a UNC project; NAPA in Port of Spain and in south, I want to say the very Tower D—I mean it is a “lil” late, but I just want to welcome you all to Tower D [Laughter and desk thumping] because they cussed this place, excuse my coarse language, Mr. President, they ill-mouthed this place for months on political platforms and I only have to wonder, had Tower D not exist where would we have been today? We might have been having this sitting in Rienzi Complex or maybe in Woodford Square. [Interruption]

In terms of human resources, you go through the police service, go through the defence force, go through the teaching service, the public service generally; you would be hard-pressed, subject, of course, to what Sen. Dr. Balgobin said today, we may run the risk of becoming a papered society without education, because the quality of the product needs to be looked at by the professionals—no Government. A number of the problems that they identified and point at the PNM, look a Minister in the Lower House talked about cookies and cookie monster and who was caviar, pork chops and lamb chops and who was sleeping in the Hyatt. Only this morning we have been told, “I never slept a night at the Hyatt”. I have no brief for Madam—what is her name?


Sen. F. Hinds: Rampaul. I do not even know the woman. I am not interested, but it just shows you the extent to which they are now lying without taste as the old people used to say: only for scandal and bacchanal.

Hon. Senator: They are suffering from insomnia.

Sen. F. Hinds: According to the Senator, like they are suffering from insomnia, something worse. [Laughter] You just have to go all the way through; the police, the prison, the coast guard, the fire; you would be hard-pressed to find
persons who have not improved their academic standing and status over the last eight or 10 years! Everybody is going to university, everybody is gaining education, [Desk thumping] through the GATE programme and otherwise, at all levels.

Young people were told by a PNM government that if you get a first class degree in your first degree you are guaranteed state support all the way up to PhD. We opened up the GATE, encouraged our citizens to do their best. As President Robinson told us, it is not so much the political class, but more the professional class that has largely failed Trinidad and Tobago. So it is up to the teachers, it is up to the planners in the universities, it is up to the contractors to do the work. When I hear them talking about building crack and soil moving, that had nothing to do with the Prime Minister or the Minister, it has to do with the professionals in this country who are not delivering the kind of product and value for money.

That is why I tell them we have some more systemic problems, and if they took time to read the 91 Uff recommendations they would see one of them has to do with licensing of tradesmen, electricians and so on, so you could better guarantee a better quality job or work. So because a louvre is hanging from a house, according to the Attorney General, in Balmain, or wherever it might be, an NHA house, you do not come and blame the Minister for that or the PNM for that. Just as how today they want to blame the police for locking up people without evidence. They want to dissociate themselves from it, but in the beginning of this mad campaign it was the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security on the television every day.

Sen. Ramlogan: “When a man gets convicted for murder we does take the credit?”

Sen. F. Hinds: I am not going to be distracted by you, you know.

Sen. Ramlogan: “Ah come back for yuh.” [Laughter]

Sen. F. Hinds: Human resource development, an explosion of that over the last 10 years. Even the much criticized Special Anti-Crime Unit, as far as we knew state-of-the-art investigative technology, and they were improving, they were teaching members of the police service the techniques that they would have learnt at home and abroad and the thing was getting better. But they had a political vendetta against the SAUTT and as they came to office they crashed it. [Interruption]
You heard the Attorney General today, very glibly tell this country in breach of the principle that you must speak sensibly and speak truthfully.

**Sen. Ramlogan:** I would put you in the blimp and send you for a ride.

**Sen. F. Hinds:** You heard him? You heard him tell the country, “We had to cancel the OPV programme because the vessels—plural—were defective”. The Minister of National Security is on record as saying something different and the Prime Minister, but that is how they are crazy and that is why the people are saying, come next election they are going to chase them crazy ball heads out of town. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Ramlogan:** You say that as if you—“by the look on yuh face like yuh believe wha he say boy”.

**Sen. F. Hinds:** I want to tell you one thing, Mr. President; you see how in the community development a small subset, there were some funds, whether it is $45 million, to assist young people who needed support. There were funds to assist single mothers who had children and could not go to school so they provided care givers and so on. That is a small subset. That was not done at the expense of everybody else, you know.

Similarly in the Ministry of Health over the last few years $100 million in scholarships were afforded to employees in the health sector and because we are more sensible and mindful of the sensitivity around race I would not go into percentages as to who get what or who did not get. I would not go into it, because I would be joining the Prime Minister in fuelling those sensitivities unnecessarily in this multiracial land.

**Sen. Ramlogan:** Is that why the Prime Minister say keep it quiet? Keep it quiet!

**Sen. F. Hinds:** What did they say? In light of the statistics I have just read you, “Treasury empty” they said when they came to office; “PNM squandamania”; “there is no money”; “PNM empty the Treasury.” All of that they had to say when they came to office and shortly after.

4.15 p.m.

I heard Minister Vasant Bharath yesterday, talking about the only way you see—we did not tax the people, we are borrowing the money to finance the deficit. What the PNM would have done is tax, tax, tax, forgetting, you know, Mr. President, forgetting that over the last eight years we reduced corporation tax to 25 per cent.
Sen. Ramlogan: Yeah, but you was making a profit?

Sen. F. Hinds: We removed the need to pay tax for any person earning up to $60,000, so there is a whole army of low income earners in this country. [Desk thumping] Once you are not earning over $60,000 you do not even have to file an income tax return. But yesterday you heard Minister Bharath—that is why I tell him he should be punished. I should get about 50 paw paws and make him count every seed. [Laughter and desk thumping]

Sen. Ramlogan: I find you talking better with that tie on boy. [Laughter]

Hon. Senator: Comic relief. That is all it is, comic relief.

Sen. F. Hinds: This is nothing to joke about you know. This is nothing to joke about. Mr. President, if the word “lie” was not unparliamentary I would have describe them as liars. But I cannot and will not. They are dangerous and they pose the greatest threat to the people of this country, worse than dengue. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: Pose a great threat to the People’s National Movement.

Sen. F. Hinds: I do not want to be distracted you know, so let me continue focusing on you, Mr. President. [Laughter]

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

Motion made: That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. A. Ramlogan]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. F. Hinds: As you know I am an attorney-at-law. I practise in the civil and criminal courts and this morning I went to court.

Sen. Beckles: You forgot to thank the AG for extending your time.

Sen. F. Hinds: Oh, I am so sorry. Might I thank the hon—that is the only good thing he has done. [Laughter] It is the only good thing you have done for a long time. May I thank you for extending my time. [Laughter] “Ah so vex, I almost forget.” Mr. President, I went to court this morning and professionally I should have been very satisfied that my two clients were able to walk away from the courts without having to even answer to any charge. These were two young men who were charged under the Anti-Gang Act, under the inspiration of the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security.
Hon. Senator: Inspiration?

Sen. F. Hinds: Yes, inspiration. Get up and call another Standing Order for that one. So, Mr. President, only day before yesterday I had the two so-called big fish whom they paraded up and down the papers, the two big fish who were caught at the Hyatt. They walked yesterday as well—day before yesterday, not having to answer any charge. I represented one of them.

Sen. Ramlogan: Oh God! Oh Lord!

Sen. F. Hinds: But it saddens me, Mr. President, to see the extent to which the criminal justice system of this country has been brought into abject disrepute because of that. It saddens me to see the police officers some of whom who work so honestly and so hard leaving the courts with their shoulders slumped, chins on their chests, dejected, frustrated, discombobulated even— [Laughter]

Sen. Beckles: “You was waiting for that, eh!”

Sen. F. Hinds: —as they walked out of the courtroom seeing perhaps guilty people go free and certainly having to deal with the question of a lot of innocent people having been arrested and kept with no bail. I am talking about that. This Government has the distinction today of not having built any school or health facility in this country since it came into office. Not one! All they have succeeded in building so far, is a jail in Santa Rosa. [Desk thumping] And putting people there without evidence and without bail.


Sen. F. Hinds: And I understand they have leaking problems, and the roof is just falling in, just like the political roof and the spiritual roof, falling in on that vicious PP Government—$50 million worth of jail with no bail and no evidence.

Sen. Ramlogan: I will have to carry you to Biche High School.

Sen. F. Hinds: That was built long before you came.

Sen. Ramlogan: Yeah, but the UNC built it and you all closed it.

Sen. F. Hinds: And the people on the ground they are saying that they missed the two real big fish who were in the Hyatt you know. They had two “fellas” who had some bribery deal and so on with big money that passed through the Hyatt. [Desk thumping] One of them FIFA banned him some time ago, and the other one escaped the FIFA process and ran and hid in the Cabinet of the PP. He is now under police investigation. The people on the ground are saying “them” is the two big fish who they really missed in the Hyatt.
Mr. President, I do not want to be distracted by these two gentlemen opposite you know, I want to remain focused. I am now asking the Prime Minister, because we are here budgeting and dealing with matters, Office of the Prime Minister pays the—and the various Ministries pay the particular Cabinet Ministers. And we are here dealing with that, a $54 million budget. So it behoves me to ask the Prime Minister, if part of the money we are budgeting here is to pay the Minister of Works and Infrastructure who is now under a police investigation, acknowledged to be so by the Commissioner of Police, if she is going to continue with the wait and see position she took and why would she, Mr. President—[Interruption]

**Sen. George:** On a point of order, Mr. President, 35(8).

**Mr. President:** Sen. Hinds, it would appear that you are bringing into question the conduct of persons who are part of the House of Representatives, and that under 35(8), you are not permitted to do so.

**Sen. F. Hinds:** I am grateful to you, Mr. President, and if I did, I will not bring into question the conduct of anyone again, but I am going to ask, as I am permitted to do, whether it is not for the Prime Minister of this Republic to decide on moral and ethical grounds, whether one of her Ministers who is under as a fact, a police investigation, arising out of serious criminal allegations whether it is not for her to make a decision rather than look for a legal opinion from her hapless Attorney General. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. President:** You cannot refer to the Attorney General in those terms.

**Sen. F. Hinds:** Okay. Let me rearrange the words a bit, the suffix and I will say, happy Attorney General *[Laughter]*

So, Mr. President, as the time for my contribution has wound to its conclusion there are a number—I have about eight more minutes. Mr. President, I would look to say that as we budgeted, I heard them speak loftily about CEPEP. You know I heard one government Minister when I was in the other place describe CEPEP workers as “corbeaux”. I heard another one who is now the acting CEO at WASA describe CEPEP workers as pigs eating at the trough. I heard them insult CEPEP workers. Today I would read on the paper that Minister Moonilal wants to expand CEPEP to marine cleaning. And I have seen how they have all run now for CEPEP. They have taken it from the poor and the pigs and the downtrodden, according to them, and given it to their friends. Would you believe it? A high, high, high, UNC
Appropriation Bill, 2011

Thursday, October 20, 2011

[SEN. HINDS]

official, his wife is a CEPEP contractor, while she holds a deputy chairmanship on a state board. We have a Senator in this Chamber now as we speak, who has six gangs under CEPEP, and he is looking at me.

Hon. Senator: Call his name.

Sen. F. Hinds: And he is looking at me.

Sen. Ramlogan: Do not forget your MP from Laventille who was a CEPEP contractor too.


Hon. Senator: Whaatt? All that?

Sen. F. Hinds: Yeah, six gangs man! No more pigs feeding at the trough. We have a Minister in the Cabinet whose sister runs a firm called RenWar Enterprises Contracting Limited. A Cabinet Minister! I have all the details you know, but I do not want to go there. I just want to prove to you, Mr. President, how they love CEPEP now. [Desk thumping] This vicious motley crew.

Sen. George: On a point of order. Mr. President he is—a vicious mob is not—[Interruption]

Sen. Beckles: “Yuh can’t take a lil joke, waay! You of all people.”

Sen. F. Hinds: I said motley. I did not say mob. I would not call you a mob. [Crosstalk] I would not call you a mob, that will be unparliamentary.


Sen. F. Hinds: Okay, okay he does not want me to use the word vicious. I withdraw the vicious. All right, I withdraw the word vicious. You heard them talk about Calder Hart’s family and all kind of family and family. There is a Minister of Government in the Cabinet of that Govenment, whose wife is the Chair of a State Enterprise, and his brother-in-law is the Chairman of another—Regional Health Authority. And his brother is on the Pharmacy Board. The same Minister.


Sen. F. Hinds: They coil up like snake. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] This same Government. So, Mr. President, there is much more to be said but time has escaped us. I had a lot more to say but time has run. So I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and my colleagues for the opportunity to have made a short intervention
in this budget debate. [Laughter] And to indicate to you that I look forward to being in your company in the future to continue this debate. And I want to close by saying I call on the Prime Minister of this country to do the right, moral and ethical thing and to remove that Minister from the Cabinet and the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to call on the Prime Minister to understand that the state of emergency as now exists, that is a hindrance to national economic growth and ought to be removed. It has outlived its usefulness. They gave us a thousand stories in its justification. They told us that the problem that they sought to deal with has been averted. The logical question therefore is why are you keeping it?

A senior policy officer told me only yesterday, that they, the police, their activity has gone to normal again. The burst of activities of two months ago has gone to normal. There are still a lot of illegal guns beyond the 130 that they collected in this operation. And he is getting a sense because he works in these communities—a senior officer told me yesterday. I do not want to call his name for he would be victimized. But he told me he is getting a sense out there that even the law-abiding people in the communities they are no longer providing the police with information. The sources of information have dried up. The people are now frustrated because they thought that this state of emergency and the removal of the gangsters from their communities would have brought permanent relief to the burdens that they carried at the hands of the gangsters only to see them walk out of jail yet again. Not having to account for some of their ways. And they are afraid and they are upset.

So I call on the Prime Minister, in conclusion, to contemplate these things. The senior officer also told me that he is getting a sense as though there is calm before the storm. I applied my mind closely to that metaphor and in the context of crime it is very frightening. I worked in the national security at some time in the past, the long ago past, and I understand the importance, the imperative of managing crime in this country. I am prepared to give advice to that Minister. The way they went about it the other day was not and cannot be the way. It has to be well thought out, more focused, more intelligence-driven and certainly more sustained. Mr. President, with those words of advice to my friends, I thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon, before you start, it is now 4.32 p.m. I propose to take the tea break at this point and to resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.32 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: When we took the break, Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon was about to get on his legs, I now invite him to do so. [Desk thumping].
Sen. Prof. Harold Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. President, I am indeed pleased to make a contribution—albeit a contribution that is going to be a bit more quiet than the last two contributions—to the debate on the second budget presented by the People’s Partnership Government and set against a landscape of continued economic uncertainty both nationally and internationally. My thanks to you and to fellow Senators. [Desk thumping]

Before I plunge into the debate, I would like to convey Shubh Divali to the Hindu community and to the larger society. [Desk thumping]

The economic crisis that seems to be triggered off by corporate greed and an economic system that may have reached its limit, continues to make headline news around the world almost on a daily basis. It is ironic that Greece a country that has given us laws, it has given us democracy, and it has even given us the theatre, among other things, and where life was guided by the principle, “moderation in all things”, is today the first victim. It is also ironic that the Greeks, who gave mankind hope through democracy, are today a people without much hope.

Mr. President, I would focus mainly on science and technology and education in the budget. And nonetheless, I want to touch or treat with a couple of other issues and matters before I get into education and science and technology. Given the global scenario and the fact that even though our local economy is not in good shape and is not in bad shape either, we must proceed with care. I do not think there is any need for us, at least yet, to press the panic button. In my view, any budget at this stage of our development must do a number of things, or attempt to do a number of things.

First, it must attempt to diversify the economy, post-haste rapid diversification must be our mantra. Second, it must create buffers in the economy to withstand global shocks. Third, it must generate, jobs and avoid layoffs. Fourth, it must protect the weak, the poor and vulnerable in our society. Fifth, it must, of course, raise revenues. Sixth, it must trim the fat, mainly in the form of reducing subsidies. If we trim a bit of fat here and trim a bit of fat there, it is going to add up in the long run. It must also pick the low-hanging fruits such as creating the right environment for the business and private sectors, and most importantly, it must pave the way for a balanced budget by 2013. We have had three deficits budgets, we cannot afford to have a fourth deficit budget.

What it must also attempt to do, is that if there is going to be a downward adjustment it must ensure that it spreads downward the pain from that adjustment,
right across the continuum, from the poor to the rich. In most cases where you have economic hardship, it is the poor and working class people that suffer most.

How does this budget measure up against the criteria that I mentioned above? The budget in my view—let me give you an assessment of my reaction to the budget—is that it sails close to the shore. The budget is creative in parts, it is puzzling in parts also, and it is sensitive to the times. I think it meets most of the criteria that I spoke about earlier; it falls short in generating revenues and trimming the fat. How can we trim the fat?

Mr. President, let me first talk about the fuel subsidy, something that has been mentioned by a number of speakers here, one of the controversial areas. The subsidy was about $4.5 billion last year in a budget of $52 billion that is, almost 9 per cent of the budget. The question is, is this sustainable? There are a number of reasons in my view why we need to do something about this subsidy.

Firstly, subsidies were introduced in the days of plenty when the thinking was that we should all share directly from the God-given natural resources of the country. This is fine, but the days of plenty have come and have gone. That is the stark reality, whether we like it or not. We have had two booms, and in my view we did not make optimal use of those two good times. We did not build extensive infrastructure, we still have roads today not in good shape; we still have a people who do not have access to clean water; there are still people who do not have access to electricity. And what shall I say when we come to the health service? In my view, the health service is still ailing.

Mr. President, I want to diverge a bit here, and I want to mention a tragic incident that occurred recently. On October 10, I was on a Caribbean Airlines flight from Tobago to Trinidad; it left Tobago at 9:05 a.m. Ten minutes before arriving in Trinidad, an elderly gentleman sitting across the aisle from me started gasping for breath, obviously, he was having a heart attack. There was no doctor on board. An airhostess brought oxygen to the gentleman and she did her best. It was a situation where you saw life ebbing away and you just could not do anything about it. One could have only hoped that by the time the flight landed there would have been an ambulance and paramedics on the ground.

Mr. President, there was no such thing when the plane landed. Fifteen minutes after—I was around there watching at what was happening—still no appearance of an ambulance. I was told that it took half an hour, after the plane landed, before an ambulance arrived on the scene, by which time the gentleman had passed away. I think this is most unfortunate. This is our airport, and one would expect response to these kinds of situations taking not half an hour or 40 minutes in this case,
because I am sure the captain would have radioed for help. And so it took over 40 minutes at the airport for an ambulance to get to someone in distress. I think this is not good enough and I am appealing to the hon. Minister of Transport, Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj to investigate this incident. I would also like, Mr. President, to extend belated sympathies to the family.

Mr. President, I have talked about two booms that we have experienced. If we are to ever experience another boom in this country, we would have to develop our human resources, and we would have to use our human intellect. This will not happen today, this will not happen tomorrow, this will not happen in another decade. It took Singapore, one generation to move from a Third World to a First World.

Secondly, I am talking about the subsidy on fuel. Statistics have shown that 20 per cent of the top income earners enjoy 40 per cent of the fuel subsidy. As one, Mr. Mc Guire said in the T&T Review and I quote:

“If equity is indeed the goal, then subsidies are not the most efficient or effective way of accomplishing it. Subsidized energy prices tend to benefit the rich more than the poor.”

Thirdly, we are all aware now of the racket—the diesel fuel rackets brought to our attention by one of our colleagues, Sen. Abdullah. It is amazing that even after months of this disclosure in the Senate some people were still boldfacedly continuing with this racket. It is claimed that the racketeers are selling this fuel beyond our shores and making a million dollar profit monthly. It is also claimed that the sale of diesel went from 5,000 gallons a day to 10,000 gallons a day. It is further claimed that one-third of the subsidy is spent on diesel.

And finally, the fourth reason why we need to do something about the subsidy is that cheap fuel encourages more cars on the road which in turn leads to more road fatalities, leads to more carbon dioxide emission with adverse effect on the climate. We should confront the fuel subsidy problem head-on, frontally and not tangentially. The State in my view can no longer afford a fuel subsidy that is equivalent to 8 and 9 per cent of our (GDP).

What do I suggest? Well, the Government’s strategy in the budget is to apply punitive measures, and if they work we can save up to $1.5 billion but we know in this country one of the problems is implementation. So while I would like to see a saving of $1.5 billion, through punitive measures, I do not hold out much hope for this. My suggestion is that we need to start increasing, incrementally, the prices of
all fuels across the board over a three-year period. By increasing the fuel price incrementally it will prevent—it will create a ripple effect down the economy. And I think that is the way we have to go. By not so doing, I think we are sending the wrong message.

I want to now turn to the effect that the downturn in the economy would have on the vulnerable sectors of the society. We have seen in the USA and the UK poverty has risen in both these countries. In Trinidad and Tobago, there are 17 to 19 per cent of the people living below the poverty line—somewhere between 17 and 19 per cent. Now if those are the official figures, the rate in reality is going to be anywhere around 25 per cent; you can easily add another 5 per cent. So we are talking about 25 per cent of the people living below the poverty line.

Government is hoping to reduce this by 2 per cent annually. The question is, where will the funds come from, and how will this be achieved; what are the strategies? In my view, you need a systematic approach to complementing the good work of the Hon. Minister Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh.

5.15 p.m.

I want to briefly turn to WASA. Recent reports indicate that things have improved at WASA and I want to commend the Minister of Public Utilities, Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George. [Desk thumping] Notwithstanding this, there is still wastage in the system, in our pipes—leaking and ruptured pipes—overflowing tanks, and the staff at WASA is anything but lean. The hon. Minister of Finance, I think, recognized this and went on to say in his budget presentation and I quote:

“The Government will focus on improving the operational efficiency and financial sustainability of WASA.”

Water, Mr. President, some do not realize is a precious commodity; without water, there is going to be no life. In some countries, for example, in Jordan, you get water twice a week; in Yemen, some parts of Yemen, you get water once every fortnight. There are over a billion people in the world who have no access to clean or to running water. There also, is the prediction that in the future, we might see water wars.

WASA, Mr. President, in 2010—I do not have the figures for 2011—earned half a billion dollars; its expenditure was $2 billion, and hence, the State subsidy to WASA was $1.5 billion, and I stand corrected. It has a customer service of 375,000, of which only 13,500 are metered in Trinidad and 500 in Tobago; only 4 per cent of its customers are metered. Mr. President, the time has come for WASA
to expedite its metering programme, and let people pay for what they use, as is the case with TTEC. You will increase your earnings, and at the same time, you will conserve water. When you charge a fixed rate, there is no incentive for people to conserve water.

I would like to see a comprehensive programme with aggressive timelines and a metering department at WASA. These are my recommendations. I am sure under the able leadership of the Hon. Minister, Sen. Emmanuel George, WASA can become a lean and efficient organization.

Mr. President, I want to turn briefly to the CariSal project. From the information that I have here, this project received—there was an environmental impact assessment done, and the certificate was received in 2009. So, I am happy that this project is now coming on stream but I want to warn the Government. You have shut down one project, the Alcoa project, and one has to be careful, one has to make sure that the CariSal project is kind to the environment; and that is my warning with respect to this project.

Mr. President, I now get to education; one of the main areas I want to look at. Education has gotten the largest slice of this year’s budget. Of a total budget of $54.6 million, education and training will get $8.7 billion or 15 per cent of the budget; that is a large slice of the budget. However, given the current economic situation, the focus must shift from spending generously to spending wisely. I want to commend the Governments—past and present—for providing free secondary education for all; without this, Mr. President, many would have been disadvantaged.

I can talk from personal experience, Mr. President. Without help from the Government through an earned exhibition, I would not have been able to see the walls of a secondary school far less the walls of a university, so I know the need for assistance. But, we have to know where to draw the line. I have no problem with free secondary school education, in fact, I have no problem with compulsory secondary education to age 16, but when we come to tertiary education, my approach to funding tertiary education is a bit different than what obtains at the moment. Mr. President, I really to do not see the reason why the State should be funding the tertiary education of the sons and daughters of the well-off in our society. I personally do not see why we have to subsidize that education, more so, since 19 per cent of our population lives below the poverty line.

In addition, we have one of the lowest tax regimes in the world today. So people are not paying high taxes; some of them can afford to pay for the education of their sons and daughters and yet, we are still asking the State to pay for that education. Let me give you an idea of the tax. No individual in this
country, I think, pays more than 25 per cent tax. In the US, it is over 40 per cent; in Sweden, it is 60 per cent; in India, 30 per cent and in neighbouring Barbados, it is 35 per cent. So, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, we enjoy one of the lowest tax regimes, and in addition, we are covering tertiary education cost for many who can afford it. Most of these, when they graduate, leave the country, and I will come to that in a while.

So, Mr. President, with respect to the GATE programme which I think has cost taxpayers $12 million so far—again, I am subject to correction—I am suggesting that we use a means test to determine who would access funding for education at the tertiary level. This is done in a number of countries, and by the way, Mr. President, the cost to taxpayers has gone, with respect to the GATE programme, from $574.3 million in 2008/2009 to $650 million in 2011/2012.

In my view, this programme, in its present form, is not sustainable. The Minister of Finance said that there will be greater scrutiny both at the individual and at the institutional levels; that is a good intention, but the question is the “how”. How are you going to do that? It is not going to be very easy to screen the GATE programme. So, while I support this idea that we need to do a bit of screening, I am suggesting in addition to that, we provide free tertiary education only to those who cannot afford to pay for tertiary education. Mr. President, I want to commend the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for setting up a committee to deal with this problem that is being encountered in GATE.

Mr. President, one of the things, I think, mentioned by the Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, which I fully support, is that we live in a society that depends a lot on the State. The dependency syndrome in this country is extremely high, and we as a people are not going to progress unless we do something about this high dependency syndrome.

Mr. President, I want to go a bit further with respect to education. We have through the years been spending billions of dollars in education; quite a bit of money, as I mentioned earlier. We have to now ask ourselves some very serious questions with respect to education. There are three things we need to look for now. What are the returns on this investment? Are we getting back some returns on this investment? Does our education system meet the needs of today’s highly competitive globalized society? That is, how relevant is our education? And thirdly, are we getting quality education?
Prof. Selwyn Ryan in one of his weekly columns, Mr. President, quoting from a reliable source, said that 79 per cent of our tertiary level graduates are migrating from the country. Now, that is a large number. What this says, is that four out of five of our tertiary level graduates are leaving the country, and if we are spending so much money to provide free tertiary education for our tertiary level students, it means that the countries that are benefiting are countries out there; we are not really benefiting from the expenditure on education in Trinidad and Tobago. Seventy-nine per cent is quite high. I think the figure, in my view, does seem a bit high, particularly given the fact that there is no pull factor in the USA. Most of our graduates go to the USA, there is no pull factor there because the economy in the USA is weak. But, I have to take the figure as it is given; as I said it is quoted from a reliable source.

We need to do something about this high figure. Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie has given us the guarantee that action is being contemplated here. Just, I think, it was not two or three days ago, I was reading on the newspaper where there is a shortage of doctors and nurses—the usual problem—and they are again turning to the Cubans to fill this gap. We are spending so much money to train people, to train our doctors and our nurses, and yet we continue to have a shortage of doctors and nurses in this country. What do you do to this situation? The taxpayers are paying for their training and they are not there to provide service for the people of this country. What did they do in some of the other countries?

In India, for example, if you are going to get a scholarship or help to do your degree or whatever it is, the government ensures that there is some collateral, that your parents either come in with something, land or money or whatever it is, and if your parents are not able, you bring some other relative. Now, I do not know how practical it is to do that here in Trinidad and Tobago, but, what I would like to suggest is that in the medical degree programme or the nursing programme, as an integral part of the programme, you build in a three-year service programme or whatever it is as part of the programme; and the people are not certified until that three-year contract is done for the State. I think that is one suggestion, but something has to be done, we cannot afford to be spending so much money training people, and yet we have shortages in the nursing, medical and in other areas in the society.

Our education system must also be aligned to national development and in this regard many are calling for substantial curriculum reform. Some people take educational reform very seriously; in fact, too seriously. There have been protests in Chile over the last four or five months for educational reform. I do not think that
is the way we would want to go here, but I think we need to look at educational and curriculum reform at all levels in the society. I know the hon. Minister of Education has been looking at reform at the primary school level. In fact, we now have ethics in our school curriculum; we now have science being taught right up to Standard 5; something that we have been advocating. So there have been some attempts to reform the curriculum at the primary school level.

And here, Mr. President, I would like to appeal to the Minister of Education that when it comes to science, science is a very basic and important subject, that we not only teach it up to Standard 4, but it should be tested at the SEA level. A subject, Mr. President, not tested is a subject not learnt.

5.30 p.m.

We also need to know how our students in the high school level are performing; we do not really have any true measure; they all do the same exams. We want to know. Are they being prepared to survive in today’s society? Are they being prepared for the workplace? There is one exam which does this for you. The acronym is PISA, it is the Programme for International Student Assessment. It is a triennial rigorous test to assess what the students know and what they can do in modern society; this test is being organized by the OECD countries.

The last test was done in 2009, and 41 partner countries took part in addition to the 34 OECD countries. Our Republic, Mr. President, and I am pleased to let you know, was one of the partnering countries which took part in that test in 2009. The results are given in three categories: above the OECD average; around the OECD average and below the OECD average. How did our students—and these students who take this exam are at age 15. How did our students do? Well, they did not do too well, they fell in the category significantly below the OECD average, but they did better than some countries in the region, Panama and Colombia.

What we have been saying now, Mr. President, for some time is that we have to reform our curriculum and to better align it to meet the needs of today’s society. And by the way, the top five performing countries in that exam were: City Shanghai, South Korea, Finland, Hong Kong and Singapore. Four out of the five came from the Far East.

Mr. President, while at an average we are not doing as good as we should be doing in the high school, that does not mean to say we are without bright scholars, okay, and I want to give you an example or two. We do have brilliant people; brilliance transcends nationality, and I will give you an example of some of the bright persons we have.
The Massachusetts Institute of Technology takes in approximately 100 students from outside the USA every year for its undergraduate programme. You have students from India, students from China, from Brazil, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, all trying to get into MIT; there are only 100 places. So the competition there is very, very tough.

I am pleased to let you know, Mr. President, for a couple of years on a per capita basis Trinidad was at the top of the list. In one particular year six out of the hundred students at MIT came from Trinidad and Tobago. A president medal winner, Kerry Singh who has a strong DNA link to myself—[Laughter and desk thumping] and who comes from that great college which has produced the likes of—and I think I better be careful here. Let us say it produced the likes of Sen. Al-Rawi, yes—he is also headed for MIT next year. But more than that, the young scholar last year won a silver medal at the International Mathematics Olympiad.

Now, let me put that in some context. As far as I recall, no student in the past, in the wider Caribbean, including Cuba, Venezuela and Colombia, has ever won a gold medal. Kerry Singh’s performance was really outstanding, the first Trinidadian to win a silver medal; we do have brilliant students here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, I now want turn to our universities. Our universities are critical if we are to really strengthen economic development. Last year, I had suggested to the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that he create a national university council. I want to commend him for taking that advice and we now have a National University Council. My only advice, Mr. Minister, at this point is that we should have an annual report from that council and that report should be made available to the public.

Mr. President, I just want to quote with respect to the words of the university’s Sir Alister McIntyre, a former vice-chancellor at the University of the West Indies:

“…who knows whether the University of the West Indies (UWI) might not emerge as principally a ‘topping-up’ and graduate institution at the apex of a network of associated undergraduate colleges? This is an exciting prospect…”

What Sir Alister McIntyre is saying, is that he looks forward to the university being a place where they offer final year programmes, and postgraduate programmes, and that students from other institutes in Trinidad and Tobago could do their first year or two and then proceed to UWI. This is what he was suggesting.
Mr. President, the student population at the St. Augustine Campus is, I understand, approaching 18,000; and let us go back a bit. It has doubled from 5,500 in 2001 to about 11,000 in 2006; five years later, the student population at the campus has doubled. Five years later the increase was 50 per cent to around 16,000; and today it is approaching 18,000. Or, if you want to put it another way, in the last decade the student population at St. Augustine Campus has trebled.

Mr. President, this will undoubtedly lead to a lowering of standards, and consequently make our task of getting UWI in the top 500 universities in the world more challenging; UWI is currently placed at 783. In addition, the St. Augustine Campus is bursting at the seams, literally bursting at the seams.

A worthy colleague of mine at UWI writing to me earlier this year and copying to officials of both UWI and UTT concerning the increasing enrollment at UWI said, and I quote:

“I am not sure this is such a good idea—talking about the increase, the substantial increase—I believe that the St. Augustine Campus is already at maximum capacity in terms of the number of students it can handle and the ability of the economy to absorb the kinds of graduates that we produce. I think that the original concept of UTT was sound; I think that we need the UTT and perhaps other kinds of TLIs (tertiary level institutes). The UWI should level off its enrollment and the UTT enrollment allowed to increase.

The UTT has the greater capacity to increase student enrollment, the University of the West Indies should continue its tradition of high quality research and excellence in teaching. The UWI can also give support to the UTT to enable it to maintain high standards; there should be better coordination of efforts at the tertiary level. I have attended many seminars and events hosted by the UTT and I think some of the things they are doing, for example, in renewable energy are very valuable and should by supported.”

I could agree no less, Mr. President, with the gentleman. I simply do not understand why UWI is chasing numbers, instead they should be pursuing the nobler mission of excellence and quality. If it was my call, I would have capped the enrollment at UWI, St. Augustine at 12,000 students; 8,000 undergrad and 4,000 postgrad students.

If we look at MIT, for years now MIT has capped its enrollment, MIT’s enrollment is 10,000. We at St. Augustine are approaching 18,000; MIT has capped its enrollment 10,000; 5,000 undergrad; 5,000 post grad. Now, if we had done that at the St. Augustine Campus, if we had capped off the enrollment, you know what
would have happened? Students would be forced with good grades to enter UTT; and UTT would have had a strong student base and it would have been a win-win situation for both UWI and UTT.

In Jamaica, Mr. President, there is also an indigenous university, it is the University of Technology and it has a similar mission as the University of Trinidad and Tobago, to directly assist with economic development. UTech, on the other hand, was allowed to develop and it is today a well-established university. At the Mona Campus there are 15,000 students in Jamaica; at UTech, the indigenous university, we have 10,000 students. In Trinidad, at the St. Augustine Campus, we are approaching 18,000 and at UTT we have 6,500 students. I am asking UWI to seriously rethink its policy with respect to student population.

Permit me at this stage, Mr. President, to make a comment or two on the investment and the Government on a special scholarship programme. What is this programme I am talking about? If you obtain a first class degree at UWI, you are now entitled to a scholarship which would enable you to do postgraduate work: masters degree or a PhD. Now, in general it is not a bad idea, okay, it has to be modified. It is not a bad idea. And I will come to the modification later on; I want to look at some figures.

According to some statistics I got from the Ministry of Public Administration there were 233 such recipients of government scholarships in the two years, 2010—2011. Do you, Mr. President, know the cost per student, per year in the USA under this programme? It is $2 million per student; in the UK it is $3 million. So if you work on an average of $2.5 million for the 233 recipients, then you get a cost of almost half a billion dollars a year with respect to this fellowship programme.

Mr. President, we cannot invest this kind of money without benefiting in some way or the other. I am sure you would agree with me. In other words, this investment must bring returns to our country and the questions which you have to ask are, what type of programmes are these students following? And where are they following these programmes? What are the institutions which they are attending? Will they return? With this in mind, I would like to make the following suggestions with respect to the scholarship programme:

- We must ensure that these students, our so-called bright students, must pursue their degree at centres of excellence abroad. We cannot spend that kind or State funds to send them to second-class institutions; and hence I strongly recommend that one of the conditions for that scholarship is that
the candidate gain entry in one of the top 100 universities in the world, where cutting edge research is done, and where the world of tomorrow is shaped. If, with a first-class degree, you cannot get into one of the top 100 universities in the world then questions would have to be asked;

- Secondly, my recommendation: where possible, they should be encouraged to pursue programmes which would assist with economic development in our country. They should be able, for example, to pursue degrees in biotechnology, in information technology and in nanotechnology, what I call the “BIN” technology which is so important in economic development.

5.45 p.m.

And, thirdly, Mr. President, if the students are going to return to the country and make a contribution, then Government needs to create an attractive environment. These students have the potential of setting up high-tech industries in Trinidad and Tobago when they return, but we need to create the right type of environment.

The other question I wish to ask is: why should the State fund all these students to do postgrad work abroad when there are a number of other avenues and opportunities? In my time, if you wanted to do a postgrad degree you could apply for a Commonwealth scholarship. You can apply for an OAS scholarship; you can apply for a Canadian International Development Agency fellowship; you can apply for a LASPAU, that is an American fellowship, and there are many others. The Germans have, I think it is called the DAAD programme, the German Academic Exchange Service. So there are a number of avenues for people who want to pursue post graduate work.

Mr. 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. B. Ali]

Question put and greed to.

Sen. Prof. H. Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you Sen. Ali. Mr. President, I am saying that there are other avenues that you can explore to get scholarships to pursue postgraduate work, and in addition, you can get teaching assistantship or research assistantship at the universities themselves. So my first approach would be, let the students apply to these agencies and try to get
a scholarship before Government consider paying the funds for their fellowship. I think if we do this we can trim some of the fat on that fellowship programme. Let me end this section by stating that an investment of over $8 billion in education must lead to a sound education system. The people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve no less.

Mr. President, I now want to move to science and technology. They are both very critical components of development and growth, and with education they are not mutually exclusive areas. One cannot underestimate the potential of S&T (science and technology) as a tool for economic development. It has been and continues to be a transformative agent of economic change for a number of countries including the BRICS countries and in the region Costa Rica. These countries have exploited the new age technology: biotechnology, information technology and nanotechnology.

Through nanotechnology, we here in Trinidad and Tobago can create a more vibrant and competitive manufacturing sector. Through biotechnology, we can increase animal and food production, and through IT, we can of course create knowledge-based societies. I want to take a closer look at biotechnology and the potential in Trinidad and Tobago. While we may not have the capacity to do groundbreaking research in biotechnology, we can use it as a tool for economic development. The buffalypso is an example.

The milk of the buffalypso produces a good quality of mozzarella cheese and a good quality yogurt. The problem is that we do not have a large size population; the herd is small. Through biotechnology we can increase the size using embryo transplant. Mr. President, it was gratifying to read in the local press some days ago that the hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs has signalled his intention to look into the development of the species. Biotech can also be used for rapid propagation of plants and propagation of new varieties. At UWI, I am pleased to let you know that work is currently being pursued in these areas in biotechnology.

Mr. President, I want to go back to Sir Alister McIntyre’s same address—Eric Williams Memorial Lecture in 1988, and he said and I quote:

We have to look increasingly towards science, technology, management and organization as key ingredients of the development process.

That was over two decades ago, and to date we have not in any significant way heeded his advice. I do not think we have any choice now but to embrace science and technology in a structured way. If we do not do that and develop science and
technology as we should, we will not be able to ride the next transformative wave of change that would follow the information, communication and technology wave of change.

How do we do that? If I may be bold enough, let me make a couple of suggestions as to how we can move forward with respect to further developing science and technology so that it can contribute to the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago.

First and foremost, we need to establish a science and technology policy. That is the first thing we need to do. And here, Mr. President, I am sure that UNESCO would be willing to help. UNESCO has helped Guyana in formulating their S&T policy. Secondly, we need to set up a centralized research and development fund. And thirdly, we need to set up a national research and development council comprising among others, representatives from the scientific community, the private sector, the diaspora, the National University Council, the Economic Development Board and the Innovation Council. Some of the functions of this national research and development council could be to supervise the research and development centralized fund, to identify economic areas of activity where S&T can make an intervention; to identify/target specific projects and invite proposals for funding; to assist with technology transfer, and most importantly, to monitor regularly and closely expenditure of funds and progress. This has been a major problem in the past.

Mr. President, the hon. Minister of Science and Technology and Tertiary Education in the last budget debate, expressed his Government’s intention to increase spending in R&D to 3 per cent. This is in keeping with the People’s Partnership manifesto, from which I now quote:

“…our target will be to increase R&D spending to at least 3% of GDP over the next 10 years.”

I am indeed very heartened to hear R&D mentioned in the last budget, and I thank the hon. Minister of Finance. So there is hope. I also heard this morning Sen. The Hon. Dr. Tewarie talk about R&D funds being available for industry. I think the message is getting across to our politicians. Thank you very much.

Mr. President, I just want to let you know that research is not something esoteric, and I think this point is getting across, that it is not something that you associate with the developed countries. It is not something that you associate only with the North; without research and development, development becomes very difficult—economic development. It is the *sine qua non* for economic development.
Mr. President, I know my time is coming to an end, I want to appeal to the Minister of Science and Technology and Tertiary Education to make some funds available to non-governmental organizations that are involved in science and technology, and there are quite a few NGOs working in science and technology. Mr. President, I want to give you an example of an event that is going to take place fairly soon.

Every year there is a conference, a Latin American Caribbean Young Scientist Conference, where scientists 40 years and under meet and discuss their research work in all areas of science: medical science, agriculture sciences, and natural sciences, and that meeting has been hosted by Brazil from its inception. Brazil is the economic powerhouse of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is also the S&T powerhouse in the region.

So Brazil had been hosting this meeting for 10 years. We persuaded them last year that the meeting or the conference should travel, and I am pleased to let you know that the conference for the first time is going to be taking place outside of Brazil, and in fact we have been able to get it for Tobago. So my friends here from Tobago would be very happy to know this. [Desk thumping] And they will be invited to the opening ceremony so they can see what these young researchers are doing in all the areas of science.

But, Mr. President, I come to the funding. We have to move scientists from Argentina in the South to Mexico in the North to Tobago. That is going to cost money. The budget is $300,000, and do you know that $240,000 is coming from abroad—$240,000. Support from the Brazilian Government, from the Chilean Government, from the Mexican Government, and we are struggling here in Trinidad and Tobago to raise $60,000. These are the challenges that we face. As some people say: “In science and technology in the developing world, it is not easy.”

Mr. President, I would like to end my contribution now. I hope I have convinced people here of the need to invest wisely in education. We need to reform our education system, make it more relevant to economic development. We need to rationalize what is happening in tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to make an appeal for UTT. UTT has been having problems as we know. It still seems to be floundering—morale among the staff members is not as high as it should be, and I think we all need to work together to make UTT a well-established university. Our tertiary education system is going to be as strong as its weakest link.
The second thing I would like to do is appeal again to the Government to look at Tamana Park with the view of making it into an entity that can contribute to economic development. The idea was not a bad idea—to create a high-tech park in Tamana Park. We have high-tech parks in a number of countries. I visited the high-tech park in Hyderabad, one of the big parks in India. I visited the one in Malaysia and they are all doing quite well. There are successful high-tech parks. So I think we should try to finish what needs to be done at Tamana and create the high-tech park there so that we can move on with the process of diversifying the economy by having some of the IT companies and so on at the high-tech park.

What I think is needed there is that you need to have a visionary IT specialist to lead the effort at the high-tech park, and most likely you are not going to get that from Trinidad and Tobago, you would have to turn to the diaspora. And what you need is to attract some of the key players in IT to the park to set up offices in the park, like Microsoft and some of the others.

Mr. President, when I look at the economic situation in Trinidad—the history of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, I sometimes wonder if the decline in our natural resources is not a blessing in disguise.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. President, in 1965 when Singapore left the Federation with Malaysia, Singapore in addition to having no natural resources, had little developed human resources, so Singapore had very little in 1965. Its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, with great determination and even greater vision led his people to the promised land. When, oh when will our people here in Trinidad and Tobago be led to the promised land? I thank you very much.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy): Thank you, Mr. President, for affording me the opportunity to participate in this Appropriation Bill debate and particularly as it pertains to the issues dealing with national security and public safety.

Mr. President, before I do that, please allow me the opportunity to respond, quite briefly, to remarks made by my colleagues, at least two colleagues on the other side. Sen. Dr. Balgobin spoke about the private security industry and the advertisements, and their inability to portray that kind of professionalism that is expected of them, and I agree. As a result, Mr. President, we are in the process now of perfecting that private security regulations Bill to bring to the Parliament to regulate the private security industry.
I am sure that you are aware that there are a number of unregistered companies, a number of unregistered private security officers—if you may call them that. We have a number of unscrupulous company operators who, intent on just getting a body on the spot, on the location, on the post, hire all sorts of people, put a beret and a baton in their hand and call them security officers. Well, we are moving feverishly to take care of that.

My dear friend, Sen. Hinds, first of all, spoke about the hon. Attorney General, and the Minister of National Security putting police officers out there to arrest perpetrators and others like that. When he was in the Ministry of National Security he might have done that; we do not interfere in the operations of the police service. [Desk thumping] And I dare say, Mr. President, information reaching me suggests that Members on the other side still attempt today to interfere with the operations of the police.

Sen. Hinds spoke about poor people in Trinidad and Tobago, and his colleagues spoke about tax, that we should derive revenue through taxation and subsidies. Now, were we to remove the subsidy on the petrol, you would find that the same poor people that he is speaking about would then have to pay higher taxi fares and bus fares, and we would put a strain on them. And this is why the hon. Minister of Finance in his wisdom thought it best not to put a strain on poor people in the presentation of his budget, and he must be commended for that. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Hinds spoke about people losing jobs. This may be so and I am sure it is minimal and it would not last forever, but would we prefer to know that people lose their lives versus lose their jobs? I think that I prefer to have my life without a job than not to have my life at all.

He spoke about people being arrested on gang charges and being released. It simply shows that the justice system is alive and well in Trinidad and Tobago, and that no one on this side would interfere with the travel of justice as it pertains to criminal activities and the courts. So there is that separation of powers that remains alive in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] We cannot say the same for the previous administration who interfered with even the Chief Justice. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, he also spoke about not thinking out the anti-crime activity. Well, they thought it out for eight years and we know what those results were.
It is unfortunate that my dear friend is not here, but he does that, he says the things and he knows they can hold no solid water so he—as we say in the military, he gets out of it. He loses himself. He also offered advice—

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** He is chatting with the AG outside.

**Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy:** Well, I know he was in the Ministry of National Security for some time, and if that is the advice that he gave, and if it is the advice he gave to my predecessor, I would decline, most respectfully.

He also spoke about people in the community telling him that they are worried about what is happening in the community, but it is the same Sen. Hinds when he was Member I think for Laventille West, that the people complained that they never saw him. So he was not going in there then but he is going now, that is kind of strange; but I know he is an honourable man, so I believe him and what he says.

Mr. President, last week the Minister of Finance and Member of Parliament for Tunupuna, Hon. Winston Dookeran, and now our acting Prime Minister, outlined our Government’s programme of fiscal priorities in his budget presentation for 2012. I wish to embrace this opportunity and join my colleagues and some of my colleagues on the other side in congratulating the Minister of Finance for such a budget that allowed prudent initiatives and responsible fiscal policies, and it gives us hope that we will indeed realize the theme of the budget which says, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation.”

Mr. President, this is the second budget delivered by the Government of the People’s Partnership led by our hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and I am humbled and indeed grateful to the Prime Minister and my colleagues on this side for the confidence they continue to repose in me as this country’s Minister of National Security. I want to assure them and the citizens of this beautiful country that I am as determined today as I was when I first assumed office to do everything humanly possible to return this country to a place of security, peace and safety. I will not shirk this responsibility and I want to thank my colleagues for the tremendous support that I have received from them over the past 17 months. [Desk thumping]

Since we have been in office we have begun to address the many challenges that proved insurmountable to the previous regime. Mr. President, Italian union activist and politician, Giuseppe Mazzini, once say and I quote:

“A country is not a mere territory; the particular territory is only its foundation… it is the sentiment of love, the sense of fellowship which binds together all the sons of that territory.”
Mr. President, this notion alluded to in our first budget statement entitled, “Facing the issues turning the economy around” laid the platform to not only turn the economy around but also to build a proper foundation to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Unlike its predecessor, the People’s Partnership Government is clear on the way forward. We seek to build a country where all our citizens have decent employment opportunities, where our country’s public utilities are accessible to all and where beds are available in all our hospitals for our country’s sick.

To elaborate on our public utilities for all: Mr. President, this Government provides assistance in all areas whether they be labelled PNM area, whether they be labelled UNC area, whatever the case might be, you would see that the public utilities, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, Ministry of the People and Social Development, Ministry of National Security, we go into all areas because we are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

This is a new Trinidad and Tobago we have started to build, certainly a challenging journey still lies ahead of us, but as our goals continue to be achieved and surpassed over time, it will underscore the fact that our beloved citizens chose correctly at the polls on May 24, 2010.

Mr. President, if the objectives for sustainable growth are to be achieved, we must strengthen our capacity to develop and this must include our country’s greatest resource, its people. Accordingly, Mr. President, the 2012 budget reflects the tenacity of this Government to address the challenge of poverty, economic expansion and of course, a mission for which I have specific oversight, maintaining national security and public safety.

As our strategic policy indicates, economic progress on a sustainable basis and meaningful democracy are not possible unless crime is brought under control and there can be some assurance of human safety and security. In addressing a nation at war in January 1945, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared, and I quote:

“This war must be waged—it is being waged—with the greatest and most persistent intensity. Everything we are and have is at stake, everything we are and have will be given.”

In much the same way our country’s war against the criminal element which seeks to wreak havoc on our way of life, must be waged and continued as we seek to regain the soul and heart of our beloved nation.
Mr. President, I believe that the Newsday editorial of Monday, August 22, puts it best when it said, and I quote:

“We must succeed. We cannot continue to tolerate the abject lawlessness of the gangs and bandits who have established the law of the jungle on our nation’s streets and in its communities. We cannot continue to live in fear. We must bring an end to the shooting sprees in which the lives of innocents are snuffed out as collateral damage in battles for turf and drugs and in revenge hits... an absolute contempt for law and order.”

Mr. President, it is clearly evident that the level of violent and predatory crime in Trinidad and Tobago has contributed to increased fear of crime among citizens of our twin-island State.

I want to elaborate a bit on the fear of crime. It is the fear of crime that causes parents of children, in the middle of the night when they need to go to the toilet, to ask them to crawl from the bedroom to the bathroom for fear of bullets passing through the house. It is a reality. It is the fear of crime that causes people to shut up their houses before dusk. That fear of crime reminds me of the calypso that Penguin sang decades ago. It is quite applicable now, “We livin’ in jail”.

I remember part of that calypso when he said that when the bandit accosts you, you had better have a little change in your pocket because if you do not have, he will beat you for making the bandit waste his time. Now, they will shoot you. This is something that fear of crime does to our country. We have to eliminate the fear of crime.

Let me assure Senators in this honourable Senate and, by extension, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that the People’s Partnership Government continues in its relentless pursuit to bring crime under control. We recognize that our country is being seriously threatened and challenged by a body of very determined criminals who are bent on accumulating wealth and prosperity at everyone else’s expense. I want to tell this honourable Senate and, by extension, the national community, that this Government is more determined than they are. [Desk thumping]

We also recognize that we are not exempt from the focus of international criminal conspirators and terrorists. We are, therefore, cognizant of the new and emerging threats and are resolved to step up with equal determination to repel this onslaught.
It is a frightening development where reports indicate that our country, like some South American countries, are now having visits far too often from criminals of other countries with ties here. It is frightening. We need to ensure that this does not develop into something we cannot handle.

Mr. President, there is no greater reward for a Minister of National Security, for a government, for a country, than to know that we, by our efforts, have diminished criminal activities in our country. We want our people to go to work as normal, conduct their business as normal, socialize as normal, enjoy quiet family moments without fear of being shot, robbed, raped or a host of other heinous acts that they have fallen victims to over the past decade.

Trinidad and Tobago is faced with four major safety and security challenges. These are border security, the illegal firearms and narcotic trade, homicides and gang-related activities, money laundering and traffic and road safety violations. The People’s Partnership Government, over the past 17 months in office, has started to treat with these issues. As a government, we are committed to returning Trinidad and Tobago to that state of safety and security. Of course, we know this will not happen overnight.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until 11.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Thank you, Mr. President. I was saying that over the past 17 months we have been committed to safety and security in our country. To do that, we continuously scan the environment and listen to the voices of fellow citizens.

In the last budget, as Minister of National Security, I made specific promises to the people of this country, promises that I remain committed to fulfilling and I am determined not to repeat the mistakes of my predecessors.

Mr. President, Members of this honourable Senate and, by extension, the national community, I will now share with you the work that the Ministry of National Security has done over the past year in keeping with our commitment to alleviate the crime situation and enhance public safety and security as a whole.
I will begin with the issue of crime in Trinidad and Tobago, which has been at the top of this Government’s agenda since we took office, and remains there today. We are determined not to be lulled into complacency by incremental improvements to date, but instead to consider those as incentives to persevere until we can achieve a sustained reduction in crime in this country. This is what every law-abiding citizen in Trinidad and Tobago wants to realize and we will make every effort to assist in this regard.

The year 2010, on this date, there were 386 homicides. Today, 2011, there are 292 and we wish for the day when we can look over our shoulders and say that those were the days of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago; but we will not fool ourselves into believing that it is a quick fix and it will happen just like that.

As a result, we continue to put elements and systems in place to ensure that our criminal activity and crime subside and are reduced. We will not be content until we can achieve and sustain further reductions. Until then, we continue to work for the citizens of this country and so that our visitors can feel less fearful of crime and Trinidad and Tobago can indeed be the paradise we once knew it to be.

It was not my intention to engage in discussion on the state of emergency, but having regard to the fact that elements were raised, I thought it fit to respond accordingly. It was in pursuit of this goal of the reduction in criminal activity, and based on available intelligence, that it was recommended to the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, on August 20, that consideration be given to the declaration of a state of emergency. Accordingly, on August 21, 2011, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago declared a state of emergency with a curfew imposed in specific areas.

As expected, there were many citizens who applauded this intervention. There were also some who viewed it as simply a tactic of inconveniencing other members of the public. Of course, those were in the minority. However, when I reviewed the statistical data on serious crimes during the period August 21 to September 30 with the comparative period of the previous year, this Government must feel vindicated.

During the period August 21 to September 30—we are talking now of 2011—1,043 reported serious crimes in Trinidad and Tobago as compared to 2,037 during the same period last year. This represents a 49 per cent decrease in the number of reported serious crimes during the period under review.

Further, of the 14 categories of serious crime, a pattern of decrease was evident in 13 of them, with narcotic offences the sole exception, witnessing an 11 per cent increase. In eight of the categories, a 50 per cent, or above, reduction was evident while the other categories range between 17 per cent and 46 per cent.
Mr. President, when compared with the comparative period of 2010, there were significant decreases in some key categories, including murders, woundings and shootings, robberies, larceny of motor vehicles; all in excess of 50 per cent.

In addition, huge quantities of illegal narcotics as well as illegal arms and ammunition were retrieved from the hands of criminals—130 firearms, in excess of 12,000 rounds of assorted ammunition complete with magazines, 1,014.9 kilogrammes of marijuana; 12.7 kilogrammes of cocaine, seized.

Mr. President, what was alarming—I know that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs dealt with it, but it was alarming to me when I was told that the average sales of diesel declined by 85,000 gallons per day. It suggests that because of the stringent measures by our law enforcers and, in particular, in this instance, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, it meant that those fuel operations had to take a back seat.

I commend the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard for its hard work. Indeed, they were ably assisted by the Trinidad and Tobago Customs and Excise Department. I wish to congratulate them as well. [Desk thumping]

The Leader of the Opposition indicated that I took ownership of the state of emergency and for that I should resign. I will not tell the Leader of the Opposition that when he was called a raging bull and fired that he should have resigned. I would not tell him that. I would not tell him that when he attempted to mislead the Parliament by saying that the hon. Attorney General had made certain statements in New York when the hon. Attorney General had not been to New York at all—sometime in May he said that—that he should have resigned. [Desk thumping]

I have observed that in this country we have the tendency to shift blame and not take responsibility for our actions. Having received information and secured intelligence that the national security of this country could be compromised, I took the decision to advise the hon. Prime Minister that we needed to take swift action to save the lives of some of our citizens, including innocent persons.

6.30 p.m.

I recommended that consideration be given to the declaration of a state of emergency. So, yes, I, John Sandy, take responsibility for that. [Desk thumping] The saving of several innocent lives in communities like Laventille, Beetham and Arima—most of the communities of PNM strongholds—I take responsibility for saving those innocent people. [Desk thumping] Mr. President, the numerous citizens who can sleep safely at night all over this country, I take responsibility for that. [Desk thumping]
Conversely, Mr. President, the murders and the serious crime, I take responsibility for that. [Desk thumping] Those same children who do not have to crawl to the bathroom from bedrooms when their parents are scared they may be hit by a stray bullet, I take responsibility for that [Desk thumping] because now they can walk to go to the bathroom. [Desk thumping] Further, Mr. President, all my colleagues on this side take responsibility for that. [Desk thumping] And I argue, Mr. President, most respectfully, that all my colleagues on the other side must take responsibility for that too. [Desk thumping] Mr. President, we, the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, when we sit idle and do nothing we encourage it. I say all law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago must take responsibility for that. [Desk thumping]

Do we want to return to the lawlessness that existed two months ago? Is this what we want for our country? I respectfully submit that we as Trinidadians and Tobagonians are all responsible for our communities to remain safe and secure and not allow misguided little boys in three-quarter pants to terrorize our land. I am saying, with respect to Trinidad and Tobago, we, all of us, must make it safe. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, with respect to the state of emergency, I seek your leave to read an article published in today’s Daily Express Thursday, October 20, 2011 at page 7, excerpts from an article by Keino Swamba; headline: “Emotional Ken Gordon launches School of Journalism, and I quote: “Of the call by some to end the State of Emergency, Gordon said time must be given for the job started to be completed which is to ‘break the back’ of the criminal enterprise.

‘This is not a battle we can afford to lose,’ he added.

He cited the reduction in the murder rate, the seizure and destruction of illegal drugs valued at millions of dollars, the seizure of a number of firearms and rounds of ammunition, the number of persons on homicide and drug related charges and charges laid against seven suspected gang leaders.

‘These are not the results of failure. Criticise the bad management and excesses by all means but not with arguments as some have done, that go dangerously close to romanticizing people who kill mindlessly and would destroy us all.’”

Mr. President, I had one call from a grandmother from Nelson Street. She said to me that her two grandsons, one is even cooking for her now; she said it is totally different. They are different young men. One is cooking for her, something that never existed in the past.
I got a letter from a man in Old St. Joseph Road, saying to keep the state of emergency indefinitely. Of course, we cannot do that. This is the type of response that we have been getting. I am saying, we are trying to save these same youngsters. We are trying to save their lives, and if one mother and one father can have his or her son in their old age to take care of them in the twilight of their lives, well then, I respectfully submit that the state of emergency was a success.

Mr. President, I wish to read for you from the *Guardian* dated September 25, 2011, page B5. This is a document where a well-respected radio show host and journalist was interviewed following the passing of his mother, and I wish now to extend sincerest condolences on the passing of his mother. Here is what he said:

“After 17 months of battling four strokes, three years of blindness, two years of the dreaded debilitating Alzheimer’s and 73 years of love, laughter, disappointment, hurt, joy and life...mom closed her eyes and ended it all. I had to leave mom in the care of a private nursing home.

This lady was my heart and my soul. We always shared a bond. I owed it to her to make sure she was comfortable. In fact, that’s what the doctors told me after her first series of strokes. ‘Make her comfortable,’ they said. ‘one day she would just go...I was happy that every day of the 17 months I was able to be with her, feed her, share some of the happenings nationally and personally, even though I was not sure she understood or grasped it all. One thing was certain, she knew who I was and apparently looked forward to my visits every day. I would hold her hands before and after feeding her. I would rub the back of her neck and tickle her ears...she loved that. Rather than a chore, it became a respite for me. I could not think about my own day-to-day challenges…

Oh how I cherish those afternoons into evenings…”

Mr. President, we want our grandmothers, grandfathers, fathers and mothers to experience what this journalist’s mother experienced. We want their sons to be there for them, to take care of them in their twilight years. [Desk thumping]

In order to holistically address the crime situation, this Government recognized the need to review systems and structures in the law enforcement sector. As a result, in the last budget, we indicated our intention to establish a National Security Operation Centre to coordinate intelligence, operations and logistical activities, and serve as a platform for the launching of joint operations among law enforcement entities.
In late March 2011, a delegation led by myself, travelled to Washington and we visited a number of these installations and we brought back with us elements that would contribute to the establishment of our National Security Operation Centre. As we speak, plans are being put in place to establish this entity.

We are also committed to the introduction of an aggressive recruitment drive for the police service to deal with the constraints of operating with a manpower shortage and a steady attrition of experienced officers. To do this, we place our efforts on increasing the training capacity at the Police Academy.

Mr. President, last year, 200 officers graduated from the Police Academy. Our aim is to ensure that, at least, 760 officers are graduated annually. To do this, we have doubled the capacity, and from August 2011 recruitment in this respect has started with a view of training our officers in different areas over the period so that at the end of the year we will have an allocation coming out into the public of twice the number.

Mr. President, the average number of trainees enrolled annually for the induction programme during the year 2006—2010 was 201. The number of trainees enrolled in the programme during fiscal 2011 is 361. That represents a 71 per cent increase. We are aiming for 720 recruits per year. We had initially sought to graduate 800, but because of certain constraints with respect to accommodation and so on, it has now been brought down to 720.

The police service is also looking at development of its existing staff. The Police Leadership Development Programme has been created to cater for the training needs of frontline and middle managers. The programme was launched on April 06, 2011 and is conducted via workshops which are held weekly, and impact officers in management and leadership positions. The police service has also introduced advanced programmes for the 21st Century policing, and it is continuing work on curriculum development, research and accreditation.

Mr. President, as evidenced, it is our intention, not only to increase numbers in the police service, but also improve the quality of our officers. To provide more officers for operation purposes, the Recall Programme of former officers that we referred to as “PALS”, Police Administrative Liaison, started last year. What this does is, it allows former police officers to be reinstated as SRPs and take care of the respective charge rooms while the younger and fitter officers go out on patrols and do policing in the communities. This is one of the areas that we are pursuing.
We are trying to regain trust of the citizens of this country in our police service. We know it will not be an easy task, but this is the thrust. We very well understand that the police cannot solve crime by themselves, so it is an element of partnership, and we want to regain that trust of the citizens so that the police officer and the citizen can work hand in hand in solving criminal activities.

One of the areas that we continue to look at, having regard to this lull in criminal activity, as someone referred to earlier on, we see it as a healing period, a kind of lent—I am a spiritual person so I am thinking of lent—when you do some soul searching.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. President, I am confident that the targeted communities do not want to go back to what they were experiencing a few months ago. Law-abiding citizens must take back their communities, and we encourage them to do that. Here is where we are seeking to have the police partner with our law-abiding citizens. Those same youngsters who would have been referred to sometimes as “bad boys”, they are not bad boys, they behave badly, but they are not bad boys. I think we need to encourage our citizens to ensure that they harness them. In that respect there are a number programmes.

We need to encourage them, because sometimes they would not read the newspapers, they would not look at television, they would not watch the news. They do not know what is out there for them. We need to harness and instruct them and guide them, nurture them into some of the programmes that are available to us.

Mr. President, in addition to attracting new recruits and ensuring capacity building, the issues of retention and motivation also needed to be addressed. So we promised payment of non-taxable monthly special allowance to police officers, and we have delivered. The extension of this facility to other law enforcement and protective service agencies under the purview of the Ministry has been provided in fiscal 2012. So prison service, fire service and the defence force will be in receipt of their non-taxable $1,000 per month as well. [Desk thumping] [ Interruption]

Mr. 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. F. Al-Rawi]

Question put and agreed to.
Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Mr. President, thank you kindly; thank you to my dear colleague and colleagues in this honourable House. Time flies when you are having fun.

I wish to embrace this opportunity, not only on my behalf and not only on behalf of my colleagues on this side, but on behalf of my colleagues on the other side and on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago, to say thanks and to compliment our law enforcement officers, our police officers, our prison officers, members of the defence force, even our fire officers, for the hard work that they have put in, particularly over the past two months. I want to compliment them for their patriotism and for heeding the call to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes once more a nation of quiet, a nation of tranquility, a nation of peace that we all long for.

I am obliged to rush through now, because I did not recognize the time was flying the way it has been. I want to speak a bit about our social programmes, our preventive programmes and the establishment of a Youth Mentorship Programme which we promised last year and delivered. On April 11, 2011, the National Mentorship Programme was officially launched. Mr. President, we know that you were the acting President at the time. You officiated at that launch.

On Friday, September 25, 2011 the Ministry hosted a National Mentorship Programme Convocation. That is where we called the mentors, the mentees and their parents together. It was an encouraging interlude, in that, prior to that we had a number of camps during the August holidays, where we had the mentees in. It was remarkable the kinds of remarks we got from their parents after that two-week period they spent in the camps. They were totally different youngsters. We held two in Tobago, and two for girls as well. It was a remarkable experience for those youngsters. I remember one of the mothers saying, “But you know he is actually making up his bed at home now,” little things like that. There was a total change in the youngsters.

As well in our Citizens Security Programme, we have gone into some areas. We are looking at after school programmes at Farm Road, Diego Martin; establishment of an information technology centre, Mount D’Or Road, Champs Fleurs; rehabilitation at Sogren Trace, Laventille; completion of rehabilitation works at the recreation facility in La Romaine; design of a mural in the Cocorite community, which is in its second phase.

I want to assure Sen. Baptiste-McKnight, she raised the issue of education, youngsters in school and criminal activity, that with the Ministry of Education we ourselves have a programme. We have gone into the schools. We are trying as
well to ensure at the end of the year we have a number of other cadet units formed in schools. In the past we had cadets in school, but not in units. We want to establish a unit in all secondary schools.

Only recently the hon. Prime Minister launched the MLI, Making Life Important Initiative, where we would go into the communities to ensure, not only that they are safe from criminal activity with interacting with the police, but as well other Ministries coming together with us—the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Public Utilities. So there is a holistic kind of application to the communities. We encourage them to build their communities.

There is another initiative we call the “Community Patriotism Initiative” where we invite them to get their youngsters to compete in sports and culture and not guns and violence. In pursuit of that last year, we had what we referred to as the “concerts of hope” where we went into the communities with bands with members of the protective services, the defence force, the regiment band, the police band, the fire services band with artistes and young budding artistes from the respective communities, so that they themselves could develop. It is amazing when you see youngsters—I remember the Ministry of National Security had donated some musical instruments to some youngsters in the Beetham and they invited us to hear them play. I am looking at this little girl, probably no more than 10 years, with a saxophone. All they were playing was a little syncopation, “ta na na tan”, but if you see “gam man” [Phonetic]. [Minister Sandy demonstrates] It is a feeling—yes “gam”. [Laughter] I am allowed to do that. [Laughter]

I am saying that music instills discipline; I am sure Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon would hear me out on this. This is why to date all the studies done at UWI to determine what motivates a young man and young woman to be out two o’clock or three o’clock in the morning for a month and a half, for eight minutes of glory in the Queen’s Park Savannah on Saturday night—if we could get that motivation into our daily work, well then Trinidad and Tobago would be second to none as a nation. This is what we are trying to inculcate.

With respect to legislation, we are looking at the Firearms (Amdt.) Act, the Trafficking in Persons Act, the Anti-Gang Act, the Interception of Communications Act, the Anti-Terrorism Act. We are also on the final leg of installation of our surveillance bays on the highway, so we can utilize that for saving lives. This is another area we need to look at. It has to do with our carnage on the roads.
What is amazing is some of these youngsters drive violently, and then they pull up at a snackette down the road to buy a beer. You know they lie down to drive. Sometimes you do not see them, they are coming and you wonder what is happening. They lie and drive, so they cannot be alert, those are the things we are addressing.

Mr. President, I would like to speak about our Immigration Department and what we are trying to achieve with respect to the illegal immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago. We are advised that a number of them are infiltrating those illegal or unregistered security companies, and this is something we are looking at critically.

We spoke earlier about retention of our partners in criminal activity. We looked in particular at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. We have established what we call an energy committee, an ESSI, Energy Sector Security Committee, with our partners in the energy sector and other ministerial colleagues, to ensure that our greatest asset is well protected. We have been having a number of meetings in this respect and the energy sector is quite pleased that we have partnered with them.

Homicides and gang-related activity—the aim is to eliminate gangs and gang warfare. Our Anti-Gang Act is designed specifically for that, with penalties, I am sure you are aware, aimed at, not only deterring youngsters from getting into a life of crime, but those seasoned gangsters who encourage our youngsters to be involved in gangs, to stay off the streets.

I am sure you would recall last Friday that our hon. Prime Minister participated in the symbolic destruction of firearms at the St. James Barracks. At that time, over a one-week period, 1,650 firearms were destroyed. They are in the process of doing so this week as well, with our foreign partners from the OAS and other areas assisting us in this respect.

The issue of money laundering has been a concern in this country, and as you are aware I have travelled on a number of occasions to meet with the Financial Action Task Force. Our hon. Prime Minister as well accommodated them here in Trinidad and Tobago when they came to advise us on ways and means to emerge from where we were, when we took over Government 17 months ago. I am pleased to inform this honourable House and the national community that we have raised our heads out of the quagmire and we are on the verge now of being clean and out of the list of the Financial Action Task Force.
With respect to our road fatalities, based on statistical evidence from 2005—2009, over 1,000 persons were killed on our roads. In 2010 Trinidad and Tobago saw 206 road fatalities up to this date last year. Up to today, we are 148; 171 last year, 148 this year. That is 148 too many, and we all recall that crash on the weekend when so many persons were killed. We find that we are losing our young people, and in most instances the person who is driving dangerously, unfortunately or fortunately, does not die. It is the ones who are taking their time and these people run into them and kill innocent people on the streets.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. President, Sen. Drayton spoke about the ODPM and I simply want to remind the national community again, that the ODPM is a coordinating body, and probably we need to make ODPM operational as opposed to coordinating.

Mr. President, for fiscal year, 2012, we are looking at the establishment of a National Security Operation Centre. We are looking at advancement in the police service, bringing more retired persons on to assist, and we are looking, as well, to ensure eight new police stations—Arima, Brasso, Cumuto, La Brea, Maloney, Moruga, Piarco and Oropouche. They are the first that would be built, and then the refurbishment of 37 police stations, and there are other police stations to be built as well.

Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the coast guard; we are looking at the technical upgrading of the National Coastal Surveillance Radar System which is a critical component of the national security strategy. Our national strategy includes what we refer to as a border blanket that takes into consideration our aerial, our maritime and land assets. We are looking at the establishment of locations around the country where we can establish maritime moorings, as they are called by the coast guard.

Mr. President: Hon. Minister, I will have to ask you to proceed to wind up.

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Yes, Mr. President. The Government and the People’s Partnership is cognizant of the immense role that the Trinidad and Tobago law enforcement officers are playing and, as such, we want to encourage them; we want them to continue the hard work that they are doing and, as such, we believe that it would be fitting at this time to elaborate—well, not elaborate anymore, but to indicate that we are coming from the youth into the adults. Remember our aim is to eliminate that conduit that leads into criminal activity, and here is where the cadets come in. I always tell people that I have a lot of time for cadets because that is where I came from and I know the worth, and we have a
number of cadets sitting in here who have done quite well. [Desk thumping] As a result, we are looking to ensure that—well, this year we had Diego Martin, Waterloo, Couva; we are looking at Carapichaima, St. James Secondary, Vishnu Boys’ School, Morvant/Laventille Secondary.

My focus remains with young people of Trinidad and Tobago, their future, our future. We need to nurture them and provide for them. We, the adults, must be the exemplars for them. Our communities must reject crime and criminal activity. There must be a marriage of law enforcement and citizens so that together we can make our country the envy of others. We are responsible, relentless in our resolve for all of Trinidad and Tobago.

I conclude with the sentiments of US General George B. McClellan, and I quote:

“Conscious of my own weakness, I can only seek fervently the guidance of the Ruler of the Universe, and, relying on His all-powerful aid, do my best to restore Union and peace to a suffering people, and to establish and guard their liberties and rights.”

On this occasion of Divali, I wish, as well, to join my colleagues, not only to the Muslim community, but all of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Senators: Hindu.

Sen. The Hon. J. Sandy: —the Hindu community, my apologies—and the Muslim community, because we are all celebrating, and all of Trinidad and Tobago. As my colleague across there said, Shubh Divali. I trust that the light will light up the hearts and minds of all of Trinidad and Tobago so that we may flourish in goodness over evil to a state and a nation of which we will all be justly proud.

I thank you.

Sen. Dr. Victor Wheeler: [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me to contribute on this Appropriation Bill, 2011 for the financial year, 2012. I would, first of all, like to congratulate the Minister of Finance on this his second budget presentation since the new Government has come into office. [Desk thumping]

I would like to state that my contribution to this debate will be in several areas. I will be reviewing what my expectations were in my contribution to the debate last year; I will also be reviewing if these expectations were met during the
last financial year; I will be reviewing promises made in the sector by the former
Minister of Health, and plans for the health sector in this 2012 budget. I will also
be reviewing some promises made in relation to Tobago and some further issues
related to the tourism sector in Tobago. Lastly, I will be reviewing some issues
related to a funding to the THA and to Tobago, by extension.

Now, with respect to my expectations in my contribution in 2010 for the 2011
budget, I had raised several concerns in various areas and I will list these off: state
of the land titles in Tobago; stimulation of the tourism sector in Tobago; the
completion of the Vanguard Hotel; addressing the problems caused by the Tobago
Land Acquisition Order of 2007; completion of outstanding projects in Tobago, in
particular the Scarborough General Hospital. I also addressed the responsibility
for the health sector Tobago, including the role of the Minister for Tobago
Development in health care. I had also addressed the role of the Ministry for
Tobago Development and its relationship with the Tobago House of Assembly.

Now, with respect to the state of land titles in Tobago, there is still no solution
to this problem, even though I am made to understand that the Ministry of Legal
Affairs has been making efforts to address it. The problem of Tobagonians
owning land with no useful title still means that they are unable to use this land as
a security for the bank for making loans, and this certainly limits the ability of
many Tobagonians to develop these lands and to generate income.

I now move on to the stimulation of the tourism sector. The figure for tourist
arrivals in Tobago continues to decline as it has been since 2005. All efforts in
this regard have not borne fruit, as far as the international arrivals are concerned.
For example, in 2005, Tobago had just over 86,000 international arrivals; in 2007,
this decreased to 63,000; in 2008, 56,000; in 2009, 38,000 and in 2010, 34,000.
This really represents just about a 60 per cent drop in arrivals over the past
five-year period.

Now, when you compare this to other Caribbean islands, they did initially
undergo a drop in international arrivals because of the downturn in the worldwide
economy, but they have recovered somewhat. Now if you look at cruise ship
arrivals to Tobago, in 2009 there were just over 70,000 visitors, and in 2010 there
were just about 61,000 visitors. For 2011, the data for the first four months,
January to April, shows 30,000 visitors coming from 22 ships. This is down as
compared to 2010 where you had 40,000 visitors from 35 ships, also
demonstrating a further decline in international visitors to Tobago.
Now, the figures for domestic arrivals by the sea bridge for the years 2008—2010, have been just around 800,000 and they have remained fairly steady. And for domestic arrivals by the air bridge, you actually had an increase from 2009—2010. In 2009 you had 316,000 and that increased in 2010 to 321,000.

Now, the domestic arrivals to Tobago seem to have made up somewhat for the fall-off in the international arrivals, but how do you classify a domestic tourist? Now a domestic tourist we refer to as someone coming to Tobago from Trinidad. It is very difficult to quantify this, because when people come to Tobago from Trinidad there are no forms that they fill out, but there has been an estimate that it could be as much as 70 per cent of that 800,000. Traffic could very well be domestic tourists from Trinidad. Because of the domestic arrivals coming to Tobago, the hotel occupancy has been fairly level at around 40 per cent over the past few years.

The Tobago House of Assembly Division of Tourism and Transport, did a report on Tobago stay-over arrivals in 2009 and they estimated that the average expenditure of an international tourist is in the region of US $139 a day, and when they worked out what the figure would be for 2009, this was converted into an annual income of US $57 million. This is pretty significant income that was obtained from international tourists for 2009. Now you would have seen the figures I gave, that 2009 figures were just about 30,000 or thereabouts, so you could imagine what the income was like in 2005.

The income earned from an international tourist is actually real foreign exchange earnings. International tourists would rent cars; they would go diving; they would visit some of the attractions; they would visit Buccoo Reef and also they would eat at restaurants. This foreign exchange goes directly into the economy of Tobago. For international tourists the survey shows that the average length of stay was 10 days.

With respect to domestic visitors or domestic tourists from Trinidad, as I had mentioned, the total number of domestic tourists is actually quite difficult to quantify, and also the amount spent in Tobago is difficult to quantify, but it is estimated to be far less than the US $139 a day.

Those visitors to Tobago coming from Trinidad very often come on the boats; they would bring their car; they would bring their own food; bring their drink, and, I am told, in some instances they would even bring their own ice, mainly because the price of food and drink in Tobago is said to be so much higher. The Fast Ferry which is two and a half hours facilitates this. So even though the
Appropriation Bill, 2011

Thursday, October 20, 2011

[SEN. DR. WHEELER]

visitors from Trinidad come to Tobago, they will certainly occupy some of the hotels, but the amount of money actually spent in Tobago is really small compared to what the international visitors would spend.

Another thing that I raised last year was the completion of the Vanguard Hotel. Last year I had stated that the closure of the Vanguard Hotel did have a negative impact on the room stock in Tobago, and I am pleased to see that—we have been told that the new hotel will be opening in November 2011 under the new name, Magdalena Grand Beach Resort.

This new resort is expected to add 200 five-star rooms to the island stock. My information is that if this hotel was not going to be reopened for this winter season, it may have led to the Virgin Airlines carrier and possibly Condor Airlines pulling out of Tobago, so I am very happy the People’s Partnership Government saw it fit to bring the hotel back on stream. Those in the tourism sector would be very happy to see this hotel reopening next month as promised.

The current THA administration under the Chief Secretary of the day did, in fact, meet a situation like this in 2002 when they came into office, when at that time there were several airlines pulling out of Tobago, and they did, in fact, launch an aggressive campaign to woo some of those airlines back, and it worked. We certainly have a situation now where we have been losing airlift. For example, British Airways used to come to Tobago three times a week, now it is coming twice a week and it is forecast to come only once a week from next year.

Condor Airlines, which currently flies to Tobago in the winter period, there are some concerns that they may pull out next year, but, again, if the hotel opens, this may not happen. Tobago has already lost the services of Liat Airlines, which used to fly from Tobago to Grenada and Barbados. So, we no longer have the ability of our Caribbean neighbours coming directly to Tobago, they would have to come to Trinidad to come to Tobago, and if we in Tobago want to go up the islands, we have to go to Trinidad before we go on to the other islands.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. President, in the last budget the Government had initially allocated $15 million towards the completion of the Vanguard Hotel and I am pleased that during the rest of the financial year they allocated, I think, an additional US $25 million for the completion of this hotel. Now, in this budget we have seen that $100 million has been allocated to the tourism sector for upgrading hotels. When
you compare US $25 million just to refurbish Vanguard you would realize that this $100 million is really not a significant amount in the grand scheme of things. Further, it is still not clear if the entire $100 million will be going towards hotel refurbishment or if other sectors in the tourism sector will be accessing it, so I would certainly like some clarification on that please.

We now come to the issue of the Tobago Land Acquisition Order of 2007. Now, this is an order that was imposed in 2007 that required a foreign investor to first obtain a licence to purchase land in Tobago. Prior to February 2007 they did not need a licence if they were purchasing land up to five acres. Figures provided by the Minister of Finance in response to a question that I posed to him on May 23, 2011 showed a dramatic reduction in both the number of foreign investors as well as the actual number of foreign direct investments to Tobago. For 2005 you had 36 foreign investors investing in Tobago for a total value of TT $41 million; for 2006 this fell to 26 investors for a total of $38 million; for 2007 there were 32 investors totalling $33 million, but for 2008, after the licence came into effect, there were only six investors at a total of $5 million; 2009, five investors at a total of $450,000; in 2010 there were three foreign investors at a total of $1.4 million.

These figures clearly show a drastic reduction in foreign investment in Tobago and can only be directly related to the imposition of the licences. Some have argued that the downturn in the economy may have contributed to that, but the figures are clear for all to see. I should say here, those responsible for the imposition of this licence should be ashamed of themselves because it has had a direct negative effect on investment in Tobago. This issue was promised to be resolved or at least addressed during the last financial year, but nothing substantial has been done to date. I understand the Minister of Finance and, possibly, the Minister of Trade and Industry may have had some discussions with individuals, but I am not aware that there has been any significant improvement in the situation; it is still very difficult to obtain a licence.

Those who are opposed to it should remember that when foreign investors purchase land in Tobago they cannot pick it up and walk with it, the land stays in Tobago. They have to maintain the land, they would put property on that land and when they do this they would be injecting foreign exchange directly into the economy of Tobago. Sometimes I wonder if this decision was really made to prevent any form of direct foreign investment in Tobago. I really wonder! Whenever the Government decides to reintroduce the land taxes, the property tax or whatever you choose to call it, a foreign investor with property in Tobago will also need to pay this tax and that would be another form of earning foreign exchange. You can even chose to tax these properties at a much higher rate as compared to those for the residents.
When these foreign investors spend time in their homes they would have to eat food, they cannot bring it to Tobago like those from Trinidad would, they would have to purchase the alcohol and they would have to go to the restaurants and even purchase ice. I must mention here that in Tobago over the past year or two, six restaurants have closed, four of them on the Shirvan Road, which is just off the Claude Noel Highway. This is a devastating state of affairs for those who have invested in Tobago. Some investors have lost their investments; many persons have lost their jobs. Tobagonians who are employed by these businesses have also lost their jobs. The suppliers of produce to these restaurants would have lost sales and income; taxi drivers would have lost income; car rental companies would have lost income.

I do hope that with the reopening of the Magdalena Grand Beach Resort this will help to reverse this trend somewhat, but I do not think a 200-room hotel would be sufficient. Surveys by those in tourism estimate that an additional 1,400 quality hotel rooms are needed in Tobago to really revitalize the tourism sector. Airlines will not bring passengers in droves to Tobago if there are no proper rooms and proper accommodation for them to stay. So, even though there might be efforts to keep the airlift currently to Tobago, when the airlines consider that their passengers would be staying in accommodation that may be considered substandard at present, that is not really going to work.

Mr. President, I now come to the completion of outstanding projects in Tobago, in particular, the Scarborough General Hospital. This hospital is another promise to the people of Tobago that has not yet been delivered. The new Scarborough General Hospital is something that the entire public and health sector in Tobago have been looking forward to. This was one of several projects that were supposed to be completed in the last financial year. In response to a question posed on February 8, 2011; the then Minister of Health said that the construction of the hospital would be completed by June 30, 2011; the installation of fixed medical and other fixed equipment was supposed to take place by September 30, 2011; the installation and commissioning of non-fixed furniture, fixtures and equipment were supposed to take place by October 31, 2011 with the expectation that services would be provided by November 01, 2011.

In his budget presentation the Minister of Finance has stated that the hospital would be completed by Christmas 2011, just about six weeks away. However, in the Daily Express of Tuesday, October 18, 2011; I am seeing an advertisement by the National Insurance Property Development Company Limited for the supply and installation of furniture, fixtures and equipment for the new Scarborough

Appropriation Bill, 2011

[SEN. DR. WHEELER]
General Hospital. The tender packages, actually, were available from today, October 20 and the tenders were supposed to be closed on November 17, 2011. It is therefore impossible for me to see how a mere five weeks after the tender is closed for the furniture, fixtures and non-fixed equipment that that hospital would be open and operational. Maybe a miracle will take place, pastor, [Laughs] but it is difficult for me to see.

We in Tobago have been eagerly looking forward to this much anticipated gift to improve the services provided in the health sector as far as secondary care is concerned. Not only are members of the public looking forward to it but also the health care workers ourselves.

Mr. President, another area of concern that I had raised in my last budget contribution was the responsibility for the health sector in Tobago including the role of the Minister of Tobago Development in the provision of health care. We have seen the drama that took place a couple of months ago when there was much uncertainty regarding the appointment of the board of directors of the Tobago Regional Health Authority. It seems that some sense of sanity prevailed and all the names submitted by the THA were in fact appointed to the RHA board. We know that the THA was given responsibility for health care under the THA Act, No. 40 of 1996, but in spite of this we do know that members of the board of directors of all the RHAs, first have to be approved by the Cabinet of the government of the day before being forwarded on to the President to issue instruments of appointments.

Clearly, some intervention took place here and maybe the leader of the TOP, who is also a minority leader of the THA may have played a critical role in this. It is known that he has the ear of the Prime Minister. It is interesting to note that this appointment of the RHA Board of Directors was made just a few days after the then new Secretary for Health and Social Services of the THA moved into the vacant office of the RHA chairman. I wonder if this bold move by the new Secretary for Health and Social Services may have had an effect on the decision by the Cabinet of the People’s Partnership to appoint the names recommended by the PNM THA. I do not know. I wonder what would have happened if the names that were put forward for TRHA board, the list of names forwarded by the Minister of Tobago Development, if that list was appointed to the RHA board and when that chairman went to his/her office on the first day and found the Secretary for Health and Social Services occupying that office what would have happened? I really do not know. I am informed, however, that at present the Secretary for Health and Social Services has vacated the office and it is available for the Chairman of the RHA Board.
Appropriation Bill, 2011  Thursday, October 20, 2011
[SEN. DR. WHEELER]

Mr. President, in the health sector in Tobago, we now have a new Chairman of the Board of Directors of the TRHA, nominated by the PNM; a new Secretary for Health and Social Services of the THA, of the PNM, and a new Minister of Health who himself is no stranger to health, but a Member of the People’s Partnership. I am heartened to see that there is a renewed sense of cooperation and collaboration between the THA and the Ministry of Health, and this was demonstrated when the new Minister of Health visited Tobago a couple of months ago with his technical team and met with the team of the THA. This collaboration and cooperation can only redound to the benefit of the people of Tobago.

With regard to the Minister of Tobago Development, we have seen that the Minister has repeatedly stated that she is here to assist and support the THA and the TRHA. I am aware that she has assisted many of her constituents in many ways and I expect that she would continue to do so when asked.

We have seen over the last financial year several instances of discord between the Minister of Tobago Development and the THA. We look forward in this new financial year to the start of an era of collaboration and cooperation. We in Tobago need to put Tobago first and uppermost in our dealings, politics should really come second.

I now want to address some of the promises made by the former Minister of Health, one of which was the implementation of what she termed Annual Services Agreements which were put in place between the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities in Trinidad. The current Minister of Health also mentioned this Annual Services Agreement, and I have a copy here where it basically says, and if you would permit me, Mr. President:

“The Ministry of Health has constitutional responsibility for maintaining and actively seeking to improve the health status of the population. In the mid 1980s the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for greater effectiveness created five regional health authorities, legal entities to which it devolved responsibilities for service delivery, freeing the Ministry to focus on it sector-wide leadership.”

It was against this background that the Annual Services Agreement was developed. Now, looking at this document it has in it certain undertakings by the Regional Health Authority and other undertakings by the Ministry of Health.
7.30 p.m.

Under the undertakings for the RHA it says for example:

Continue to provide approximately the range and volume of services provided in 2009—2010, except the specific changes listed in this agreement;
work collaboratively with the Ministry of Health and other RHAs as relevant;
place new emphasis on the development of primary care and the quality system;
develop and maintain linkages in the communities. There are several things along that line.

With respect to the Ministry of Health undertakings:

pay the RHA the sum of X million dollars for recurrent expenditure;
allocate Y million dollars for infrastructure development.

Mr. President, this document does not really identify any specific item that the RHA will be held accountable for. An annual services agreement should really represent a document whereby the Ministry of Health provides funding to that particular RHA to provide a certain amount of services. The only way this document would truly make sense is if the cost of providing health care is known. At present the cost of health care is not known.

Historically, budgets are made by looking at what you were allocated and spent last year and making some projections for the following year. It is really not truly based on what the true cost of health care is. I hope, however, in this financial year, there would be some work in that regard to really quantify what is the true cost of health care, so that when annual services agreements are prepared, they will truly reflect this.

Another area raised by the former Minister of Health was the deficit in our medical pool. At that time—that is September 2010—there were over 240 vacancies for doctors and over 2,000 nursing vacancies. At that time, the Minister stated and I quote: “We have to put ads out, we will bring them back, they will work under the People’s Partnership Government”. The implication from this statement was that the doctors and nurses in Trinidad and Tobago did not want to work with the previous government.

Mr. President, I did see some of these ads and I wonder how many of these 240 doctor vacancies and 2,000-plus nursing vacancies have been filled. What I do know however is that an interview earlier this week by the Minister of Health, stated that a shortage of doctors and nurses in the public health sector has led to
the State hiring more medics from Cuba. The same article said that 65 doctors and nurses will be arriving by the month end from Cuba. Mr. President, what I want to know is, what is the true extent of the vacancies for doctors and nurses since the Government has come into office?

The former Minister of Health indicated that there will be the creation of the Children’s Life Fund, which was an initiative of the People’s Partnership Government and a priority of the Prime Minister. This fund was successfully introduced in early 2011, and it is expected that many needy children would have benefited from this fund. The Government does need to be commended for this development. However, I agree with my colleague, Sen. Baptiste-McKnight, when she stated that there needs to be some recourse for those children who try to access the fund and were denied funding because the Children’s Life Fund does seem to be soaking up a lot of the contributions that would have otherwise gone to other agencies that were funding children’s surgeries.

Another thing that was mentioned by the last Minister of Health was the improvement to the services at the San Fernando General Hospital. The public has been fully aware of the problems experienced by persons seeking health care at that institution. The last budget had stated that there were plans to build a ramp from the hospital to the Chancery Lane Complex, the aim being to increase the number of beds available at this institution.

I am happy to see that this is a promise that has in fact been fulfilled by the current administration, and I am informed that the Chancery Lane extension is due for completion by the end of 2011. I am sure those in San Fernando would be very happy with this development. I do hope, however, that consideration would be made for the increased need for doctors and nurses and other ancillary staff, because we have to remember that a hospital is not a building. A hospital is a building that has medical equipment being used by trained staff to provide the health care needs of patients. So if you are going to increase the number of bed space available you really would have to increase as well the number of medical or health care personnel to look after these patients.

Mr. President, the San Fernando General Hospital serves the largest population of all the general hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago. The figure that it is set to serve is in the region of 600,000. This is a very busy hospital. The medical, nursing and other ancillary staff, I am told, are just not sufficient to provide care for all these patients who access the hospital. There are many other issues related to the hospital that are too numerous to mention here. But when patients have a bad outcome at the hospital the health care workers are the ones that they tend to
blame first. I am hoping that serious attention will be paid to the chronic problems that exist not only at the San Fernando General Hospital but also at other public institutions in the country.

Now, with respect to the 2012 budget and some of the provisions made in this budget, it was stated, that the central government will work with the THA to roll out a 15-month tourism action plan. The only difficulty is that I am not sure if all the sectors in the tourism industry in Tobago are aware of this plan. And as I have mentioned the Tourism Development Fund of $100 million, it is still not clear exactly how that money is to be spent or accessed.

The other thing mentioned in the budget is the plan to have a review of the THA Act and to have constitutional reform, so that Tobago will, as is stated in the manifesto:

“Revisit the provisions of the THA Act, and in particular, the Fifth Schedule, with a view to granting greater autonomy and responsibility to the people of Tobago over matters that directly impact on Tobago.”

This was on page 63 of the people’s manifesto.

Mr. President, two groups actually started working on this revision of the THA Act and the Constitution. One group led by John Prince, who was appointed by the Tobago House of Assembly, and another group by the central government. So that what you had were two documents being presented. The John Prince committee produced a document that was sent to the THA and the other group produced a document that went to the central government and a Green Paper was developed. I was made to understand that both groups did meet with a view to—at least I thought—producing one document, however, this has not been the case. I was made to understand that the debate in the Tobago House of Assembly took place today on the process for constitutional reform. Sadly, Mr. President, this process of constitutional reform has now become a political football and I am hoping sanity will prevail so that all Tobagonians will speak with one voice on this very important issue.

I now come to funding for the Tobago House of Assembly. In the 2012 budget the total budgetary allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly was $2.199 billion, out of a total national expenditure of $54.6 billion. This amounted to 4.03 per cent of the national budget. Now, this 4.03 per cent represents the absolute minimum that was agreed when the Tobago House of Assembly took the central government to court and resulted in the Dispute Resolution Commission saying that Tobago should be allocated 4.03 to 6.9 per cent of the national budget.
Now, if you add the $500 million that the central government has said would be provided to Tobago by other Ministries, this will bring the total allocation for Tobago to $2.699 billion. And if we take this as a percentage of the national budget, this amounts to 4.9 per cent. Last year, in the 2010/2011 budget, the THA allocation was exactly 4.03 per cent, and when you added the money spent by the other Ministries, it actually came up to 5.6 per cent. So from the calculations I have made, the total money to be spent in Tobago is actually proportionally less than what was spent in 2011. And if we are to go by the partnership’s pledge in the manifesto, “Tobago side by side together”, “Not one behind the other”, it is known that development in Tobago is way behind that in Trinidad. So the only way Tobago can catch up is if Tobago is given a proportionally greater per cent of what it needs.

Now, if according to the Dispute Resolution Commission, you do not even give what is the maximum percentage allowance, then really it does not demonstrate that the Partnership Government is serious about having Tobago really come side by side. At the moment Tobago continues to lag behind and if no further allocation is given in this budget it will remain lagging behind.

Now having said that, the THA in its budget presentation for 2012 did state that, on page 8:

“As is the practice of this Assembly, and as indicated in the monthly budget reports…”

I am quoting the Secretary for Finance.

“…if, regardless of the reason, there are any financial balances at the end of any financial year, these balances are placed in what is called the Assembly’s Contingencies Account. An amount of $232.3 million was collected as so-called unspent balances for the financial year ended 30th September 2009 and placed in the Contingencies Account for 2010…”

And similarly:

“For fiscal 2010, $253 million of contingencies account resources were released by the Division of Finance and Enterprise following on instructions of the Executive Council…”

I am actually quite confused by this, because every year the THA requests—at least for the past three or four years—upwards of $3 billion to carry out its activities, and they usually get in the region of $2 billion or less.
So it is difficult for me to understand that you asked for money, you do not get what you ask for, and then you were able to save money at the end of the financial year. That is something that I find quite perplexing. And when you look at what was allocated to the Tobago Regional Health Authority for the last financial year, TRHA was allocated $202,901,000 for 2011. But they were actually only provided with $157,900,000 by the THA.

I have been told that after the budget is passed the THA gets its funds in three-month aliquots from the central government. And even though the budget does identify where the money should be spent, it seems as if the THA takes it upon itself to determine exactly who gets what. I have been told that at the beginning of any financial year the THA takes a certain percentage of the recurrent expenditure and puts it towards this contingency fund and then at the end of the financial year determines what is not spent and they roll it over. This seems to be the genesis of these unspent balances that Tobago has. What is not clear, is what is the balance of this contingency fund at the end of each year because it does not seem to be clear anywhere, and particularly for the TRHA. The TRHA, as most would know, for the last financial year were preparing to recruit staff because we were looking to move into a new hospital. We are supposed to move in this year, so it boggles the mind that the allocation to the TRHA was actually cut by the THA by almost $50 million.

7.45 p.m.

The TRHA during the last financial year went through some serious financial constraints. There were times when salaries were paid late, there are supplies that are still in need of funding and there were some instances where supplies of services to the RHA were halted or even stopped because of this funding. So I am hoping that for this next financial year, when the hospital will in fact be coming into effect—I see for this financial year the RHA has been allocated $281 million—that at least they get all that they are allocated this year because the hospital needs to be properly functional. As I said it needs equipment, it needs staff.

When the TRHA appeared before a joint select committee in March of this year it stated that there was outstanding—they needed to hire an additional 600 more in health care personnel, because when we get to that new hospital in Signal Hill, it is supposed to provide improved services, it is supposed to provide new services to the public. And these services can only be provided by staff. So, I am hoping that the allocation is not cut for 2012 as it was for 2011.
Mr. President, just a couple more points with respect to the TRHA. In 2010, voluntary separation of employment was set to occur for the public servants in Tobago. This means that most of the—at least from the hospital—public servants who were previously employed by the Division of Health and Social Services would have gone over to the TRHA or would have taken VSEP. I am informed that there are still some health care workers who had requested transfers to the TRHA, who have not been transferred yet. Now, this is just a small number of people, maybe 20 to 30, but it means that you still have public servants in the hospital when the majority of personnel are RHA employees. But when I look at the allocation for the Division of Health and Social Services 2011, I see on page 59: Hospital: salaries and cost of living allowance $16 million, and when I look at the establishments for the Division of Health and Social Services, I see under Medical staff: Hospital and Medical Director one; Specialist Medical Officer one; Registrar, 6, House Officers, 11.

Now at present, there are no public service doctors at the hospital, so I am at a loss to understand how come in 2012, you have an allocation for public service doctors, which is funded with several people on the establishment. You also have nurses on the establishment, nursing supervisor, 106 nurses, 8 head nurses, clinical instructor; I do not understand what is happening with respect to that. In summary, for this new financial year 2012—

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

Motion made: That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. E. Moheni]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. V. Wheeler: Thank you, Mr. President. I never thought I had enough to say to reach 45 minutes actually. I did not think it was possible.

I would just like to address some items mentioned by the current Minister of Health in addressing the budget. A couple of things I would like to agree with him. One of which is the introduction of the Nurses and Midwives (Amdt.) Bill where he seeks to create a specialist register for nurses. I agree with this Bill and its intention because we are aware of the shortage of medical doctors that exist not only in the country but worldwide. There are certain tasks with respect to providing care that nurses, specially trained, given additional skills can perform. So, I am hoping that this is a Bill that would be brought forward forthwith to ease the human resource in the health sector.
Another Bill that I agree with him with is the National Blood Transfusion Service Bill, which is said to give rise to accountability and management issues and inconsistencies in the availability of blood and blood products. Early this year when there was an attempt to remove the chit system by the former Minister of Health, it really resulted in a drastic reduction in the availability of blood supply. Of course, the argument then was that some patients had to purchase blood. We are hoping with the introduction of this National Blood Transfusion Service Bill this body will help to rationalize and it would be responsible for collecting, storage and transferring and the delivery of blood and blood products.

Another comment is with respect to AIDS and HIV. Now during the last financial year there was an organization, the National AIDS Coordinating Committee, that was disbanded by the—well I am not sure if is the Prime Minister or the Minister of Health. This body was responsible for coordinating preventative activities in fighting AIDS and HIV. Now a similar coordinating body still exists in Tobago, and we know that even though the number of deaths from HIV has reduced, the number of new infections is still rising. I am hoping that this matter would be addressed soon, so if there is the intention to replace the national coordinating body with another body some decision should be made soon to address the situation.

Mr. President, I would just like to close now, and I find myself using similar words to what I used in closing in the last budget. The people of Tobago voted for change on May 24, 2010. We are expecting the delivery of a fully functional modern hospital as promised, with working well-maintained equipment being operated, staff who are well trained and well motivated to give their work 110 per cent. The Tobago public has waited too long for this. We are expecting the Magdalena Grand Resort Hotel to be completed next month as promised; we are expecting all the other outstanding major projects to be completed in Tobago as promised; we are expecting the THA Acts and the Constitution to be amended as promised, to bring more autonomy to Tobago; we are expecting revival of the tourism sector that is going to bring about increase in jobs and work for all those who depend on this sector. Mr. President, I thank you [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Before we proceed with the next speaker, I just want to make Senators aware that dinner is available, so if you care to leave for dinner you may do so. The House will break at 8.15 p.m. for half an hour, but you of course are invited to stream out when you please to have dinner beforehand.
The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications (Sen. Nicole Dyer-Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for affording me the opportunity to contribute to this very significant and historic budget discussion. As you are aware this is my maiden contribution and as such [Desk thumping] I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Senators of this honourable Chamber for welcoming my colleagues and me, the new Senators, because you have heard it mentioned time and again that there were a few of us who were replaced and a few of us who are now coming in and so on. So I would like to thank all of the Senators of this Senate for welcoming us with open arms, and I trust that after this contribution the Senators of the Opposition would continue to welcome us and welcome me with open arms.

[Desk thumping].

Mr. President, I would also like to take the opportunity and join my honourable colleagues in wishing the national community Shub Divali; a happy and holy Divali on behalf of all of us here on the Government side, the Opposition side, and the Independent Bench [Desk thumping]

Of course, I would also like to take the opportunity to recognize the parliamentary staff for their hard work in ensuring that this Chamber was opened and ready for us to occupy on time, so well done to the members of the parliamentary staff. [Desk thumping] And, last but not least, I would like to join the chorus of congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Acting Prime Minister for the delivery of what was a very steady and sure financial and fiscal contribution. Well done, Mr. Minister; well done, Acting Prime Minister. [Desk thumping].

Now, Mr. President, the Minister of Finance presented the budget for this Government of Trinidad and Tobago 2012 titled “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” and this is indeed so. You see, Mr. President, the theme aptly describes what this Government has had to undertake upon ascension to office. Now, this ascension was done against the backdrop of significant global and economic challenges coupled with mountains of the previous Government’s mismanagement, misappropriations, and malfeasance. [Desk thumping] And, against this back drop this Government has managed to hold firmly to the fiscal reins [Interruption] whilst developing and implementing—I will get to that—solution focused strategies toward economic transformation.

Now, Mr. President and members of the national community no doubt by now had the opportunity to review and deliberate over the budget and what was presented, and I am sure that the deliberations would have returned the due
demonstration of sound economic positioning. And I know that my colleagues on the other side would no doubt agree with me that our Minister of Finance has placed us on a very sound trajectory, moving from 2012 onward. [Desk thumping]

It has been stated that perhaps when you do not know from whence you came, then you may not have any idea of where you are heading. Hence it is important for me to segue into a brief look at our not so distant past, and I would just like to take the opportunity to refresh the memories of the Senators of this honourable Senate as to what the former administration promised in just a few areas.

Mr. President, you know something, this reads almost like the story of Christmas past. You know the story and you have these ghosts of Christmas past where the spirits appear to someone, and they appear shackled and chained by the misdeeds and wrongdoings of the past, so that this story reminds me somewhat of that Christmas story. And we can go as far back as 2003 where budgets of the past administration—just to move away a tad because I just want to assure the hon. colleagues on the Opposition Bench that I am not referring to them in the least because they are very honourable representatives, and I know they would not have had anything to do with any type of malfeasance. But it is still important for us to recognize and remember from whence we came, so that we would know as we move forward, we could change trajectory and not end up in that position. [Desk thumping]

Sen. George: That was very neat.

8.00 p.m.

So, Mr. President, in no predetermined order, I would just like to identify a few of the areas of the budget presentation, and I would do so based on a quotation from the very eloquent speaker of the Opposition, Sen. Hinds. Sen. Hinds stated, “Truths are stubborn things; they do not go away.” And so, it is against that backdrop, that I recall some truths from Budget 2004. In culture, the budget of that regime, then promised a new state-of-the-art national carnival centre at the Queen’s Park Savannah, and it was promised that phase one would have been completed in March 2006, in time for Carnival 2007.

Now, I am an avid masquerader, and I recall as an avid masquerader and as a member of the cultural community out there, that loud voices were heard around that time, one, because of a lack of consultation in the process of moving towards the development of this national carnival centre. It was stated by some members of that cultural community that they felt left out of the process. I would have
appropriation bill, 2011

[SEN. DYER-GRIFFITH]

anticipated that if it is such a significant move would have been made to move the
culture along, that you would have had significant consultation with the members
of the cultural community. So much so, Mr. President, if that consultation had
taken place, then the members would have understood that moving the Carnival
out of the Savannah and into 25 x 50 space of roadway just would not make
sense; it would not please the masqueraders. As such, in 2007, there was no
national carnival centre, which we did not mind at all.

In fact, this year, I believe that the Members of the People’s Partnership
Government and the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism made the boast, and
quite rightly so, that this was the best Carnival ever, because we took advantage,
we were afforded the opportunity to take advantage of the stage, so this was
labelled as the best Carnival ever, because the people were given the opportunity
to say what they wanted and we listened. [Crosstalk] That is all right. That is all
right. [Crosstalk] And he came with us so that said a lot; he remained with us.
[Crosstalk] That is okay, he will come back.

With respect to National Security, I feel really gratified that the Senators of the
opposite side are taking the opportunity to contribute to my contribution because that
says to me that the contribution that I am making is hitting a nerve; it is resonating with
my hon. colleagues, so I thank you for that. [Desk thumping]

National security: just to go back to this, the shackles of which I spoke—national
security. We have seen the strategic alphabet soup. We have gone from Anaconda to
Baghdad to blimps to OPVs to zero tolerance; from A to Z, Minister of National
Security. And lest we forget, Mr. President, we must include the $1 billion Tarouba
Stadium—$1 billion Tarouba Stadium—and I just would like to go into a little segue
that Sen. Cudjoe mentioned, and I would want to agree with you. She mentioned in her
contribution that she felt ill at ease that the Minister of Sport would have obtain
$300 million to build and develop three stadiums—$300 million—and she felt ill at ease
because Tobago was not granted a similar sum. Am I correct, Sen. Cudjoe? Something
along those lines, and I agree with you. The point is that Sen. Cudjoe made the point
abundantly clear for us—$300 million for three stadiums; $1 billion for the Tarouba
Stadium. [Desk thumping]

Sen. George: And it cannot work.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: And it is still non-functional. So that is a shackles, Mr.
President.

Other shackles: the $100 million expenditure in the NHA refurbishment
programme; the $3 million defect in WASA, and we have here, Sen. The Hon.
Emmanuel George, Minister of Public Utilities, and he would speak to the
significant successes of WASA, and the projects which came in within budget and on time; but I will leave that for him to speak to. But, it speaks to the level of success that the Members of the People’s Partnership Government have been experiencing, and it has redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I can go on and on. We have heard it all, from “cookie monster,” from all sorts of stories, from the millions and billions of dollars in debt. I can go on and on of each one of these shackles and speak to it over and over again. Sen. Deyalsingh—I have heard him at least twice—mentioned that when you pelt a pebble from across on that side, he will throw and hit a boulder across on this side, and really, at the end of the day, nothing really is achieved. But the reason I felt it absolutely necessary just to remind us of a few of these things is to ensure that we do not forget. It is important for us never to forget some of these things—the reason we are here and we do not want to go over there. [Desk thumping]

So, Mr. President, I choose to dwell no further on the shackles of the past, as many of these, as I mentioned, were the impetus for this exchange. The thing about this Government is, perhaps, we do not blow our trumpets.

Hon. Senators: What! [Laughter]

Sen. Beckles: “I and I Government—I do that and I do this and—” [Inaudible].

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: We do not blow our trumpets enough, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: “All yuh eh wait for enough.”

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: Enough, or perhaps it may be that we exercise significant restraint in extolling our achievements. However, Mr. President, with your acquiescence, I would like to remove those proverbial shackles of which I previously spoke, and identify just a few areas of success over the last 365 days of governance in Trinidad and Tobago.

This document here [Senator holds up book] is entitled “The First 365 days Pillar of National Development”. Mr. President, this document here just identifies a few of the success factors that the People’s Partnership Government has managed to undertake within 365 days. In brief, it articulates the significant achievements of this Government. As I mentioned earlier, it is important to see from whence we came, so that we can truly appreciate what we have accomplished, and what the budgetary plans and allocations will allow for in 2012.
Mr. President, if you permit me to identify what we term the significant 24, that was about a few months, of course, it will be more than 24, and in this document, it articulates many, many hundreds of successes, but I would just like to articulate a few, a thumbnail of descriptions of 24 of the more significant actions of this Government during the first 365 days in office. Mr. President, we will see, as the budget theme identifies, a common developmental thread from the achievement of those days along with the extensions of service in each area. In other words, from this document, we would identify the achievements and then I would seek to link how the contribution for 2012 would look to expand on some of these achievements; and so, I remove shackle No. 1.

The establishment of the Children’s Life Fund. And further in this budget and my hon. colleague on the other side agreed, thank you very much, hon. colleague.

Hon. Senators: It was good.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: It was good. And I recognize and appreciate that you recognize and appreciate our success factors; we thank you for that. [Crosstalk]

Excellent, excellent! That is why I am positive that the Members of the Opposition will support this budget because from the pronouncement of Sen. Al-Rawi, he has recognized that the establishment of the Children’s Life Fund was par excellence, and for that, we thank you.

Mr. President, for the extension of that, in the budgetary allocation for 2012, there was a clause which said that they would focus on the expansion and development of a new children’s hospital which, of course, is very important and it ties very nicely into the concept of the Children’s Life Fund.

Achievement No. 2: the provision of laptops for first formers in secondary schools. Now, it is easy just to state the provision of laptops for children in secondary schools, but it is important for us to understand the number of persons or children that were touched and reached by this project. For the last year, the distribution and number of first formers that would have been reached by this project was 16,655 young persons. [Desk thumping] I just would like to repeat that, because this is no small success.

Sen. George: Say it again.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: This is no small success, Sen. Baynes—16,655 young persons were in receipt of laptops in the first 365 days of this Government being in office.
The revision of the grant to a pension and the increase of the pension for senior citizens who qualify to $3,000 per month. The first point here, I would just like to expand a little a bit, because I recall, during election period, this was an election topic where many persons had spoken against the removal of the pension and replacing it with a grant. Because it was felt—[Interrupt] no, no, during the election period—that the pension is something that you are entitled to, it is an entitlement, and as such, the removal of the pension was “disrespect.” You know, that word is a word that we hear a lot from the THA, so it is the first word that came to mind. It was felt by many senior citizens that the removal of the pension was tantamount to disrespect, because that is more of an entitlement where as a grant—I can give you a grant, I can take it away. So that with the inception of the People’s Partnership—[Crosstalk] it was—we replaced the grant with the pension and increased the pension for senior citizens who qualify to $3,000 per month.

Further, Mr. President, as articulated in this recent budget, equity will be brought to the system to further expand the net of support by increasing the minimal National Insurance retirement pension from $2,000 to $3,000. I recall one of the Independent Senators making a statement around this and wanting to have a little more of a streamlined effect to the provision of this articulation and we took notes and I am sure that the hon. Minister of Finance would be more than happy to look at the streamlining of that NIS scenario.

8.15 p.m.

Another achievement, Mr. President, the passage of strong legislation to deal with kidnapping, wiretapping, human trafficking and firearms. For this we need to recognize the hard work by the hon. Attorney General, for ensuring that these pieces of legislation were, in fact, passed within the time frame within which they were supposed to have been.[Desk thumping]

Another shackle removed and this, Mr. President, was a shackle which we inherited and this refers to the Clico issue. We inherited this shackle and within the first 365 days the People’s Partnership Government, had the commencement of payments to Clico policyholders. I recall having conversations within this honourable Senate just a short while ago when we discussed the provisions of this Bill. The information which I have just to refresh the memories of the members of the national community, from Clico over 7,150 STIPs, or Short Term Investment Products, were accepted with a dollar value of $227.7 million, so that we have given out over 7,150 STIPs. Over 1,554 British American clients with a dollar value of $37.2 million were accepted, and the figures go on and on. It just demonstrates our boldness to take the issues by the neck and to get things done. [Desk thumping]
Achievement and removal of shackle—the revamping of the incentives to agriculture including dropping the lending rates for the ADB. Mr. President, I would just like to recognize the contributions by the hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, because [Desk thumping] not only was it sound, it was also strategic and it was very clear in terms of the articulation of what was achieved within the first year, and what will be achieved within the next year, and exactly how the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs and the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs will be moving ahead. I will like to again underscore and congratulate the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs for what he has achieved in his Ministry over the last year. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: I believe this is a convenient moment. I propose to take the break at this point, we will return at 8.45 p.m. after the dinner break.

8.20 p.m.: Sitting suspended.
8.45 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: Yes, Sen. Dyer-Griffith was on her legs. I estimate that she spent 20 minutes and, therefore, she has another 25 minutes of her original time. [Desk thumping]

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Before we took the break I was outlining just a few of the achievements of this Government over the first 365 days in office. One of the very significant achievements was the formation and creation of the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Now, I recall when the hon. Prime Minister articulated this concept on an election platform there were a few persons who verbalized wanting to find out a bit more about why would you have a Ministry of the People and Social Development? They did not understand the concept and some questions were being asked around, what is the concept of this Ministry of the People and Social Development?

Today, Mr. President the concept of the Ministry of the People and Social Development has held true and is extremely successful, because the Ministry of the People and Social Development holds to the very core of what the People’s Partnership Government stands for. If you would look at each of the forms of documentation which we have put forward, you would see that at the core, and at the heart of all of the principles which we articulate would be that of putting the people first—[Desk thumping] and it is against that, that the creation of the Ministry of the People and Social Development was so important, and so integral to the nucleus, or being the nucleus of the movement of the People’s Partnership.
It is against that I would just like to quote from the document, the budget statement, where under “Managing Our Social Safety Net” it was stated that:

“…in Trinidad and Tobago poverty is estimated at 17 per cent of the population with the”—levels on the rise, and it is articulated here that—“these figures are totally unacceptable”—and as such a —“Poverty Reduction Programme has allowed persons-at-risk to undertake micro projects”—this will be facilitated by providing—“financial support to community-based and non-governmental organizations as well as private sector entities for the purpose of supporting micro credit”—and the small businesses and—“small entrepreneurs”.

Now, Mr. President, it behooves me to understand and to appreciate why would any Member, why would any hon. Senator, why would anyone want to go against such a principle as this? Why would anyone want to go against the principle of things which have at its very core and its very heart, the issues which put people first?

Mr. President, I recall when I was in another incarnation and I had offered myself up for general elections, that in the walks around the constituency—the constituency I had offered myself for is Diego Martin Central. In walking some areas of that constituency the abject poverty which you would have seen in some of those constituency areas was enough just to rip your heart out; to rip it to the very core.

When the hon. Prime Minister—and I know the hon. Prime Minister, she would have walked many of these streets before not only in the constituency I had offered myself up for, but throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. When you are faced with some circumstances of abject poverty, how in good conscience could anyone look at provisions such as these, which are articulated in this budget statement, and come and say and offer that you will not support, or you cannot support? I cannot accept that. [Desk thumping]

Another area of success, the introduction of buses for rural areas and increasing the PTSC sponsored maxis for school children in rural communities. Now, again, Mr. President, another shackle which we chose to remove and to replace with a success factor. I would like to take the opportunity to recognize the Minister of Transport, Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj for the significant work [Desk thumping] which he has been doing in his Ministry, and before that, that he would have undertaken with PTSC.

You see, Mr. President, I recall a scenario where in a rural community a family existed and this particular family—there were 10 children in this family in this rural community. With these 10 children, it was extremely difficult for the parents
Appropriation Bill, 2011

[SEN. DYER-GRIFFITH]

of this family to be able to get them to school, because we all appreciate the importance of a sound education. The cost of sending these children to school was about $20/$25 a day. But if we were just to calculate at $20 per day, per child; and then you calculate that for a week, that family in that rural district, with those 10 children would have to spend something like $1,000 a week; this is unacceptable.

It is against scenarios such as these that we need to recognize and appreciate and underscore the success factors at the introduction of buses to those rural areas—[Desk thumping] because now, Mr. President, that family and many other families can now send their children to school and allow their children to have a sound education.

In having a sound education it brings to mind something which I have heard senior persons mention, something called civics. In civics, Mr. President, one of the key areas of learning is that you listen when persons are speaking. And that area of civics is something which I know that we would want to reintroduce in our education system, so it is important and imperative when in this august Chamber these hon. Senators demonstrate how excellence is performed, and how we listen intently when each Senator is making a contribution. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: “Yes, well putted! Well putted! Well putted! Well putted! Well putted!” [ Interruption]

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: So, Mr. President. [Laughing]—I did. Again I just—I mean we are speaking and we make jest of certain things, but it is important; I just want to get back to that family, because it might not resonate with us as much as it would resonate with them. The mere fact that they can now afford to send each of these children to school, every single day and still have a little money put aside to buy food and other things is significant. It might not sound significant to some people who might not see the significance and say, “Well, so what?” Because if it is, anyone who looks at something like that and you look at the strategic imperatives within managing our social safety net, and then you pause and you say we can never support that, then I cannot understand it. I cannot understand it. [Desk thumping]

Again, Mr. President, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize the hon. Minister of Transport for his strategic imperatives and for the success factors which he has undertaken thus far. In addition to that, in addition to the introduction of the buses in the rural communities, he also was successful in ordering 19 buses for the differently-abled.
8.55 p.m.

Mr. President, just for the benefit of persons who might not have been in this honourable Chamber a little earlier on when I had started my contribution, I made reference to the Christmas story and The Ghost of Christmas Past, and how when those spirits who were shackled by some of their misdeeds and wrongdoings of the past would visit the other persons, that is somewhat how I felt. So I am just speaking to the things that have been done within the first 365 days to remove those shackles of the past, and each one of those shackles would be removed by an achievement. So just for the benefit of those who might not have heard, I would just like to reiterate. So that is where I am going, I am speaking to the removal of each shackle and replacing it with a golden bracelet. [Desk thumping]

So another area of achievement was the decision to build a school for the Spiritual Baptist community. Another area of achievement was the completion of a free flowing highway from Port of Spain to Chaguanas including the removal of lights at El Socorro and Aranguez. [Desk thumping] And we move on: delivering on the promise to hand out land deeds and leases to former sugar workers; the development of police surveillance bays on the highways; turning the sod to establish a campus of the University of the West Indies in Debe—significant. [Desk thumping]

And the reason that is significant is that I myself, I must admit, have fallen prey to being stigmatized as a “Northy”. A “Northy”, Mr. President, I think that is what they call them, a “Northy” and they tell you—a “town girl” or whatever, that if you do not know beyond Caroni Bridge or something like that then—

Hon. Senator: South of the Caroni.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: —south of the Caroni. So you have heard the phrase “South of the Caroni”, which is an unacceptable phrase. It is an unacceptable phrase. So what this Government has done is to recognize that there is a significant need to decentralize services, and in doing so these services have expanded to educational services so that you can cater for people and students in all areas because you recognize the challenges that you would face if you were a student coming from Debe for example, from Cucharan Trace; the very famous Cucharan Trace. [Desk thumping] So go from Cucharan Trace to St. Augustine, it is unacceptable, so as a result of that this very responsible Government has recognized that we needed to decentralize these services and to reach out to the various communities. It has been said that everything is in Port of Spain, so that we needed that, and with that being said you would find that there was a build-up
Appropriation Bill, 2011

Thursday, October 20, 2011

[SEN. DYER-GRIFFITH]

of traffic and that would go on to other things. So there is a ripple effect that happens because of this centralization, and so with the foresight of this Government we have seen it necessary to move and shift, and to turn this sod to establish a campus for UWI in Debe.

And I go on. Another shackle removed and replaced; the decision to establish an integrated tertiary level campus to connect COSTAATT, UWI and UTT in Tobago, Sen. Baynes. [Desk thumping] Now, Mr. President, I had mentioned this golden bracelet a little bit earlier and I would just like to underscore it; the completion, and I want to articulate it very slowly—the completion of the 28 km water main from Navet to San Fernando substantially improving supply to 300,000 persons, and this significant project of scale was done on time and within budget—[Desk thumping]—on time and within budget. And I would like to recognize again, the Minister of Public Utilities, Sen. the Hon. Emmanuel George, because, Mr. President, historically you would not have heard such things coming out of a public utility, so that we need to understand the significance of a project of scale being completed on time and within budget. Three hundred thousand persons would have benefited from it, and if we were doing the maths and following the calculations of the number of persons who would have benefited from various success factors, we have reached over 500,000-plus, and I have not even started to really get into the meat of the matter.

So it just demonstrates and it goes back to the core of people being the nucleus of the People’s Partnership. In keeping with that, the Minister of National Security articulated the non-taxable special allowance of $1,000 that was given to select members of the protective services, because the hon. Minister recognizes the absolute importance and significance of the contributions of the members of the protective services. I am sure that he would have loved to have given more than that $1,000, however—

Sen. Hinds: Gary Griffith?

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: It must be stated—you can go ahead and say that. I expected that. It must be stated that the members of the protective services do recognize this, do appreciate it and in keeping with that in this fiscal package there was a decision to extend that to cover more members of the protective services, and with this provision, approximately 13,000 persons would have benefited from this subvention. I am sure that the hon. Sen. Hinds would join me in applauding the hon. Minister of National Security for ensuring that 13,000 persons of the protective services would benefit from that contribution. There is nothing that I am sure the hon. Senator would want to do more than to recognize that 13,000 members would have benefited from this subvention. That is a significant fact, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]
Achievement: the turning of the sod for the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway. Now this is another significant achievement and I would want to agree with Sen. Basharat Ali when he spoke a little bit to the opening up of Point Fortin. You see, Mr. President, many of my family members still reside in Point Fortin and it is very challenging many times to get from where I currently am into Point Fortin because of the distance and so on. So that the news of the turning of the sod of this highway brought significant joy to people not only in Point Fortin but other persons along the stretch of that highway and the thing about it—

Hon. Senator: And north-east too.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: And north-east as well. The thing about it, as Sen. Ali articulated very clearly, is that once this highway is completed then it opens up a gateway of opportunities for the persons along that highway—along the stretch of the highway. One of the things that I have noticed is that Point Fortin in particular—Point Fortin boasts of many persons from the cultural milieu; it boasts of many national sporting heroes; it boasts of the place with the oil; and the boasts can go on for Point Fortin, and yet for whatever reason Point Fortin has still remained somewhere very, very distant from the central and from the receipt of— [ Interruption] Yes. And for some reason so we have to ascertain that reason. But with the advent of the People’s Partnership Government we have recognized and acknowledged that and as a result of that you have had the turning of the sod so that you can open up a gateway from San Fernando to Point Fortin. [Desk thumping]

Recognition of the cultural diversity of our people by the establishment of the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism: we have also seen the launch of the Workforce Assessment Centres to assess and certify competencies of individuals who have the requisite workplace experience to perform trades but do not have formal certification. I am sure that the hon. Sen. Karim will speak more to this area and this is a very significant area. I would also like to underscore the work that has been undertaken by the hon. Senator, because he has just been going and going and expanding opportunities for the young people in Trinidad and Tobago. Congratulations, hon. Senator. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, there are a number of other areas of success factors. Let me hold up the book again and we can speak from now until “thy kingdom come” with the number of areas of achievement, but I think one very, very key area of achievement that really links to this Government listening to the people and listening and understanding due process and good governance and democracy, democratic governance, is that this Government held local government elections
when they were constitutionally due since 2006 and were not held by the previous administration. We held local government elections as soon as we came into Government—first priority, Mr. President, because we recognized that the people’s needs must come first; they must supersede whatever ulterior motives that any other administration might have had to ensure that you do not allow the people their democratic rights since 2006. That is unforgivable, Mr. President, unforgivable. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Even Hinds would agree.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: Mr. President, these are but a few of the significant achievements for the first 365 days of this administration, and I am sure that as at today I can articulate, and each of these hon. colleagues can articulate, 365 days more. One of the things that drive these success factors and these areas of accomplishment and achievement is that we are led by someone who understands the term “leadership”. She understands what it means to be a leader, and the thing about the hon. Prime Minister is that she listens intently. She listens intently to each one of her Ministers. She listens to the people, she understands the role and the key importance of people to the process, and that is one of the reasons we are a part of this side of the Senate and that is why the hon. Senators are on that side of the Senate, because for some reason people and the needs of the people, the thoughts of the people were placed at the side.

So the reason we are here, one of the key reasons we are here is because of our hon. Prime Minister. And, Mr. President, with your acquiescence, I would just like to articulate a little bit of what the hon. Prime Minister has been doing when she leads these missions and she ensures that Trinidad and Tobago is represented on an international scale. In the realm of foreign policy, the hon. Prime Minister has led from the front in a number of areas. Again, the Prime Minister continues to achieve a number of firsts, and I remember hearing it on the other side, that this Government is a Government of many firsts, and this is true and we accept that and we thank you for that: first female Prime Minister, and we can go on with the other firsts, and we accept it and we thank you for it.

Not only do we have the first female Prime Minister, but so too the first Woman Chair in office of the Commonwealth. And in keeping with this vein, it is imperative that we note just a few of those achievements as Chair in the Commonwealth. The Caribbean Regional Colloquium, which was an initiative of the hon. Prime Minister, was held in June in Port of Spain in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, UN Women, The Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership and the OAS. This event was geared towards treating with critical
areas affecting gender equality as outlined in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for 2005—2015, and this colloquium served as a platform for regional female leaders to network and discuss issues relevant to the Caribbean geographical and cultural space.

Importantly, one of the core objectives of the colloquium was to achieve concrete results in advancing women’s political participation. One of the key outcomes of the colloquium was the Port of Spain consensus on transformational leadership. And this outcome document was developed by participants and endorsed by UN Women, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the OAS and CIWiL, and it articulates the necessity of ensuring women’s equal political participation, shared best practices and outlines the measures that must be taken in order to attain this goal.

9.10 p.m.

Now, I was honoured to be a participant at that regional colloquium, and we hosted a number of women from across the globe, and one of the key threads that were articulated throughout that colloquium was the huge amount of respect that these women demonstrated for the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Respect in terms of, one, recognizing the need to host such a colloquium and recognizing the need to have it under the theme of “Transformational Leadership”. This is the first time this has happened in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. President, and the women from across the globe recognize this, and we also need to recognize this because our Prime Minister, as I mentioned before, leads from the front.

Mr. President, in order to get as much momentum as possible to the “Women as Agents of Change”, the Commonwealth theme, it was important that it be promoted on a global scale. Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar, therefore undertook to arrange a high-level meeting of prominent women leaders to address the issue of women’s political participation in the margins of the 66th United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. 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. F. Al-Rawi]
Question put and agreed to.

Sen. N. Dyer-Giffith: Thank very much, Mr. President, and thank you very much, hon. colleague and hon. colleagues, for allowing me the opportunity to continue this contribution. I must tell you that I am shocked that I have taken up most of my speaking time. So, I will just jump a few because there is an area that I would like to speak to just a bit before my time is completed, and this is in support of what Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy would have spoken to in the Ministry of National Security.
My heart cannot expand anymore with a sense of pride for the hon. Minister and for what he had done in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of national safety and security. [Desk thumping] Now, I recall in the other place someone mentioned that the National Security Operational Centre is but a figment of someone’s imagination. So, I am really happy that the hon. Minister of National Security clarified that for that person, and if that person did not hear I am sure that person’s hon. colleagues would share the message that the National Security Operations Centre is certainly not a figment of anyone’s imagination but as a result of that and led by Brig. John Sandy, we have seen significant achievements, and that is the reason I would like to underscore what he would have articulated earlier today.

The members of our protective services, Mr. President, words cannot describe the sense of pride, and I use the word again because it is the best word to describe how I feel about how they go about their duties and how they have put themselves out in the front to represent not this Government, not the Opposition, not the Independents, but every single person in Trinidad and Tobago. Every single individual, good, bad and indifferent, they have pledged to protect and serve us all with pride. As a result of strengthened collaboration—strengthened collaboration—particularly within the last two months, as articulated by the hon. Minister, I would like to quote for a specific time frame—and the Minister stated it, but I would like to break it down just a tad between August 22 to October 10, 2010, and the same time period in 2011, you have had a decrease in murders by 51 per cent; a decrease in wounding and shootings by 60 per cent; a decrease in serious indecencies by 60 per cent, a decrease in kidnapping for ransom by 100 per cent, and a decrease in larceny by 80 per cent.

Now, I have heard it stated that these successes are but fleeting successes, and we should not boast about fleeting successes. But you know something, Mr. President, if it means that the life of one person is saved then we do not consider that a fleeting success; we will never consider that a fleeting success. [Desk thumping]

When it is stated and it is reported by members of the police service that they have taken up X number of guns off the streets, and you hear it stated “Well, is just three guns, is just four guns”, well right now for the period, for this year—and the hon. Minister can bear me out, I believe it is over 300 for the year—over 300 guns have been removed from the streets of Trinidad and Tobago and I am positive, Mr. President, that all of the hon. Senators in this Senate will join me in recognizing the hard work that has been undertaken by the members of the protective services, regardless of whether you are Opposition or Independent. [Desk thumping]
Mr. President, just a few other areas as the hon. Minister would have articulated during this time frame, particularly during the last two months, we have seen a suppression of the incidence of gang-related homicides during that period. We have seen the successful dismantling of gangs during that period, allowing for the law enforcement agencies to gather their intelligence. We have seen the ability to have undertaken and succeed in a number of large joint operations.

Mr. President, we have seen the unearthing of a billion-dollar illegal bunkering diesel racket. [Desk thumping] Billion dollar, Mr. President! Billion dollar! We have seen approximately $1 billion in narcotics and illegal drugs seized and destroyed—$1 billion of illegal narcotics and drugs removed from the streets, removed from the hands of children, removed from the hands of young men and women, removed from our streets—$1 billion.

Hon. Senator: Hinds would be proud of that.

Sen. N. Dyer-Griffith: All of the hon. Senators would be proud of that achievement. [Desk thumping] We now see the expression of a renewed sense of safety and security by our citizenry, a renewed social contract between the citizens and the protective services, so much so, that we have had hundreds of calls coming in for information—from the information that I have received. We have seen the respect of the law with persons harbouring persons of interest giving them up to the protective services. I saw that on television. I saw it on the news sometime ago when I think the police were looking for someone and the members of the national community gave that person up because they stated that they did not want to harbour any persons, any criminals or anyone committing an illegal act within their community.

Those things just did not happen before. Correct me if I am wrong, but those things just did not happen before, and that is as a result of the renewed social contract between the citizenry and the members of the protective services, and a lot of that is due to the effective leadership of the Minister of National Security, Brig. John Sandy, so we need to recognize that, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I am cognizant of my time, so as I begin to close I would like to draw a reference to the Medium-term Policy Framework document, page 5, chapter 1 where it is stated that:

“As the Government engages in the process of economic transformation a simultaneous and complementary effort of social transformation must take place…”
You see, Mr. President, whenever you experience change, many times you also experience convulsions because with change comes a sense of anxiety, and that is why we on this side understand and appreciate the levels of anxiety that might be experienced by some hon. Senators on the other side because this social transformation is not an easy thing you know. Just as I am sure it was not easy to remove those balisier ties, and remove that shackle and come into the national symbols and national colours, I am sure they would understand that social transformation is not easy but it has to be done.

Understanding that social transformations can both influence and be influenced by economic transformation, the goal is to create the conditions which will engender greater equity and inclusiveness in the society through expanded opportunities for wealth generation and accumulation and participation in the national development process for every individual, community, and region in the country, and I am convinced with aspirations such as these, underscored by the evidence of significant performance in the first 365 days in office, I am convinced that the august Senators of all Benches will ensure the passage and the continued passage and the successful movement of the fiscal package for 2012. I am sure they will agree with me and understand that we need to support the continued movement of the trajectory which was presented by the hon. Minister of Finance.

I thank you, Mr. President, for affording me the opportunity to contribute, and I would like to thank my hon. colleagues on all sides for supporting me throughout my contribution. I thank you.

Mr. President: Before you start, Sen. Prescott SC, I am sure that all Senators would like to join in congratulating Sen. Dyer-Griffith on her maiden performance. No doubt it was an enthralling and dynamic contribution, Sen. Dyer-Griffith. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Elton Prescott SC: Mr. President, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, and may I segue from your initial remarks following up on the contribution of Sen. Dyer-Griffith, and myself say that it is very pleasing to note the changes made on the Government Benches in this august Senate. In one swift move they have managed to alter the average age of the Bench downward, and to improve the appearance—[Laughter]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Significantly!

Sen. E. Prescott SC: —the collective appearance. And this is not only a reference to the sartorial outlook but it is the physical beauty of some of the new Senators in the Senate on the Government Benches.
Sen. George: We will take that! We will take that!

Sen. E. Prescott SC: I comment favourably also on the very seamless transition that each of the two—who have spoken so far—has made in that the level of debate on the Government Benches has not been unfavourably affected by their presence but they have managed to maintain the standard that we have grown accustomed to from that side. [Desk thumping]

So, I wish you well, I look forward to the contribution of the other two—I think it is only two more.

Sen. George: Three.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Three? Very well. Mr. President, I rise to firstly establish that I am satisfied that the Minister of Finance has presented a budget which all of us can find something good to say about. It is not a remarkable budget by any means but then this is coming from a non-financial person. To say it is not remarkable is not to suggest that it is of any lower standard than should be expected, but it is the kind of budget that allows you to drift into somnolence, and to think that everything is all right, and I trust that by the time my contribution has ended, I would have pointed out those aspects which we ought to be wary about, because there are some, and you would have heard comments from my seniors and betters in the Senate on some aspects of it that we all need to watch very cautiously. But the Minister of Finance has always managed to present an air that suggests that everything is either under control or can be controlled. He is very much calm, and the society drifts along with it, and one can only hope he is right.

I should like to add to my battery of congratulations, my congratulations to Sen. Dr. Tewarie on his contributions to this text—Innovation for Lasting Prosperity. It is a well-written document; it is worthy of study. I am sure that when I read it the second time, Dr. Tewarie, I will see the flaws which you would have noticed in it. I cannot say that I have found any, but that is only on my first reading. I trust that all of us would find the time to look at it and to see where it is you propose to take the party—of which you are a member—and the Government and of course this country in the years ahead.

9.25 p.m.

If, therefore, electoral success should follow your footsteps, then we will see how it develops. If it does not, then the country would have benefited from your intellectual contributions in this regard.
I will be referring to it from time to time in the course of my contribution because it sets the tone, as I have been saying, for where you are looking. May I, therefore, Mr. President, commence by looking at page (ii) in which, in the introductory remarks, the following is said, that this is:

“...a government that is committed to the principle that people should be at the centre of all development interventions.”

A very laudable statement and we now look forward to seeing it rolled out, if I may use this modern term, in the course of the years ahead.

The document goes on to say that we must work together to create—I had better read it from the text itself at page (iii)—something about creating a forum for discussion.

“At the heart of the thinking behind our policy framework is that we must work together to create a mutually respectful place for discussion, dialogue and meaningful action by designing forums for government, business, labour and civil society to sit together and talk things through.”

It was at that point that I began to feel warm towards what you have written because you have spoken about things that concern me, in particular your view that there can be a forum for government, business, labour and civil society to sit together and I trust that, during the course of my contribution, I will develop on it so that you can see how I am thinking.

The text also goes on to treat extensively with values and attitudes. Mr. President, may I read a much longer snatch from it, commencing on page 11. It says:

“In terms of our values and attitudes, we need to inculcate a passion for lifelong learning among our citizenry, heighten our sense of civic responsibility as well as our commitment to nation building and place a premium on the value of productivity. This combination of reforms within specific areas of our social system and the positive changes in our values and attitudes will have a catalytic effect on the economic transformation effort.”

On page 12:

“The ultimate goal is to create an equitable, inclusive society, in which ‘everyone counts’ and everyone can enjoy an improved quality of life but where there is also respect for human life and meritorious achievement and where value is placed on positive human interaction, social engagement and community building.
Stepping Out of Poverty

In order to lift persons out of poverty, as opposed to reinforcing a culture of dependency, social safety net programmes will be designed...”

So, Mr. President, I start off my focus on the efforts that ought to be made in this country to address poverty. All the commentators acknowledge that there is a substantial degree of poverty among us. I am referring to poverty in the money sense; in the sense that people do not have the means by which to access resources which would permit them to enjoy a quality and standard of life that we all should enjoy.

I am not partial to the welfare state, so I am hoping, because it appears that is what Sen. Dr. Tewarie is saying here, that we will wean people away from the culture of dependency and provide them with the tools which they themselves will see will take them out of the rut of poverty, which many of them now seem to endure.

The country has, for many years, been allowed to think that if something goes wrong in the way you live, if disaster strikes, governments must step forward and fix things for you. I think someone made the reference that within five minutes, a government minister ought—it was Sen. Dr. Balgobin—a government minister, “not no councillor or no local government official”. If a Minister does not turn up, the relevant Minister, and walk with more than a mattress and a hamper, the society has failed you.

Something needs to be done, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, Senators, to wean our people away from that. It is not necessarily going to be looked upon as being callous towards people, but it teaches us that this is our society and that it is by our contribution that we make it great or we make it safe.

When the drains are clogged; when there is flooding following the rain, do not blame God. Chances are it is our own activity that has led to this and governments that rush to provide you with assistance ought to bring with them a message that this is not going to happen each time. You have to do something. The river bank is not going to move and God will not tell you when the flood is coming. In fact, he would probably have told you many times before because you can see when rain is “setting up”, if I may use a local Trinidad expression.

We need to prepare people to deal with their own poverty and take them out of it. If it means that they were doing so and it takes us another five or 10 years or a generation, I trust that this is what our governments will do in the future; both this one and those that will follow them; work towards making people less dependent on government and with more pride in themselves.
I have been told, and I accept it, that budgets are more than merely setting up figures representing revenue and expenditure. Budgets should guide the way that the people should look upon themselves; and how they should look at their patrimony. Budgets should provide a platform for us to move forward at least one step each time. If we do that, all of us will rise. [Laughter]

I did not mean to make it appear partisan. Forgive me. [Laughter] I was thinking, although not saying it, of a well-known statement that a rising tide causes all boats to rise or something like that. [Laughter] The use of the word rise was not related to politics by any means. I am troubled that it should slip so easily off my tongue. [Laughter]

So, in my efforts to communicate what ought to be done by way of poverty eradication, may I read from the message of the Secretary General of the United Nations on World Food Day, which was on October 17, 2011. I will not read the entire thing, of course, mainly because, regrettably, the global figures tend to see poverty only in terms of the media representations of what is occurring in the Horn of Africa or in some remote parts of India perhaps. Some of this applies even to us and it is set in the context of the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty.

The Secretary General said:

“Lasting solutions must cover the full spectrum of food security—from improving the resilience of smallholder farmers to deploying safety net programmes that help protect the most vulnerable.”

So, here is the United Nations saying, through the voice of the Secretary General, that our smallholder farmers—and you may read along with that our poor—can be made to see within themselves how resilient they are and safety net programmes should not merely be a crutch for them each time but something that causes them to get up and get.

There was a politician in Trinidad and Tobago who used to talk about “taking up thy bed and walk”. He was, of course, merely mouthing what a politician of many, many years before had said. It is written in religious terms. Taking up your bed and walk applies to all of us. Budgets are meant to tell people to go out there and do the same thing. Be proud of yourself, be satisfied with what you have, but strive for greater. There is resilience in all of us. The country will provide you with a safety net, of course, because we cannot provide everything for ourselves. But do not continue to see yourself as being downtrodden.
So, for those who have the opportunity to use the public purse to benefit members of society, it is to them this message is directed. Let us use the funds that are available to us to remove from people’s minds the dependency that they are now experiencing. We may do so by providing them with messages and with support in the areas in which they are weak; messages that say that we can do much better.

In the Secretary General’s message, he spoke of our taking steps to break the link between poverty, food security and malnutrition. It is not rocket science. We all know that the three are very much linked. If we can remove from our society food insecurity, we would have done a great deal towards enhancing people’s view of themselves.

The Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, Sen. The Hon. Bharath, in his contribution two days ago, was very clear about the messages that he has been sending among the farming community. If the newspaper reports are to be believed, the impact is being felt and the farming community is reacting well to it.

I must confess that there are always going to be farmers who would say, We have lost everything; we cannot start again. But I am satisfied that there are ways in which you can provide them with the funding to do it; impose upon them the obligation to repay the loans that you may give to them and let them feel proud they have done it all themselves. It cannot be that every time you lose a crop of bodi, somebody must bring the seeds for you.

By the way, the reference today to 50 pawpaw and pumpkin, the seeds, was really quite funny. [Laughter] It was said in the context of agriculture, so it was very much relevant to the debate. I did enjoy it.

I move on. There is one other message I want to read from the United Nations because this, too, is relevant. It is the message issued on International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, which, as it turned out, was October 17, 2011. In that message, the Secretary General spoke of people’s fears. He said:

“For decades, the United Nations has worked to free people from poverty. We have made great progress—but today those gains are in doubt.

Too many people are living in fear: fear of losing their jobs; fear of not being able to feed their families; fear of being trapped forever in poverty…”

We in Trinidad and Tobago—

“deprived of the human right to live with health, and dignity and hope for the future.”
—not quite Trinidad and Tobago, but governments have a responsibility to avoid it happening.

“We can meet the challenges we face—the economic crisis, climate change, rising costs of food and energy, the effects of natural disasters. We can overcome them by putting people at the centre of our work.”

That is what Sen. The Hon. Dr. Tewarie has told us he is going to do; that is what we expect him to do.

The Secretary General goes on to say:

“In the name of fiscal austerity, we cannot cut back on common-sense investments in people.”

Mr. President, you have heard the comments, some direct, some indirect about programmes such as GATE and how it is being abused. It is probably because we are not applying commonsense as we should in the way we distribute what is available for people. If we are going to invest in people, use commonsense, and that is the simplest most direct message that anybody could give to people who now have control of the purse strings. I trust that they will take the message as it is intended to assist them in the way forward.

9.40 p.m.

So, I now move to the strategies outlined in the document *Innovation for Lasting Prosperity*, and the first reference that I wish to make is to the strategic approaches set out, commencing on page 40. It deals with “Increase Agricultural Production, Distribution and Access”. Why am I focusing so much on agriculture? You may recall that about a year ago, I had pointed to my rural antecedents, that there are many of us who have come from rural communities and, therefore, we understand the value of agriculture, therapeutic, productive and capable of putting food on the table even in the poorest of households. So, forgive me if I focus on it at length in the course of my contribution.

In setting out the strategic approach, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, my initial reaction is to say, there need not be all this focus on overwhelming us with technology. There are some people in this country who will never get it. There are small farmers who do not need it. What they need is what I think I overheard Sen. Bharath speaking about: “Tell me which crops will do best on my land, on my soil. If it is tomato, tell me how to get those tomatoes to market and get the benefit of my labour.”
All I am saying and hoping is that my words are not falling on deaf ears, is that we need not look at every farmer as some technological giant who is going to produce millions of dollars overnight. That person will know, because they also have commonsense, not to go down that road with you, because when he loses it will be a great loss, a big loss. Tell the farmer what will work in the area where he is. Maybe you could encourage cooperatives; maybe you can provide them with the means to get better equipment or more equipment or seeds or better seeds, but the focus on technology and mechanization cannot be applied across the board in the view that I have. So I would urge that we look there.

Agro-processing is among the strategic measures set out in the text, and that also can be spread into some of the more remote areas, because we could hardly fail to notice that there are many farmers who are sometimes forced to dispose of their produce at comparatively low prices or maybe even worse, because they do not know what else they can do with it. They do not know that they can use “sikiey fig” and produce a preserve that could be used over many years. It is something that some people know. You put it out in the sun and dry it and you are going to get a good preserve that might be used in your cakes and so on, and the same thing goes for pawpaw and melon and so on. I hope I am using the term correctly. I do not know if agro-processing covers that, but I am sure you know what I mean.

There are many by-products that can come out of the smallest parcel of land if the person has access to the measures that can be used, and these are the things that I am saying that governments can do and do well.

The text goes on to provide for the reduction in food imports. I do not know that anybody can quarrel with that. We do have to reduce the importation of food. The messages can be delivered. I note at page 44 you speak of using local sport celebrities to endorse the consumption of local fruits and vegetables. I look forward to seeing which ones you are going to choose, because there are some who are doing damage to themselves now by eating only fast food and expecting to grow up to be healthy role models in our society. I say it without regret, because it appears to me, most clearly, that the people who are going to do well in sport or in entertainment must take care of their bodies, and they may think that all they need to do is to eat what is put on the table.

Our country is blessed in that we have fertile soil for fertile production for substantial production, and to feed all of us and, therefore, in promoting food security, maybe you could look away from the local sport celebrities and promote the farmer. Let him tell us how we can benefit from using locally produced
Locally produced cassava and sweet potatoes in the hands of Prestige Holdings are not going to be sold any cheaper than what you are getting now. May I just repeat that for your benefit? Locally produced cassava and sweet potatoes, Minister, are not going to be sold any cheaper by Prestige Holdings than the other thing they are selling now. We need to put locally produced cassava and sweet potatoes on the lips of our young children in schools. I understand the School Feeding Programme uses a lot of it and that is good, but there are parents and children who do not wish to hear of it at all.

Fries does not include cassava, and it must. In fact, it should be exclusively cassava and sweet potatoes. So if that is what you are hoping to do, then I wish you well because, to me, we will be addressing a very basic issue in the society, how to keep our people healthy. Talk to the children, put it in their snack boxes and put it into their minds that it is good for them, and it is better than the other thing, no matter what kind of advertising and marketing they are exposed to on the public television.

Finally, if I may deal with—you speak of monitoring food prices. I will only assume that the use of the term “monitoring” really means managing it and ensuring that prices are maintained at levels that are reasonable and practical. The thrust really is to address food inflation, and I congratulate you on putting it in the centre of what is proposed for this fiscal year.

May I offer another word of congratulations? I am jumping a bit, because surprisingly this deals with national insurance and in the budget statement, there is a proposal to include self-employed persons within the national insurance arrangements, and it is found at page 39 of the Budget Statement: “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I am pleased with this development, and would like to record my congratulation to whichever body or person came forward with the idea. The fact is, many persons who are self-employed today do not know that there is a future for which they must prepare. The future really is that period beyond your active life.

I do not know what it is in our society that allows people to think that they will all pass away at age 60. The reality is that we do not, and there needs to be some preparation for that time, and the National Insurance Scheme can, indeed, educate people in the ways in which they can provide for themselves. And here is where a government should take the initiative of educating the populace generally, that there is life after retirement, or after your active service in whichever business you are in today. There is life after that, and we need to deal with it.
Now, may I just move to the other side of my thinking, which is to make the observation that we have not been practising to put into action the things that we say in the budget each year. I overheard on BBC, not too long ago, a story of a man who had done some contract work in Indian for the Commonwealth Games, and he had been so disappointed at the failure of the Indian Government to meet their contractual obligations to him that when he was asked by the BBC commentator what does he think of when he hears India, he said, “I’ll never do it again.” The acronym should not have escaped any of you. He said, “I’ll never do it again.” There is an acronym that I wish to introduce into the Hansard record and it is this. “The reality is, nothing is done after debating.” The acronym should not escape you. “The reality is, nothing is done after debating.”

Mr. President, in 2010—this is in support of what I am saying—I noted that there were five growth poles identified, and I looked forward with keen anticipation to some steps being taken to give meat to the proposal about growth poles. One of them which was important to me, was that the north coast had been included among the growth poles. There is very little said in the Budget Statement about growth poles in 2011, and that is why I say, “The reality is, nothing is done after debating.”

If you look at page 13 of the budget statement you ought to see the first reference to these growth poles. It says;

“In the Budget Statement of 2011, we began to spell out the specifics of ‘opening new economic spaces’ in our quest to develop five poles of expansion in the medium term. It is in this context that the Budget Statement sets three strategic imperatives for the transformation framework:”

I am not certain that this is taking the growth poles idea any further, but I am certain that the Minister of Finance in wrapping up will put me right about it. If, indeed, growth poles are still at the centre of what we are doing, then the north coast needs to hear about it. We have not been hearing anything. I am not hearing anything, and I do not wish it to be said next year, that the reality is, that nothing was done after we had debated for many an evening on this question of the budget 2011/2012.

In the Innovation for Lasting Prosperity—it is in the medium term.

**Dr. Tewarie:** It is in there.

**Sen. E. Prescott SC:** In this document? Yes, it is at page 10. I am sure I did not see it anywhere else, but if it is there, it will come to those who read it,
because it is recommended reading. It says on page 10 under “Creating New Economic Spaces”:

“An important thrust of the economic and social transformation effort is the wider dispersion of productive activities across the country. In order to expand the economic space within the country, Government has identified five (5) growth poles for focussed attention.”

That is what we were told last year, and I began to anticipate. I salivated for about three months, and then I went back to reality.

“Four (4) of the designated areas are in Trinidad-Central, the South Western Peninsula, East Port of Spain and the North-Coast. The fifth growth pole is the North-East Region of Tobago.”

So they have all been mentioned, and to whomsoever the responsibility falls for developing the growth poles and expanding the economic space, we are required to see some action. Let it not be said, and I say it for the last time, that, “The reality is, nothing is done after debating.”

In Toco, I know that some work has been done on rehabilitating the Lighthouse and some lifeguards have been introduced, but we deserve more than that, Sir. We deserve much more than that.

9.55 p.m.

Mr. President, I have some comments to make on some other aspects of the budget, and I shall proceed to deal with them seriatim.

The first of these is that I have to join the chorus, Minister of National Security, of those who prefer a clear, specific, present danger to public safety as the basis for introducing a state of emergency. The Constitution requires the President to be satisfied that there is what I call a clear, specific and present danger, and it is not only he. I think we, the population, need to be satisfied that there is, or was, a clear, specific and present danger.

The things I have heard as grounds or reasons or justifications for the state of emergency have not come within the criteria which I think are necessary, that is to say, no clear, specific and present danger has been identified to us. I have heard it said that there are reasons, best known to those who sit on the National Security Council, which probably come very close to giving us clear, specific and present danger. But it is we who are required to be satisfied by what you have seen or heard, Sir, and there must be some way it could be communicated to us.
I go along too with those who say, “Well, if the danger has not yet passed, can we expect that there would be some further move to extend the state of emergency?” If there is no move to do it, then can we conclude the danger has indeed passed and it ought to be lifted? Do I need to say in more aggressive terms what I am thinking, Sir? [Desk thumping] There really is a groundswell, and you probably hear it and it probably makes us all feel comfortable.

I have found these days, if I might just digress a little, that by 10 o’clock I am sleepy, I go to bed. It is not usual for me, but something in my subconscious I suppose says, “Boy, you cannot go anywhere at this hour, you might as well go to your bed.” So I suspect I am among those who have been lulled into a kind of somnolence when the evening comes, because it is nice and quiet, no car horns, no man shooting down man. I do not live in an area where there is shooting, but I can imagine that there are other people who had grown accustomed to these voluble expressions of people’s anxiety outside, disorder in the society, so now they are comfortable. They all go home and relax and say, “This could continue forever.”

But we all need to be cautious, even those of us who are ruling today need to be cautious. We cannot allow ourselves to relax into the somnolence that the state of emergency appears to present for us.

It has been said that the darkest hour is just before dawn, and ironically it is the best time to fall asleep. The best sleep is just before dawn. We are now in that state of somnolence. It has been imposed upon us and we have grown accustomed to it—we are growing accustomed to it, but I am clear in my mind that some reassessment of the position needs to be done with a clear intention to relieve the society of any acceptance of a state of emergency as the way to address the problems which the Government has foreseen. [Desk thumping]

There are those of us, and I am among them, who think that all that we have done over the past two months is embark upon a data gathering exercise as a means for tracking crime. I do not know why it has struck me that is what is happening; that we are going out there and arresting those who we think have information that might be useful. We are going to establish a databank of all the information that is going to help in the future, and we will then, presumably, get up and decide how to treat with that information. Gathering information must be important to any Minister of National Security. [Interruption]

**Sen. George:** Mr. President, I would like to refer to 35(1) regarding relevance.
Hon. Senator: What?

Hon. Senator: “Awww, come on!” [Crosstalk]

Mr. President: I will allow the Senator to continue. [Desk thumping]

Sen. E. Prescott SC: I am very much obliged to you, Mr. President. Maybe it might be safer for me to identify that aspect of the things presented to us that caused me to think that I was being relevant.

Sen. Al-Rawi: It is at page 1 of the budget.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: I am looking at page 29 of the Innovation for Lasting Prosperity, a document I still say is worth reading. On page 29 under the caption, “Crime and Law and Order” we find the following. I will not read it in the order in which it is written, because for emphasis there is need to take the last sentence on the page first:

“It was in this context that a State of Emergency was declared”—To do what?—to contain and accelerate the process to eventually reverse the situation.”—What is the situation?—“The culture of fear which has emerged over the last decade, and which is stifling all aspects of development—recreation, culture and business…”

Recreation, culture and business have been suffering over the past two months, Sir. All I am saying, because this is an independent view, is to look again at it. Tell us whether the danger remains clear and specific when compared against what you knew on August 20.

Sen. Hinds: The answer is yes. The danger is the UNC.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: You know, of course, that being an Independent Senator, I cannot be heard to say I agree with Sen. Hinds on that one. But you will take that into account if you wish. There is in here a statement that suggests to us that the state of emergency was declared for this one reason, to contain and accelerate the process to eventually reverse the situation of fear, the culture of fear we had found ourselves in. The culture of fear will not go away. It has been submerged; we are in this soporific state, but there is tomorrow. The Constitution does not allow it to continue forever. [Desk thumping]

So I go to page 31, because I am going to move away from this now:

“Proactive law enforcement will be more evident as specific actions are taken to:
Target leaders and criminals involved in gangs, guns and drugs to rescue communities.

Seek out guns and ammunition that support criminal activity and take them out of circulation.”

I agree with that. The state of emergency has permitted us to do it in “grap”—if I may use the term—to go out there and seek out the gang leaders, take the guns away from them and hopefully reduce criminal activity.

But there are people who know better and who are saying, “Well, it cannot go on forever.” Those who have guns still securely hidden away, are not going to walk away from a life of criminal activity. So I am hoping, and I am offering this, that the information gathered so far, puts our protective services in a position where they are now fully—well, in full capacity, fully resourced by way of information, to react and to preempt when there is criminal activity on the horizon. All of us need to be protected. We can only turn to one place for it, and that is to turn to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

There are many people who believe that the Minister of National Security is a policeman, I do not, but if what is happening today has come out of the information available to you, Minister of National Security, look at it again, know that you have the support of the society in ridding us of criminal activity. Maybe the management systems need to be addressed once more, with a different kind of mindset.

How is it going to affect us in the budget? If criminal activity is reduced substantially, the society now has available more incentives to produce, the crime rate of fear is removed and clearly the economy is going to benefit from it, because there are no more—[ Interruption ]—the economy is bound to benefit from criminal activity being reduced, and I am fully on your side in this. The budget will read differently.

We do not know from reading this budget what kind of money has been spent on nurturing the state of emergency or in seeking to remove criminal activity from our landscape. I am sure that if the figures are published we would observe that there has been a reduction in the amount of money spent on running after criminals, when all this has gone away. So I am looking forward to December 03, or any earlier date that it is possible, having regard to the data you have.
I want to end by making this further reference. The extension of the $1,000 allowance or bonus to all of the protective services is more than generous. [Interuption] Except who?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Except the SRP.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Very well; maybe I should just remind you that the SRPs may not have benefited from it and they too are working. I do support the acknowledgement of the work the protective services are doing. I am a practitioner in industrial relations and I am wary that you may have cut across some boundaries, but the relevant association ought to be taking that up with you, if they have not done so yet. If they have done so and have failed, well, that is the power of collective bargaining.

Item two I note from reading the innovation document that the Naparima Medical Academy is planned. My first thought was, “Well, where in Naparima could this academy be positioned?” The document, _From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation_, says that:

“The San Fernando Medical Complex which has already begun, with the conversion of the Chancery Lane building as a medical facility, will be expanded to include the Naparima Medical Academy.”

Local knowledge tells that it has something to do with the Naparima Bowl. If, in fact, it is meant to usurp, take over or replace the Naparima Bowl—[Interuption]—I am so pleased to hear, but let me say it nonetheless—or any element of the arts and entertainment industry in this country is going to be affected by this, maybe it should be rethought. I am pleased to hear, Sen. Karim, that you have confirmed it has nothing to do with it, and clearly I missed it, but one needs to say what my thinking was on this.

Sen. Karim: [Inaudible]

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Yes indeed, you have that opportunity. So I can draw a line through that one on my paper then. [Interuption]

Mr. 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. S. Cudjoe]

Question put and agreed to.
Sen. E. Prescott SC: Mr. President and Senators, I thank you very much. In my professional life I have been known to give time estimates and to exceed it by 100 per cent. So I am not surprised that this has happened, and I am not proud that it has happened, because I was hoping to meander very slowly to get to the final points in my document. I am now going to have to hasten.

If you read the innovation document—did I say thank you?—thank you very much everyone—Creating a New Growth Dynamic, you would see that developing culture and supporting creative industries is part of the thrust, and therefore in the context of what I was saying about my fears for Naparima Bowl, I recommend a reading of page 9 of the document.

The labour unions are next on my agenda. Some years ago, the government of the day had managed to bring to the table the trade union movement, business and government to come up with something which came to be known as “the social compact”. Arising out of that, a tripartite body was established within the Ministry of Labour. I had the honour of chairing that body for some time. We got along quite well. I am not known to be an attorney that works for labour, but the trade unions were, as was to be expected, quite respectful in their response to my chairmanship of the tripartite body.

10.10 p.m.

Regrettably, it did not survive long after I had to depart. I departed because I was fearful that the Integrity Commission was on my back. I did not anticipate that in doing public service I would have to expose all of my life to some stranger.

But getting back to the point, tripartism seemed to have disappeared immediately thereafter and seems not to have been put back onto the table. In the document, the one that I am reading, “Innovation for Lasting Prosperity” at page 103, it appears that this Government is thinking of going in that direction once again. Under the rubric, “Role of the Labour Unions”, they say:

“…the labour movement is recognised as a positive force for economic development and trade unions are considered central to the maintenance of an effective industrial relations environment that balances the need for private enterprise to become and remain competitive with the aspirations of workers for higher wages and better working conditions.”

And down the page:

“It is essential that the labour movement play their rightful role in helping to define and in supporting an enlightened socio-economic transformation agenda, through an effective multipartite engagement...”
Very good, very bold, very clear, but, Sir, the languaging suggests that you think the burden is upon the trade unions to pilot this initiative. It says it is essential that they play their rightful role in helping to define it. When you get the opportunity and you come face to face with them, allow the trade unions to know that you know that the burden belongs to the Government to bring the other two parties to the table and to keep them there.

I ask you to note also that in stating your national priorities on page 118 of the document, tripartism, or that relationship with the trade unions, does not appear among the priorities and it ought to. There is no gainsaying that if there is labour unrest, if the trade unions are not happy, then somebody is going to suffer. There was a time in August when people thought that the state of emergency had been introduced to deal with that. I was not of that view, but it can happen, that trade unions become very unhappy.

Let me deal with one point that I must get off my chest before I go on. During the course of September, legislation was introduced into this country which led to—I did not bring it with me so I do not have the actual words—an Act of Parliament that says persons who have actions to recover claims against Clico, CIB and British American, these people are not going to be permitted to continue their actions. I understand—I was not here—that all the proper majority was obtained. But there is no reason why we cannot, in the context of a budget statement, look at that again. It could not be that the role of the investor—well, not the role; the society needs to have people who are prepared to invest, people who are prepared to take risks, and they take their risks and they expect either to be very successful or, on the other end of the spectrum, to lose. So you may well be right to seek, having taken the action that the Central Bank has taken, to bring to a halt, for the time being, while you intervene, actions that may interrupt the process of the recovery that the Government has set about to do.

What troubles me is that when you read the legislation, there is a clear move to oust the jurisdiction of the courts in it, and I am not satisfied that this is a constitutionally proper piece of legislation. [Desk thumping] To put it at its lowest, what about the rights of an employee who is disappointed that he has been terminated wrongfully in his employment? Clico is not unionized. Can he not go to the High Court and say, “I need to be paid my salary?” Does the Central Bank Act—I cannot remember the name of it—not stop him from doing even that? Is it really intended that service providers and employees of Clico cannot take them to court? Am I finished, Sir?

**Mr. President:** No, you are not, but I am on my legs. That is a matter that has already been ventilated in this Senate and I do not think that we can permit you to embark on a debate on that issue again.
Sen. E. Prescott SC: Do forgive me. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

If the purpose of the legislation is to bring us back to a steady state in the economy, I am pleased that we are taking steps, but I want to warn that the day may come when we should have contingency plans in place in case the unconstitutionality of that piece of legislation is exposed.

Last and final, as some people say—how much more time do I have?

Mr. President: Seven minutes.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Penultimate. Not too long ago we were fortunate to hear from Sir Shridath Ramphal, of much repute in this society and more widely a former secretary of the Commonwealth—Secretary General of the Commonwealth. He spoke on a Caribbean jurisprudence. I am sure I do not have the precise title. He spoke eloquently and spoke directly to all of the minds in the society. There is nobody who could have misunderstood him. He used an analogy of us lingering on the doorsteps of the Privy Council and turning up one day and finding that the edifice had been removed.

What does this have to do with the budget? To my simple advocate’s mind, the cost of going to the Privy Council, both in terms of filing documents and of appointing attorneys and getting them there, and accommodating them there, must be quite exorbitant; must be quite high.

Sen. Al-Rawi: It is, $7.2 million.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: I did not even read the figures because I do not like to play with them, but I am hearing that it is $7.2 million.

Sen. Al Rawi: The AG said that.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: We do not need to do that. There is no need for me to go over all the talk about our Independence, our pride in ourselves, the quality of our jurisprudence, the brilliant jurists that we have produced. But look at it from a financial point of view. Can we not really subserve—I do not know—our colonialist approach to this thing and simply accept the CCJ, which, according to Sir Shridath Ramphal, we have a treaty obligation to adopt? In short, in law, we are bound to do something and we are not doing it, and it is not quite Trinidadian to disobey the law. Is it? Why do we not just simply go along with Sir Shridath on this, and stop lingering on the doorsteps of the Privy Council, and save a few million dollars every year? I cannot contribute to the budget, but if I am going to bring about a savings of $7.2 million, I feel I have achieved something.
So, to put it more seriously, we are not going to get much benefit from standing outside the doors of the Privy Council on the day that they finally decide to say in their best diplomatic English, “We are no longer treating with you.” It is time that our country consider that there is much to be gained by preferring the Caribbean Court of Justice above the Privy Council.

And I did say penultimate. Oh, I cannot let this one pass. I have heard it from a radio broadcaster and I have seen it in this text on page 33. I am quite certain that the word, “solvency” is not to be used when talking about criminal statistics and saying, “The solvency rates are going to increase.” I feel the word is “solution”, and I feel I must bring it to the attention of the person who drafted that here, and the person on the radio. [Desk thumping] There is a lady who comes on the TV and speaks—the new face of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service—about “solvency” rates. I did chemistry up to the second form and I gave it up, but I knew solvency from then, and I know it still. It has nothing to do with this. [Desk thumping]


Sen. E. Prescott SC: That is her name? It is the acceptable face of the police communications. But it is not “solvency” rates.

Finally, I have seen two submissions for a beverage container bill, one from the Environmental Management Authority, and the other from the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association. They are both focused on removing from the landscape, debris; the debris caused by plastic bottles, et cetera, and imposing some penalties on those who manufacture, not so much the bottles, which is very strange—let me just say this slowly. What I have seen suggests that the burden is on those who manufacture to ensure that bottles are returned and removed from society. But “manufacturer” has been defined in one of these offerings as being a person who—and I trust I can find it in a hurry—makes juice.

I do not know if you all buy things on the road. I buy things on the roadside and I will buy a juice from Elsie in Toco, easy, easy. She makes a nice pomme cythere juice, using pomme cythere skin, and she puts it in a bottle and I buy it and I drink it. Listen to what this person has here: “Manufacturer” means a person who manufactures a beverages (pomme cythere juice) and includes a person who carries on the business of bottling or otherwise filling containers with pomme cythere juice.

Now, poor Elsie could never have thought that in our efforts to clean up the society she would become a manufacturer who is going to be imposed with a penalty to ensure that her bottle does not turn up anywhere else, and it will, because not
everybody is going to stand up by Elsie and chat while they are drinking their juice. Is this what we intend to do? Do you know Elsie? I saw Mr. Uff there one day. You remember Uff? He did not recognize me, but I marvelled at how easy you could get around in this country.

**Sen. Hinds:** He must have called it “pommecy-there”. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. E. Prescott SC:** Mr. President, I thank you very much.

**Sen. Danny Maharaj:** Thank you, Mr. President. Coming at this juncture in the debate, I must say it leaves me with very little work to do because of the contributions of my fellow Senators and their sterling and brilliant performances. They have totally decimated and rejected the obsolete and nonsensical contributions of the Opposition. My job here is not to win fans on the opposite side. My job here is to represent the voice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to express that voice as truthfully and as honestly as possible in this Chamber, so it could ricochet through our entire country, so the works of our Government and the progress we have been making, and the progress we will make, they will understand and they will continue to support us and join us as we move forward to lift our country to higher and new levels of existence.

Mr. President, before I proceed further, I just want, briefly, on the contribution of Sen. Hinds, to just say it was an *Ace Ventura*-type of contribution.

**Hon. Senators:** What is that?

**Sen. D. Maharaj:** Of the highest level of comedy, *Ace Ventura*, usually. The contribution of Sen. Cudjoe was well dealt by Sen. Baynes.

**Sen. Hinds:** Well dealt? Well dealt? How do you spell “well dealt”??

**Sen. D. Maharaj:** Mr. President, Sen. Deyalsingh seems to be taking the wrong tablet of the wrong colour, because every time he speaks he seems so hyper, so out of it.

**Sen. Hinds:** That is very much out of order to cast aspersions on a Senator like that. [* Interruption*] Just sit down! Sit down! Sit down! We tolerated your sixth form debating skills long enough.

**10.25 p.m.**

**Sen. D. Maharaj:** Mr. President, we are here in this historic setting, in Tower D and we must ask the reason why, why are we here? Why are we here? We have been here because of the mismanagement and wastage of the PNM administration and they would get angry with me here tonight, they would get disturbed and they would fly comments across the floor, because they do not want this population to be reminded of their negative works and their deeds of destruction in our country.
Sen. Hinds: Well, no sense, give up the paper now. [Laughter]

Sen. D. Maharaj: Yes, I will do so. I will do so. I will do so, Sen. Hinds. You have been doing a very great job of nothing. [Interruption]

Mr. President, in 2010 we entered into Government in a very particular situation and that situation was one in which we found ourselves in an economy that has been bled by the PNM. [Interruption] Furthermore—Mr. President, I ask for your protection.

Mr. President: Senators, could we have some silence whilst the Senator is making his contribution? Thank you.

Sen. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, I want to quote from Bettina Drew:

“The past reminds us of timeless human truths and allows for the perpetuation of cultural traditions that can be nourishing; it contains examples of mistakes to avoid, preserves the memory of alternative ways of doing things, and is the basis for self-understanding...”

Furthermore, Oscar Wilde stated:

“One’s past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged.”

Mr. President, the PNM administration which suffered near political annihilation while suffocating and stifling the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, made that very significant mistake. They suffered the dreams of our people. They were rejected, ejected and practically vaporized from government. A new governance structure emerged—

Sen. Hinds: “Oh goooood!” [Crosstalk]

Sen. D. Maharaj:—reflecting the positivity and progressiveness of our people.

Mr. President, it has been well documented, articulated, revealed from Ministry to Ministry, state enterprise to state enterprise, from directors to chairmen to Government Ministers, the abuse of power, disrespect of the rule of law, wastage, open and naked corruption that resulted in our Treasury being admitted into a fiscal ICU bed. Deep daggers penetrated the flesh of our Treasury, twisting and turning as it went in. [Interruption]
We know about the rapid rail, $565 million on a feasibility study, we know about the blimp, the Brian Lara Stadium; we know about all the issues of corruption, the Scarborough Hospital. Additionally, the global economy was in a recessionary environment. Therefore, we came into office meeting a double whammy situation, that is the effects of political parasites on our Treasury and the global and economic conditions that existed. Given all these difficulties and complexities, the need of the common man did not change, the average citizen, did not change, in fact it was heightened due to years of neglect, years of suffering, years of not being really focused on and cared for appropriately by the governance system of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, we talk about hospitals, we talk about people going to hospitals and having to wait hours upon hours for service. [Interruption] Furthermore, there were insufficient beds, medicine, staffing; it was a core problem of our society. It was an area that had to be focused on in-depth and moneys and finances allocated to—that basic essential amenity of health service to our population, was it appropriately addressed? Was the amount of finances in periods of boom in our country, the right proportion of our budget of the fiscal pie, addressed to that essential service that was necessary? The population thinks not. It was not. Because tall buildings, summits and Prados galore, that was the focus; not the person who had a wound, a stab or some disease who was waiting for treatment. They could not get the type of efficient and fast service that was necessary to deal with their ailments. [Interruption]

Mr. President, pipe-borne drinking water, roads, electricity, a sustainable job environment, development of our agricultural sector, decentralization of our government services, a more enhanced business environment, and most importantly, the safety and security of our citizens, that was critical. In fact, that was one of the number one issues that we had as a nation. Crime and the crime problem, that was critical and no matter what Sen. Hinds says, that is the reality. His words cannot change that. That is what the population, their perceptions and their realities amounted to, crime. The solving of crime, better health care systems, better water supply, better roads; the essentials they wanted to start with. The foundation! Where was the foundation? You cannot build a building by putting red bricks and foundation bricks in the sky. You have to start on the ground with the essential, the basics and build upwards and that was the challenge of their philosophy, that was the challenge of their governance style.

I might not attend public speaking classes and have fancy tutors—

**Hon. Senator:** You should.
Sen. D. Maharaj:—but that is okay, because the population would understand my words and the truthfulness of them and that is the critical and important thing.

With that snapshot of the society, our socio-economic situation, it really required strong leadership, powerful leadership, leadership that would really lift our country and inspire our citizens to dream again, to hope again, to live a life that they thought they had lost, but I tell you, Mr. President, our first budget in office was one of consolidation, of trimming of fat, of ensuring our state enterprises and institutions are lean and fit. No more newspaper headings saying, “over cost”.

Sen. Hinds: Overruns, not “over cost”.


Sen. D. Maharaj: In the billions, in the billions: Chancery Lane $300 million, Legal Affairs Tower, $300 million; International Waterfront, $1.3 billion; Ministry of Education Tower, $300 million; NAPA, $234 million over budget. Mr. President, that is what we face, and you call that poor budgeting. Poor! How did they arrive at their figures? That level of cost overruns—I do not know who was their Minister of Finance. [Interruption] The headlines have changed “Value for dollar”; “Priority expenditures”; “Social necessity”.

Hon. Senator: “State of emergency”.

Sen. D. Maharaj: Yes, to deal with the issue of crime. [Interruption]

Mr. President, the 2012 budget builds upon the work done by our 2011 budget, and if we look from the birth of a child, to a young person to your retiree, we see that each individual along the line of life has been positively impacted and I would give by way of example. We have heard about the Children’s Life Fund and we must understand what that means. It means a mother who would have lost a child, tears running down her cheeks, today holds that child with life—

Hon. Senator: You got it back.


Sen. Beckles: Thank you. [Laughter]
Sen. D. Maharaj:—could take away from that. Nothing! [Desk thumping] They could give their high fives and do what, [Crosstalk] and be in their PNM club, but lives are being saved and that is the bottom line. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, we look at pre-school development and Sen. Deyalsingh asked, “What is the money being spent on?” We believe in a knowledge-based society and we believe in investing in education. In the Public Sector Investment Programme 2012, From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation: safety, jobs and investment; page 8:

“16. Significant progress was made by the Government-funded ECCE Programme in Trinidad with the completion of construction of 15 centres located at Valencia, La Horquetta, Bon Air, Malabar, Morvant, Carlsen Field, Raghunanan Road, Edinburgh South, Retrench, Harmony Hall, Clarke Rochard, Wellington Gardens, Golconda, Maraj Hill and Egypt Trace.”

Mr. President, we see—

Hon. Senator: Cucharan Trace. [Laughter]

Sen. D. Maharaj:—the Government investing in our young people, aiding the parents of the society because we need to nurture the young people of this country at a very early age to mould them and develop them into right-thinking citizens.

Mr. President, we look at secondary schools and we know about the laptop programme: they were negative, non-supportive, but the children of this country, they are happy. [Desk thumping] They may poke their fingers at me, [Interruption] they may do that, but my joy and the joy of this Government is to see a better Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] They say sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. [Desk thumping] Tertiary education—and we know we supported the GATE programme which was a genesis from the dollar for dollar programme and we have now expanded that programme into technical and vocational. Congratulations to the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. [Desk thumping] He is doing a tremendous job in this country. The young people applaud him: north, south, east, west, Tobago. [Desk thumping]

10.40 p.m.

Mr. President, critical in the development of our country we understand that we must find ways to move away from the dependency on energy. And on the point of energy, I want to congratulate our brilliant, our dynamic—he is a human
Sen. D. Maharaj: In terms of efficiency, we must also appreciate the work done by this Government in bringing Bills that will enable citizens to transact operations in a very instantaneous way. I am talking about the Electronic Transactions Bill and the Data Protection Bill. And when these Bills come to life, you can go online and pay a bill, you can conduct business via your computer. E-commerce will become a reality—new reality with young entrepreneurs. These are the things that are taking place in our country that are very beneficial to each and every one of our citizens. And we are feeling the difference already. We are feeling the difference already.
Crime: crime has been a critical point for this Government. And over 50 per cent of the Bills that were passed last year were crime-focused Bills: the Evidence (Amdt.) Bill, the Firearms (Amdt.) Act, the Interception of Communications Bill. All these Bills were focused on getting out there and empowering our law enforcement agencies to really attack the criminal element in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Justice will be bringing new Bills. New courts will be developed. The criminal justice system overall will be strengthened so that we can have a clearer and more efficient process in dealing with the criminal element because we need to fight crime 150 per cent.

Mr. President, in terms of social development, this has been a tremendous area of success for this Government. We know about the elderly: $3,000 in pension a month. An increase that will make a difference in their lives. We know about the Direct Impact Programme, from Social Development where the Ministry went into the communities and reached out to the people. Previously, they were unsure of what was available, how to get it done and they gave up. Now this Government is going out into the communities and meeting the people, and informing them and guiding them along the process—a new level of governance, a new level of governance.

We talked about the environment. The Minister of Housing and the Environment spoke about his activities and his plans for manufacturing solar panels in Trinidad and Tobago and utilizing this form of energy to propel many of our services in this country—lighting and others, Mr. President.

In this time of Divali it reminds me of a story in the Ramayan. In times of great darkness, difficulty, trials and tribulation a leader emerges to lift the nation and that is our Prime Minister the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute, and may God bless our nation. [Desk thumping]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Friday, October 21, 2011 at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.49 p.m.