SENATE

Friday, October 21, 2011
The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[Mr. President in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT

(DEFERRAL OF)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I propose that part of the announcements be deferred to a later stage of these proceedings. In relation to matters where we have agreed that we would express condolences, I now invite Members of the Senate to contribute on the sad passing of Mr. Barry Barnes.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. BARRY BARNES)

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Mr. President, on behalf of the People’s Partnership Government and the Government Senators, I would like to express our condolences to the family and friends of former Sen. Barry Barnes. I was in the public service at the time when Barry Barnes served as a Minister, and my impression of him was a man of outstanding and impeccable character, who was very, very, dedicated to his country, very patriotic and who gave virtually his life to the service of Trinidad and Tobago. After a long and distinguished service as Minister, it is my understanding that he continued to be of service to the country as an advisor to various Ministers, particularly in the energy sector—Ministers of Energy and people in the energy sector.

I would like again to convey to his family, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and of us Senators on this side, our deepest condolences at his sad passing, but to let them know that he had served very, very well, and that his record of achievement and of that service that he gave to his country will never be forgotten by the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. Once again our condolences on his passing. I thank you.

Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds: Thank you very much. Yes indeed, Mr. President, on behalf of those of us on this side and of course the People’s National Movement, we
too would like to join our colleagues here in this Senate in paying humble, thankful and respectful tribute to the late Barry Sydney Barnes.

Barry Sydney Barnes emerged as one of the foremost experts in the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in the area or subset of energy marketing. He began and really made his career in the pre-Independence era having developed himself and his skills in the opportunities that availed themselves with those who operated in the energy sector before our Independence, that is to say the foreign multinational operators.

In the post-Independence era, Barry Barnes evolved into a local expert. He was, as is well known, the Minister of Energy in this Republic from 1992 to 1995 and he was very, very instrumental in the whole monetization project, where Trinidad and Tobago saw the wisdom of and began to monetize our gas reserves to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I agree with Sen. George that notwithstanding his passing he still lives, he is still with us because we are still enjoying the benefits of his thoughts and expertise from those years. He was also a very firm mentor to the young, particularly those who made careers as well in the energy sector.

His was a long and distinguished stint of service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. He served of course, as indicated earlier, in the public sector to the extent as well that Barry Barnes was the chairman of the Water and Sewerage Authority from 2005—served for a period there.

He was a very strong family person. I am informed that he left to mourn his wife Janice and a son. I am proud to say that my information is that he heralded from Belmont where some of us in this Senate grew and continues—Norfolk Street in Belmont. I know the location very well, and his life is testimony to the youngsters at Belmont and the environs, that it is not where you are but rather it is who you are. And Barry Barnes continues to mentor the young people of Belmont, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean in this respect. I am advised as well that he had a close—in fact, he might have been the uncle of John Barnes who went on to be an outstanding English and international football player.

So I would like to join my colleagues here in closing, in again extending deep and sincere condolences to his wife, his son, all of his family and all those whom he loved and who loved him. I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Basharat Ali: Mr. President, I stand here to pay tribute with a very heavy heart, because Barry Sydney Barnes was a friend of mine for 66 years. We started at St. Mary’s College in 1945, we were both 11 years old but we were never in the same class—strange enough. I may have mentioned it before about the choir. The place I met Barry Barnes was in choir practice and we followed our careers through—Barry chose the more esoteric subjects like Mathematics and Higher Mathematics, et cetera, during our years at St. Mary’s College; I chose the more mundane subjects botany, zoology, physics and chemistry. But that was not the end
Condolences

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of our association, because when we left St. Mary’s College and we went to Point Fortin—we were both Shell scholars and Barry chose mechanical engineering which he pursued at Loughborough College of Technology, which is now Loughborough University, whereas I went to Manchester College of Science and Technology. He did mechanical engineering, I did chemical engineering. So we had parallel careers, we were great friends always at school and then in those later years.

I divided—spelled my lifetime with Barry into three parts. The first part was school, the second part was university, and the third part was in fact life with the Corporation Sole. Although we were both Shell people—our careers sponsored by Shell for which we were very thankful—I do not think we would have had the opportunity otherwise. I left Shell in 1973, in fact, just a year less than when the Trinidad and Tobago flag flew on the building in Point Fortin signifying the purchase of Shell Trinidad Limited by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. So indirectly I was in the Ministry and Barry Barnes as a member of staff of what became Trintoc came under the control of the Corporation Sole. And I have to say that even before he got there, Barry Barnes was a very respected person in the world of Shell. Shell management had a great deal of respect for him not only for his technical and managerial capability but also for his integrity, and integrity is an important matter. And I have proof of it, Mr. President. One of Barry’s younger brothers came for an interview for a job at Shell, and I happened to be on the panel of very senior members of staff of Shell to choose. Young Ian Barnes was way ahead of anybody else, but there was a question in the mind of the panel. Can you have two brothers at top senior positions in the same organization? That might be a potential reason for conflict of interest. And I think we all came to the conclusion that Barry Barnes was above all of that. And therefore, his younger brother Ian also joined Shell Trinidad at that time.

Then when we came then to the period in Trintoc, it was an unusual one because we were used—which of us who were in Shell—to marketing matters being handled by Shell, especially marketing of products in the external market. But suddenly one day we were in charge of our own destiny and the marketing people—and Barry was the chosen person in marketing had to deal with matters like the purchase of crude oil for refining and the disposal of the products of refining into a very competitive market. He did an absolutely marvellous job. And it is my personal belief that the greatest achievement for Barry Barnes was to put together a team of our own local people to do the international marketing both from the point of view of crude purchases and sale of refinery products in a very efficient manner. To me, I believe that was a crowning glory of Barry Barnes’s career as a person in Shell.
He retired very early, because at that time in Shell you could retire at age 55, so he did. Not long after that, in 1992, he was Minister of Energy, deservedly so. We continued our association because I was working at the National Energy Corporation, which is also a state enterprise, and he was Minister, and as my friend here said it was a very important part and he played a very important part in the monetization of natural gas. 1992 to 1995 was one of the key areas when we were dealing with LNG, we were doing other projects—methanol, et cetera—but that was a period when we were dealing with LNG, and Barry took the bull by the horns and worked it out. He was a great negotiator—always very modest, never losing his temper, a great negotiator, and that was one of his strong points apart from the fact, as I have said, his absolute integrity. Nobody ever questioned his integrity, and that is something to be said very positively, and I hope we could say so for many of our people in state enterprises today.

10.15 a.m.

I am shortening this, actually, Mr. President. As a friend of Barry, I was asked by his wife to do a tribute on the day of his funeral so my tribute is a little longer than I am going to spend here today. So, we went through that second period and after his retirement, he really started then to do work because from 1992—1995, he was the Minister of Energy by that time, he was a retiree of Shell on Shell’s Pension Scheme. So, he continued there, and as my friend, Sen. Hinds mentioned, he was a special advisor for many periods. He was a special advisor to many Ministers, right up to the time of his passing, basically. They always say, “Old soldiers never die; they just fade away”; I think that was the exception. Barry was an exception to that rule because he did so much in a period when he was very terrible; he had cancer—he died of throat cancer—but he continued as a special advisor to a Minister of Energy. And certainly, I remember Mr. Conrad Enill and even his predecessor who would have been Dr. Lenny Saith where Barry was an advisor in one of the—he even worked in one of these tall buildings, Tower C, when Tower C was here. So, he had a career worthy of any citizen of this country and he was rewarded too. In 2007, he was awarded a Chaconia Medal (Gold) in the field of energy, in the field of development of energy, and I can think of no one more worthy of that honour than my friend, Barry Barnes. [Desk thumping]

He was also my neighbour by chance, because we could shout across at each other so we visited each other quite often; and although, I was an Independent Senator and he was an advisor to a Minister, we were always able to talk one to one. And he had a credo. I would say, “Barry, how are you going with the Minister?” He
would say, “Well, I answer the Minister when I am asked.” He was not going to venture opinions to the Minister. It is the same with me, when I would call Barry and say, “Well, Barry, what about so and so?” We would talk about it. Some days I would go down and I would take a drink with him and that was the kind of relationship that I had with this person, Barry Barnes.

As I said, he received a Chaconia Medal (Gold) as a national award in 2007. But, one of his pride and joy in his garden was an exquisite double Chaconia tree which was always in full bloom. I am sure there are many tourists who would have that in their album—that particular picture—because all the tourists going to the north coast used to stop there and take photographs of this magnificent double Chaconia. So, he had two Chaconias to be very, very proud of. [Desk thumping]

This is basically what I have to say about my friend, Barry Barnes, and I know he came from a very close-knit family. I knew his parents from day one from St. Mary’s College—Slyvester and Ena Barnes; I am a great friend of his sister, Justice Monica Barnes, and I know that they are a very close-knit family.

So, today, as we pay tribute to him, I would like particularly to add condolences to his siblings—Justice Monica Barnes and Belinda, his sister and two remaining brothers, Ian and Knolly—deepest condolences to them. His wife Janice, is a wonderful woman and looked after him particularly in those last days with the greatest amount of love and tenderness. His son lives in the United States at the moment, he was here.

I would like to extend on all our behalf, our deepest condolences to that family, and hope that they will be able to get over a difficult time of their life without Barry Barnes. May Barry rest in peace and may God bless us all. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: I would like to join with Senators preceding me in the sentiments you have expressed in the tribute to Barry Barnes, a former Senator and Minister who has served in the Senate. Barry Barnes, of course, was a giant in the energy industry, and therefore, well known by all of us. I will ask the Clerk of the Senate to send a suitable letter of condolence to his family so that his service will not go unrecognized and unreported in this Senate. We will now stand for a minute of silence.

The Senate stood.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual administrative report of the Port of Spain Corporation for the Period October 2005 to September 2006. [The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George)]


4. Administrative report of the Board of Directors of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO) for the period October 2008 to September 2010. [Sen. The Hon. E. George]

5. Annual administrative report of the National Insurance Appeals Tribunal for the financial year October 01, 2009 to September 30, 2010. [Sen. The Hon. E. George]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 20, 2011]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: Those who spoke on the last occasions: on Wednesday October 19, 2011, the Hon. Winston Dookeran, Minister of Finance, mover of the Motion; Sen. Dr. Lester Henry; Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan; Sen. the Hon. Vasant Bharath; Sen. Basharat Ali; Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramarine; Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe; Sen. Helen Drayton; Sen. Terance Baynes; Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight.


The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for allowing me to join this 2012 budget debate this morning on its third day in the Senate. But, before I start my contribution, I think I would also like to join with all my other very distinguished colleagues and you too, Mr. President, in extending condolences to Mr. Barry Barnes’s family on the passing away of this icon in the energy sector. I
do this as I had the distinct pleasure of working with Mr. Barnes a few years ago, albeit very short, when I represented the University of the West Indies on a committee to celebrate the 100th—the Centenary—Anniversary of Oil in Trinidad and Tobago.

As I rise to make this inaugural address at this new location in this Chamber at Tower D—and much has been said about this Chamber at Tower D in more ways than one; from our side, we compliment; from the other side, we are reminded—I want to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, and the parliamentary staff for extending the excellent hospitality that we shared at the other place and that we continue to receive here. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I begin in the style of all of my other colleagues who spoke before me in recognizing the sterling contribution of our Minister of Finance and we congratulate him. He is also, at this time, our acting Prime Minister and we congratulate him on that appointment as well—[Desk thumping]—for his focus and direction in the presentation of this year’s—2012—budget.

10.30 a.m.

The allocations for the fiscal year 2011/2012 clearly illustrate the People’s Partnership Government’s intent to reshape Trinidad and Tobago into a nation that is sustainable, high performing, prosperous and one that will be happy for all of us to share and live in.

In this regard, I applaud the hon. Minister and all my Cabinet colleagues for ensuring that the largest chunk of the budget, sectorally, of $8.7 billion went to education and training and of which $2.8 billion went to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. I congratulate the hon. Minister and all my colleagues, because I am aware of all their competing needs and interests and I thank them sincerely, and I thank the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sincerely, led by our very distinguished Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for placing continued emphasis on human capital development. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I want to use three words to describe the presentation by my erstwhile and very distinguished colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and Acting Prime Minister. I describe his presentation as creative and collaborative. And in the context we have heard much about Singapore here, that has gone beyond collaboration, that has gone beyond creation and that has gone beyond cooperation to co-creation. This budget is truly an outcome of co-creation of many minds, institutions and stakeholders.
Last year, the budget was entitled: “Facing the Issues, Turning the Economy Around” and this year, as we would be reminded, it is entitled: “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation.” I want to say that we on this side are extremely proud again, as we congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for steadying the ship and this financial ship as well, so that we would have prevented any untoward collapse of the financial system and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We truly congratulate him.

I want to also say I congratulate all my other senatorial colleagues on the other side for their very important, insightful and very useful contributions, and to them we owe a lot in terms of the responses that will follow.

Mr. President, before I get into the meat of my contribution, I want to refer briefly, as has been done and very briefly so, in terms of what we are facing in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of the global economy. All over the world, what we are seeing is the continuation of how governments and economies continue to strive to reduce public debts, their fiscal deficits, whilst supporting growth and employment amidst anxious financial markets. Although many countries have planned budget cuts to help rein in their debts, public debts in advanced economies are projected to the top 100 per cent of GDP in 2011. The bulk of this increase since 2007, has been due to a drop in the GDP and government revenues and this, as we are aware, is not only here in Trinidad and Tobago, it is being experienced globally.

Mr. President, after the economic and industrial boom Trinidad and Tobago experienced, under what has been described regularly as a misguided direction of the former administration, why do I have to stand here again before all of us, talking about limited resources as everyone on both sides of this Senate laments? We recognize why we have limited resources and much has been spoken of, in terms of what were the consequences that we face today, in terms of this misguided direction and sometimes waste and mismanagement. But not to repeat that, I just wanted to remind this honourable Senate of what I said in my last year’s contribution. I described the end of 2001—2010, as the lost decade. For what else can be said about a nation that is blessed with talent and resources as we are, having made not one substantial step really towards sustainable economic development? Luckily, on May 24, 2010, we had a changing of the guards and we are now on the way to sustainable economic development. [Desk thumping]

Oliver Blanchard, Chief Economist of the IMF said:

“The global economy has entered a dangerous...phase. The recovery has weakened considerably. Strong policies”—and I repeat—“strong policies are” indeed—“needed to improve the outlook and reduce the risks.”

May I add to that strong policies, strong leaders which we now have in the People’s Partnership.
Mr. President, as there are challenges, as I indicated, all over the world. I want to make some quick references to some of the countries and the challenges that are faced. For example, Europe today is characterized by high public deficits and debts, lower potential outputs, mounting market tensions and suppressed growth in most of the advanced countries. The United States is experiencing sharp stock market drops, which really hurt consumer and business confidence and significantly reduced spending and we are all aware of the contingent effect of all of those factors, particularly on the job market. I said recently, and I repeat, that one of the world’s leaders, it has been reported in the *The Economist* magazine, is being threatened to lose his job because he himself has been dubbed as being unable to create many jobs.

In Japan, the great East Japan earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, brought Japan’s national recovery almost to a halt. The final cost of that earthquake could range anywhere between 2 per cent to 4 per cent of GDP, spread over several years, and that is what happens when countries go through trauma of different kinds. We may have gone through traumas of another kind, not necessarily of the kind suffered by Japan.

We are witnessing daily on the television what is happening in North Africa, in Tunisia and Egypt. What we saw last night—in fact when I left here last night, on the television in Libya—I know that my brother, comrade and very good friend, Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, always exchanges discourse, in terms of what is happening in the Middle East—I am reminded that what we are seeing in the Middle East—it is always said when you neighbour’s house is on fire, you need to wet yours—in my view and the reports will indicate, was really an ignition/spark from a young man called Muhammad Bouazizi in Tunisia.

Muhammad Bouazizi, a young computer science graduate, unable to find a job in the job market, decided that he would take his entrepreneurial skills to the street, took a fruit cart and decided to sell fruits for a living, got into an altercation with a police woman and vowed that, in return for that kind of treatment, that humiliation, he must see the Governor of Tunisia; he must report this matter. He decided that if he was unable to see the Governor of Tunisia, he would set himself on fire. Well, he was unable to see the Governor of Tunisia and the report is history.

The dramatic events in Tunisia and Egypt paved the way for social upheaval that we are witnessing in North Africa and the rest of the Arab world. In fact, it is dubbed the “Arab spring”. Closer examination of these social uprisings unveil some alarming parallels among not only these nations but our nation as well, Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. President, I will enumerate a few of these: the extended period of what some called a creeping political dictatorship, as was earmarked and identified in the last administration; single party politics, as was seen in the last administration; government oppression in some cases, as was described by some, of civil population; and as recognized by all of us, increasing crime and corruption, again from the previous regime. I indicated, you could imagine what would have been the continued state of affairs, had there not been a turn of the tide on May 24, 2010. We thank Almighty God for placing his hands on the leadership of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, we are talking about diversifying the economy in Trinidad and Tobago. Sometimes we behave as though we are so complacent with oil and gas, that these resources will never come to an end. In fact, sometimes when we go away and we visit other countries and you are asked where you are from, of course, you have to try to tell them geographically your closeness to South America. We also boast and tell them about the oil and gas reserves that we have.

Where are we and what are the new world powers doing with respect to their oil and gas? Let me give a few examples which my very learned colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—we are extremely proud that you have listened to his contribution and we congratulate him for his sterling contribution. [Desk thumping] I am sure what I am going to say is not new to him, it may be new to others, but I would say it for the edification of all of us.

In terms of oil and gas and oil and energy in the rich Saudi Arabia—in fact while I am talking about Saudi Arabia let me just say I had the distinguished pleasure to be in Singapore the other day, a couple of weeks ago; unfortunately, what made the news afterwards was not about my visit, but the Shell Oil Refinery that was on fire for a few days. Would you believe, that the report stated that the Shell Oil Refinery, the largest in the world, located in Singapore, refines over 500,000 barrels of oil per day, with Singapore not having one drop of oil? That tells you about entrepreneurship and business. As a matter of fact, in that strait, the Port of Singapore, it is recorded that a ship either leaves the sea space every three minutes or enters.

Let me get back to Saudi Arabia, so we can learn some lessons from other countries. The Global Competitiveness Index ranking 2011/2012, overall puts Saudi Arabia at 17/142 countries. In terms of higher education and training, it is ranked 36th out of the 142 countries and they are now platforming their future development on the philosophy of life after oil and gas and, therefore, they are diversifying the economy and they are now developing the King Abdullah Economic City.
Since my days at UWI, 1974, reading McIntyre, Best, Girvan and Jefferson, we have been talking about the diversification of this economy. I know it is a dream to which we continue to strive and there are initiatives that the Government of the People’s Partnership is engaging in to diversify this economy and I will talk a little more about how the tertiary education sector will play a critical role in the diversification and the future development of Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to the King Abdullah Economic City, there are other knowledge and economic cities in Saudi Arabia, which will include knowledge-based industries. I make this point in reference to what we are doing here too, tourism and services, that they expect would create 20,000 jobs and investments in these economic cities of US $7 billion.

Mr. President, much has been said on all sides of this Senate, in terms of the benchmark Singapore. Singapore—I cannot remember who said it, but I know it was said here—got independence three years after Trinidad and Tobago, from Malaysia. When I was studying in Singapore in 1997, Singapore had the same land space; they may have increased a few acres or square miles, in terms of taking from the sea, because I always remind people: “God eh creating no more land space”.

10.45 a.m.

If you have to get additional, man has to develop the intuition and the science to take that. Singapore with 3 million persons at that time, 1997, is now at 6.5 million persons on the same land space. Singapore which we describe as well Trinidad and Tobago, my colleagues who would have gone to Presentation, San Fernando and did Geography like Sen. Al-Rawi, would have read *Caribbean Lands* by John MacPherson and since those days we have been talking about Trinidad and Tobago as an entrepôt. I will make reference to what a true entrepôt of Trinidad and Tobago could be in the future of Panamax, I will come to that later on.

I just want to say for the record, Mr. President, that Singapore has an overall GCI ranking of 2 out of 142 countries, second in the world; higher education, 4; technological readiness, 10; square miles, as I indicated, 255 square miles versus 1,980 in Trinidad and Tobago; no natural resources; relying substantially on port, ICT, education, their bilingual policy, broad based and holistic learning; ICT infused curriculum—and that is something which we have to do and we are going to be revising the curriculum in Trinidad and Tobago particularly in the post-secondary sector.

I have said recently that all students under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for the first time in this country, as we move towards
progressive development, and technological development—I am sure Sen. Drayton will be happy to hear this, she has been an architect of this—must be exposed to ICT in the curriculum; all the students in the post-secondary sector under the Ministry. Whether you go into HYPE, to NESC to the MuST programme, to YTEPP, all of those to MIC, you are now going to be exposed to ICT in your curriculum.

Mr. President, I noticed that my friend, Sen. Dr. Lester Henry, took a line from me last year to, in a sense, reverse it to the budget of 2012, but let me repeat what I said last year. So you will recall what he learnt from what I said last year and, therefore, regurgitated it; actually he is a very good student. Mr. President, I said, I am repeating. You would recall in my response to last year’s budget I awarded the former PNM government an emphatic “F grade” for failure in their governance of this country during their tenure, which he repeated and I thank him for recognizing the quotation, but not necessarily the source. Beyond branding them with this unsatisfactory mark, I also identified ways in which we could remedy the situation.

Mr. President, after 42 years of the People’s National Movement’s control of this country and this economy where we are as a national, what is the legacy? I know they are trying to do the arithmetic and see whether it is from ’56—it is from ’56, do not count from the time of Independence. I am saying that during their stint—and certainly I will give you the most current figures. Between the years of 2002 and 2010, what has passed through that administration is in the vicinity of $280 billion. Could you imagine—[Interruption] and I am being asked to say $300 billion, but you know, it is a big difference, but in that vicinity of $300 billion. I asked and I re-ask the country the question, as we approach—and I made reference to Singapore, and I made reference in the sense of Singapore in terms of the GCI, not having the resources we have in this country. I ask the question, as we approach our nation’s 50th anniversary of Independence, where are we as a nation?

Mr. President, after 17 months in government, I want, as my colleague, Minister Bharath did, Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources, to outline to the country and to the nation what are some of the accomplishments of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Because this is where we have to account to the people, what have we done since last year when we said what we were going to do?

Mr. President, for this Ministry and previous to this, previous to my acceptance of this appointment as Minister, I am reminded that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education was almost dormant, it was as if you were going through a revolving door; the same thing over and over and over, with no real
impact on science and technology and significant transformation. I know that my friends will talk about transformation through the GATE programme. We always remind them that one of the things about education, is that as you sit in a class and you are taught, it is always important that you improve upon the foundation you would have received; the foundation of the GATE programme has its genesis in the UNC’s dollar for dollar programme. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, what does the scorecard look like for this Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for 2010/2011? We had promised the policy on tertiary education, TVET, and lifelong learning—I know Sen. Corinne Baptiste-McKnight was asking about the policy. Sen. Baptiste-McKnight this is the policy [Holds up a book] which was laid here as a Green Paper and then a White Paper after consultation. Both Sen. Baptiste-McKnight and Sen. Ali will be able see this afterwards. This is the document which you asked about, this is the policy on tertiary education, and I will give you a copy and I will tell you—

Sen. Baptiste-McKnight: Is it a secret?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: It is not a secret, Senator. We laid it in the Parliament and I am getting the nods from my dear brother Sen. Dr. James Armstrong; it was laid in this Parliament. [Desk thumping] Check the Hansard. In the spirit, as we approach Divali, and let me take this opportunity to wish all my colleagues here and the wider Hindu community, Shubh Divali. As we move towards Christmas, a time of generosity, charity and thanksgiving, I will present you with a copy of this report soon afterwards, in fact, I will give you my personal copy which I will autograph.

Sen. Baptiste-McKnight: There were two, where is the other one?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I will give you the other one as well. I will talk about—I know you boasted about your plumbing skills, I will come to that shortly. I will tell you how we can award you a unit award in the CVQ. I know that you are a very competent person in the diplomatic circles, but we are going to make you a competent person, when you are finished, you will be able to say, I can truly put down this kitchen sink without it falling on anybody’s foot.

Mr. President, I say this policy which was laid—and I remind Sen. Baptiste-McKnight—in this Parliament in January 2011. Done! That was a promise we kept.

The development of an apprenticeship system which she raised again yesterday, Mr. President, consultations were held—and I am reminding all my colleagues—were held in November 2010; advisory committees were launched and that has been done as well; we kept our promise. [Desk thumping]
The expansion of the GATE Programme—and I think we were complimented by Sen. Drayton, and I want to thank you for those compliments. [Desk thumping] I know your heart is in education and training. I remember your name many years ago, even when I was in secondary school when you were attached to Royal Bank—[ Interruption] No, I did not say she was that old, I am saying she looks that—[Laughter] [ Interruption]—today she looks as youthful as when I used to see her—[Desk thumping] on the Royal Bank newsletter. [Desk thumping]

And, in fact, I want to remind Sen. Drayton, one of the things which we used to get at college, at Presentation, San Fernando, was an RBC newsletter, which I used to keep and read. It helped us tremendously in our GP papers and our classes, and we have come back for those days from RBC, to RBTT to RBC, so that is how life goes. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President we talked about the expansion of the GATE Programme, and in item 2 of the 120-day plan of the People’s Partnership Manifesto we promise that we will secure and expand GATE to vocational; we have kept our promise. That is done!

In addition to that, we promised to reposition the OJT, MuST, Retraining and Life Skills programme, from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; they have been repositioned for improved delivery, effectiveness and efficiency. The OJT programme and the Life Skills programme have both been repositioned to the National Training Agency. The Retraining programme has been repositioned to the YTEPP Limited and the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme has been repositioned to the Metal Industries Company Limited.

Mr. President, we also promised and it was said by the Attorney General, agreed in Cabinet in a post Cabinet, and mentioned in Parliament that we would engage in forensic audits at Petrotrin and at UTT; these audits are completed, and I will speak in some ways to UTT later on. I have to move on with the time here. And I want to tell you that the forensic audits are completed, we have the report, and that is going to be the subject of deliberation with the Attorney General.

I want to tell you as well we promised work force assessment centres. Mr. President, for the first time in the history of this country and I know of no other place, and I can tell you this is not a boast I can tell you of the accomplishment. I was the first CEO of the National Training Agency. I started on January 03, 1999; we started on the ground floor of a mall office and today, the NTA is making significant inputs to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I am tempted to say something about May 11, 2007, but I think the debate has been going so good in this Senate, I will not go there. My friend Sen. Hinds very well knows what I am talking about, but I will not go on Friday, May 11, 2007, the
Friday before Mother’s Day. But I want to tell you that today, or yesterday, or that day, I was the CEO of the National Training Agency. Today, by the grace of God and the hand of the hon. Prime Minister, I have the privilege, the honour and the pleasure to serve as the Minister responsible for the National Training Agency. [Desk thumping]

I speak about the work force assessment centres, and I want to tell you that our citizens who have skills and competencies, but do not have certification will be certified under the People’s Partnership Government through work force assessment centres. And what does that mean? I taught in a comprehensive school where we had three streams of classes. We had the academic, we had the pre-technician and we had the vocational, and sometimes when we leave—all these comprehensive schools were built with the same kind of infrastructure. Block A was administration; Block C was other classes; Block E was a classroom; and you had the vocational sector. And when we left the classrooms you would hear teachers say: “Oh God, ah hah to go down to dem fellas in Techvoc!” We are going to lift that deferential bar, we are going to ensure as has been said many times before, that we will remove this lack of parity of esteem, between vocational and academia. We are going to move this country to a seamless system of education and training as never has been done before. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, we promised to deliver on the Tobago Technology Centre and my colleagues the Senators from Tobago will tell you that you cannot escape seeing that beautiful building, very functional, very purposeful, I speak about the state-of-the-art Tobago Technology Centre which we completed and I want to say, I know—Sen. Cudjoe is smiling at me—I started; I will say yes, it was started by the previous regime, but completed by us before time, and certainly with a budget which will be requisite of the type of skills and competencies and, the quality of teaching which is going to happen at that state-of-the-art MIC/YTEPP [Desk thumping] Technology Centre. We delivered on that.

Mr. President, we promised the University of the West Indies (South) Campus; it is going to happen. Many in here, some persons in here and in the other place were questioning, why a campus in south? Well, I live in central, I went to school in San Fernando, in fact, I was privileged to go on the last train to San Fernando, many of you would know that song: “If you miss this one, you never get ah nudder one, last train to San Fernando”. I might have a calling for another profession after here. [Laughter]


Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. President, I want to tell that I went to San Fernando, I went to the university in St. Augustine and all of us who were in south,
went north, what is wrong with those from the north, moving south? We have land, and I will tell you about the student population from the University of the West Indies, what percentage lives south and central. Therefore, I want to tell you we have delivered; we have identified the land, 100 acres of land; we have additional lands, 42 acres. We are now in the process of having those 2-acre plot farmers removed from the site by virtue of their approval to another location—they are going to be relocated.

11.00 a.m.

I am saying here today, designs are completed, and by or before December 31, 2011, construction will start on the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine—Penal, Debe campus. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I want to tell you, if you look at this manifesto, I have selected all the items for action and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has delivered on every manifesto promise as it relates to the Ministry. I want to enumerate some of them. My colleague, Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon, is not here but he spoke—he said he advised me in terms of a higher education council. I want to tell him that I really accept and applaud that advice, but before that advice we had written into this manifesto, the visionary leadership of our People’s Partnership Government: the establishment of A National Commission for Higher Education.

Mr. President, we delivered on that. [Desk thumping] We promised as well the establishment of an Education City at St. Augustine. Mr. President, Dr. Azad Mohammed is the Chairman of that Education City, we delivered on that—it is here.

The GATE Review Committee—and I am going to talk about GATE now. There is a GATE Review Committee headed by Dr. Jwala Rambaran, and I want to tell you a little bit about GATE.

Mr. President, much has been said in this honourable Senate about GATE, and GATE really started in 2004, and I think one of my colleagues was talking about the opening of the GATE, we do not know how wide the GATE is, we do not know if the GATE closing. I want to say to all of us and to the national community, before we went to the election people were being scared into believing that we were going to interfere with GATE. “There will be no GATE”, they were saying; “You will have no further free education”. Mr. President, the People’s Partnership has secured GATE and expanded it, as I said. I want to tell you a little bit about GATE.

Mr. President, from 2005—2011, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the taxpayers of this country have spent approximately $3 billion on GATE
programmes. And let me give you some statistics: for example, in 2009, we spent $574 million; in 2010, $584 million; in 2011, we spent $624.9 million; and in the context of that scaring factor, all that emotionalism about GATE, we have decided—this Government of the People’s Partnership has decided to expand the GATE programme by an additional $25 million; the allocation is now $650 million.

Having said that, I want to also tell you that I decided to look at the GATE expenditure in terms of the investment per student, and effectively what you were finding—and let me just say that we would have trained as well over 200,000 persons. The average number of students benefiting from GATE is in the vicinity of 50,000-53,000-56,000 persons, and what that amounts to is when we started the GATE in 2005, you had a per capita cost of $7,113.55. In 2006, the per capita cost was $7,000; again in that vicinity, it went up to $8,000 in 2007; it went to $9,000-plus in 2008. Mr. President, it is now over $11,000 per person for GATE in this country. And I want to tell you that we have had commentators who have said that they agree with the principle adopted and the position adopted by the People’s Partnership Government, and certainly in terms of the manifesto commitment of the Minister of Finance that we will review the GATE programme.

I have articles here which I will just make mention of, written by Professor Emeritus John Spence, and he said and I quote:

“I am in agreement with the intention to monitor the GATE programme more closely. I suggest…”—and I think we heard this yesterday from Prof. Ramkissoon as well—“I suggest that the GATE programme entitlement should be subject to a ‘means test’.”

We also had an article by Dennis Leslie in the Guardian of Wednesday October 12, 2011, in which he said and I quote:

“I congratulate the Government for the decision to do something about the abuse of the GATE facility by unscrupulous people and to the detriment of young people who wish to improve their education and or obtain certification needed to qualify for jobs, especially in the technical fields.”

There is another article written by Dr. Noel Kalicharan from UWI, in which he is saying that he is very happy to hear about the GATE programme. What pleases my heart as well is not only in terms of the technocrats, but the students themselves in an article in the Newsday of Sunday October 16, 2011, in which the PRO of the Guild, Mervin Agiste is saying that they will support:

“The Guild, Agiste said, fully ‘agrees with the review of the GATE programme to ensure it caters for more students and that it benefits the national economy’.”
This is not my headline, I did not say that, apparently he said that the: “Guild agrees slackers must go”. I did not say that. All I am saying is that we look for a process improvement.

There are also articles in many other places or articles that talked about the fact that they are supporting the review of the GATE programme.

Mr. President, what are some of the things that the GATE Review Committee found. I did indicate to you that there is a GATE Review Committee, and let me say from the outset, I have asked the GATE Review Committee, in the spirit of the People’s Partnership and our commitment to the people of this country, to go to national consultations on the GATE programme. Open it up, let people come and talk about it. Let us hear about the kinds of programmes—and I am seeing nods from the other side and therefore I know we are on the right track; consultation is important. [Desk thumping]

But let me tell you of some of the things that the GATE Review Committee found. They observed as follows: These are the findings of the GATE Review Committee: Institutions in the private sector were coalescing in determining the cost of their programmes; institutions they observed in the public sector were not giving notice to the ministry of new programmes. In some cases what happens is once you have the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago approval, that stamp, it seems to many that the fact that you are an accredited institution or you are registered with the ACTT, and you have been approved to put on a few programmes or courses, that anything else after you want to put on it is a fait accompli. That is not how the GATE programme will work in the future. You have to have approval by the Ministry, through the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, before you can put on any GATE programmes and access funding through the taxpayers.

Mr. President, this affects the budgeting and planning process, and in many cases, new programmes are only known to the students who apply. In addition, we found students dropping out of programmes did not have valid reasons. We were also advised that institutions at times were not reporting on these dropouts; that there were students programme hopping from one to the next. Like we found in the case of the TVET programmes, where you are paid a stipend, you would have somebody going to a programme during the day, they get a stipend, and they go to a YTEPP programme in the evening; so they are perpetual student earners, as opposed to student learners. And those I call the “programme hoppers”, and we are going to ensure that using the technology of the one card system, like with the PIN—and I think Sen. Baptiste-McKnight spoke about it, and I want to compliment you for that suggestion, Sen. Baptiste-McKnight in terms of using the electronic birth certificate—we will track you. And I was going to say almost from birth to death, but really that is what it is in some cases. That is what it is. We would track you.
You know it happens, when you go to a foreign country and they tell you to put your fingers on a screen—they track you all the way. And we are going to track you not because we want to find you out and we want to punish you—and let me say upfront—it is for us to ensure what the Minister of Finance has said and the hon. Prime Minister and the Government, we are now into value-based accounting and accountability. We have to account for the taxpayer dollar and therefore our students must be made to account; you cannot simply move from programme to programme and expect that the taxpayer will finance that. We are not financing failures—we are going to be financing success.

Mr. President, people are switching programmes without prior approval. Students are repeating the same programmes at different institutions, so if they are smart you have to know how to protect the future. If people continue to be in the system and absorb the taxpayer dollars, what is going to happen to those who want to enter the system?

Mr. President, I want to say that while we have the GATE clearance form, I want to also tell you that when you access GATE you sign an agreement to work in Trinidad and Tobago for two years, and in fact before you can access GATE, you are supposed to reside here for a minimum of three years. And when the hon. Minister of Finance spoke about tightening the GATE system, and all the Senators who have spoken here over the last two days have said, and we have mentioned about this “ROI” what is this return of investment that we are getting, I want to tell you, we are going to enforce the GATE compliance rules and regulations to ensure that the investment of the taxpayer redounds to the benefit of the taxpayers in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Baptiste-McKnight, I see you are thumping the desk heartily, I want to tell you—and you are agreeing. I told you recently I went to Singapore, in Singapore they take their best and their brightest—and I will talk about Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon just now in terms of the OECD Report and PISA—and in Singapore when they send you, they take the brightest and they send them to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, MIT, et cetera, when you come back you work in the public service. The best brains in Singapore are found in the public service. And if you have to leave the country to go to visit anywhere or anybody—you know long time we used to have a tax clearance—you have to have a clearance from the Singapore government before you leave there. If you leave and you do not return, they convert it to a loan; you have to pay it.

I am not saying that we are going to do the same thing. All I am saying is that we are going to look at regulations to tighten—and we have. But, Sen. Al-Rawi, it
may be there but it is not enforced, and that is why we are going to enforce it. We cannot continue with this haemorrhage of financial resources in the system to the detriment of those who are coming behind us. We have to leave a legacy. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, you know, whenever we go to Tobago we are reminded about some words in the vocabulary and the dictionary, “insensitive”, “respect”, and so on. I want to say to my colleagues from Tobago, that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, particularly in the tertiary sector, we have not left out Tobago. You are an equal partner in this, Dr. Wheeler, and I know yesterday you spoke about an equal partner, and it was evident from the Minister of Finance’s allocation of $2.199 billion to the island in the 2012 budget, that you were an equal partner with us in development. And we spoke about certain commitments.

Let me tell you what are the commitments for 2012 with respect to Tobago from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. We are going to upgrade the HYPE facility in Tobago in 2012, in order to provide adequate training facilities for our students there. We are going to engage in consultation—I am sure you are going to be very supportive of this—with the Tobago House of Assembly. The Tobago House of Assembly is an important partner in development such as with the Ministry of Tobago Development, and our colleague Ministers for Tobago East and Tobago West. We are going to ensure that we move ahead quickly now that the hon. Minister of Finance has written into the budget statement that the integrated campus—because we were looking at lands in the west as well. We were looking at lands and we had some issues and concerns in terms of locating and not congesting the area from Scarborough to the airport. And that area is very——

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. F. Karim: Thank you very much to my colleague brother, my very good friend from the alma mater that we both share, Sen. Al-Rawi, and thank you very much, Mr. President, and to all my colleagues. In fact, I am just one-fifth of my speech, but I will probably have to come back and use it at some other time, but let me give you some highlights.

So I am saying that we are going to have outreach in Tobago, and we are going through US Aid, from which we would get a US $90,000 grant; we are going to have
a dedicated computer mobile facility in Tobago. I want to also say as we move, let me just confirm that the tertiary sector has a population in excess of 53,000 students enrolled and 18,000 first year students as we speak.

11.15 a.m.

I want to just mention about the GATE programme. We boast about the GATE programme and we say this GATE programme is a significant success story of the former government, but sometimes you have to lament what great and good means and what greatness means.

We have allowed students in this country to access through GATE the University of London LLB programme, at the expense of taxpayers in this country, and when they are finished they cannot practise in this country unless they have the LPC which is the equivalent of the LEC from the Hugh Wooding Law School.

So, we give these students GATE money, let them qualify at the undergraduate level with an LLB, and they cannot go to England, guess why? The cost to go to England to do the LPC is in excess of TT $200,000, Mr. President, what have we done? Are we setting up these people? And then somebody is asking the question, why are we putting a university campus in the south? Let me say, that the first faculty that will be going south will be the faculty of law, and we are going to expand that faculty. [Desk thumping]

As a matter of fact, Mr. President, let me just say that UWI has an intake from 2006—2010 of 777 students

Sen. George: We will use Al-Rawi as a tutor down there.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: And do you know how many students are at the University of London? For 2006 to 2010, in excess of 5,000 have pursued the degree in law.

Mr. President, much has been said and my dear friend, and again alma mater colleague, Dr. Rolph Balgobin, spoke about ensuring that [Interruption]—is a “pres” connection—that we should ensure that what we are doing the tertiary sector responds to the labour market.

Let me just advise the Senate, Mr. President, through you, that yesterday Cabinet approved the establishment of a Standing National Labour Market Council of Trinidad and Tobago, and you know what that will do. I do not need to read out all of it. Let me just give you one piece of information: to act as a consultative and advisory group to the Ministry of Labour, in terms of the dissemination of labour market information.
I have said with respect to my own Ministry, just as you have the weather report every night on television, why can you not have labour report, let people know where these jobs are? And every investor coming to this country—Singapore has what you call the Ministry of Manpower; we used to call it the Ministry of Labour and Manpower, Planning and Development. Everybody who comes into this country must give the complement and requirement of their workforce so that we will know who we have to train, and where it will come from, as opposed to importing labour.

We talked about the health sector and I wanted to say a little about the health sector, particularly with respect to nurses, that at present we have found 2,910 vacancies for registered nurses and other nursing personnel in Trinidad and Tobago—2,910. Forty-eight per cent shortage of registered mental nurses, 28 per cent shortage enrolled nursing assistants and that is why, Mr. President, this Government will soon commence—we have started work already—classes at the former El Dorado Girl’s Youth Camp which will be called, the Nursing and Health Care Education and Training Facility in El Dorado. And in this regard I want to thank the former Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, hon. Anil Roberts, for ensuring, and I also want to thank the subsequent Minister, Minister St. Rose for allowing us the facility to be transferred—the El Dorado Girl’s Youth Camp to be transferred to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

Mr. President, I spoke about the National Commission for Education. I have an article here from the Sunday Telegraph in England and they were able to calculate what it costs for tuition fees, and let me just read:

“Students will pay as much as £50 to attend a lecture at some universities, an investigation has revealed.”

I want to move to this stage in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not simply that I will wake up one day and decide I will charge so much money for a course or for a programme of study. We will ensure, through the National Commission for Education, what is the cost per hour, what is this value that we are going to place in terms of education and training, not simply—as Minister Dookeran indicated—creation of cash cows smiling all the way to the bank. That will be one of the things about the National Commission for Education.

And I welcome Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon because he would have missed some of the things I mentioned about him in terms of his suggestions, and I also want to thank Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon; he has been very supportive of the Ministry, and in terms of science and technology, and we thank you Sir, and we look forward to working with you. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] “A next ‘Pres’ person.” Okay.

**Hon. Senator:** A conspiracy.
Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I would have to read that one, and look for that photograph in the college annuals of the years before.

Hon. Senator: 1940.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: So, Mr. President, as I come to a close I want to talk about the education cluster we are going to be doing. I want to talk about the University of Trinidad and Tobago briefly.

Much has been said about the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Tamana Park which is in excess of $1.8 billion and the high performance unit. But, Mr. President, it might be interesting for all of us to note that with respect to GATE, the public purse with respect to GATE in the hands of the Government; and I am making reference here with respect to UTT and the Masters and PhD students.

I want to say that for Masters and PhD students the GATE programme allows 50 per cent tuition fees, but at UTT, do you know, Masters students are being paid a stipend of $75,000 per year, and PhD students—I am going to repeat it—we have discovered that the public purse with regard to GATE is in the hands of Government, I start by saying that, and for Masters and PhD students the GATE programme allows 50 per cent of tuition cost, but at UTT do you know, Mr. President, they were paying Masters students a stipend of $75,000 per year, and PhD students a stipend of $85,000 per year to study? So in effect UTT circumvented the 50 per cent of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and was actually financing 100 per cent and more tuition fees. Mr. President, I will say a little more about that later on, but let me just—I have to speed through my contribution.

There was much talk about the MYPART programme that was transferred to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Let me just say, the MYPART programme which is the Military Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeships and Reorientation Training will be held and expanded, it will not only be at one venue, which is at the Mausica Teachers College. We are going to open access to the MYPART programme through the Ministry of Science Technology and Tertiary Education, including Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I was going to talk about the CVQs, the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications, and the unit award, but time does not permit me to do so. I want to raise quickly in terms of another aspect of UTT—just to say, Mr. President, that earlier on I made reference to new programmes, and also to the fact that what we are having in Trinidad and Tobago is a maritime campus. It is my view that this maritime campus has not done as well as it ought to have done and I want to refer to the New York Times with your permission that speaks to Panamax, and let me just read. We talk
about entrepot, we talk about business development, we talk about initiatives that will expand the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Maritime Campus and what is happening now and I just want to read:

The future of global shipping is little more than a hole in the ground here, which is Panama. About 1.6 kilometres long 90 metres wide and more than 30 metres deep the investment is a $5.25 billion project due to be completed in 2014. Right now with its two lanes of locks that handle ships up to 294 metres and 32 long and 32 metres wide—this size is known as Panamax.

In other words what they are saying is that on a daily basis 15 ships additionally will pass through Panama. Could you imagine what that means for Trinidad and Tobago? As I come to the end—

Mr. President: You have five minutes again.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. President, and therefore, it is a most appropriate time for me to come to this juncture, and I want to welcome back my friend, Sen. Hinds, and another colleague, who spoke about the airport at Camden. The airport at Camden—well, it might not be you, I know that you just came in—

Sen. Hinds: You think I am afraid?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: No, no you were never a person to be afraid but I will not be distracted. [Laughter]

Mr. President, I want to tell you, as I am not being distracted, that in 2008—I have Cabinet Minute 2899 from the Ministry of Works and Transport that speaks to the expansion of the Camden Airstrip in Couva, which is being criticized now by those on the other side. Let me just read. This is the Cabinet Minute that I have in front of me here:

Expansions plans for the National Helicopter Services Limited—

Because that is all that they had there at that time, and they are saying that:

the company has also proposed—in this Cabinet Minute—that steps be taken to preserve the Camden Airstrip no helipad the Campden Airstrip which has been identified as the only operable airstrip outside of Piarco—Campden, the only one operable outside of where? Piarco—in the case of an emergency would prove to be a valuable, economic and national security asset for Trinidad and Tobago.
And I want to tell you in 2008—

**Hon. Senator:** Who was the Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** I will tell you who was the Minister and I will tell you the blog the Minister engaged in—

**Hon. Senator:** He is a blogger?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** And I will tell you what you want, he said and I am quoting and you could decide who that Minister is. He is saying:

In my view the idea of an aviation training school in Trinidad and Tobago should not be dismissed just so. Yes there are issues with capacity, feasibility—and that is what we said and that is what our Prime Minister said, we are going to engage in a feasibly study of a campus called the aviation campus that will include UTT and the Camden Airstrip, which has a good airstrip that can be rehabilitated to land a DC9 as we speak.

A DC9 jet can land there, but guess what the former government was doing?—building houses in the glide slope if you know what that is. “They have an airstrip, they want to expand, they take a decision in 2008 and say it is the best thing outside Piarco, and they building house on the glide slope.”

You see when we talk about misguided direction, this is what we are taking about—wastage of money and I am sorry my friend Sen. Hinds, left. His very good friend was in charge of that project, a “fella” by the name of Uthara Rao, building houses in the glide slope. Let me just continue.

Cost effectiveness, usefulness *et cetera* but our locally trained air traffic controllers for example, are highly regarded all over the world.

Mr. President, as I conclude let me tell you what I plan quickly for this Ministry in 2012: our score card will include—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Senator:** Who was the Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** the construction of an administration complex, the first of its kind, the first Ministry moving south but really into central. Everybody has been talking about bottleneck in Port of Spain. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has acquired 15 acres of land, north of the Divali Nagar, to start construction in 2012 of the Ministry’s headquarters that will house as well *[Desk thumping]* the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Training Agency and other institutions. As a matter of fact, YTEPP will be there, so the savings of rentals will be the investment in buildings in the future.
We are going to be establishing the Nursing and Health Care Education Training Facility at El Dorado—$8 million allocated immediately. Expansion of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mr. President, do you know this Government, through the taxpayers is financing $48 million annually—in the last fiscal year to St. George’s University Medical Sciences, why can we not use that money and expand the infrastructure here so that our students could stay in Trinidad and Tobago and pursue their medical sciences degree and clinicals?

Mr. President, this Government is on the move, this Ministry is on the move; we will deliver. [Desk thumping]

And I want to tell you—we talk about the Penal Work Force and Technology Centre. It hurts my heart to know that the previous government closed down the Debe Technology Centre and moved it to Ste. Madeleine. We are going to reopen the Debe Technology Centre as we move towards closing the digital gap.

Finally, Mr. President, as I end, if you will allow me to give this quotation which underpins the strategy of the Ministry of Science Technology and Tertiary Education. And my colleague, Prof. Ramkissoon, made mention of the OECD report and the PISA, and I am saying this as I end as quotation from Angel Gurria, Secretary-General of the OECD, the Secretary-General who says, and I quote:

“Education is the single most critical investment to raise the long-run growth potential of countries. In the global economy, the performance of education systems is the yardstick for success, particularly in light of the fundamental, technological and demographic challenges that are re-shaping our economies.”

Mr. President, as I close, I want to take this opportunity as my other colleagues, Dr. Tewarie and Minister Vasant Bharath, and all the other Ministers have said, and all our speakers, that we are the face of the nation here today but the work behind us, our staff, I want to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate all the members of my staff. They are seated there, my technical staff headed by the Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Permanent Secretary, my advisor, Mr. Boodai, and all the persons in HDSC, I cannot call them, but I owe them a great deal of gratitude, and I thank you very much for this opportunity.

11.30 a.m.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. President: I had indicated to hon. Senators that we would stand down the matter of announcements and that there was another matter which I need to bring to your attention before the next speaker.

I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath, who is out of the country.
SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

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

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: ARCHBISHOP BARBARA BURKE

WHEREAS Senator the Honourable Vasant Bharath is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(a) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, BARBARA BURKE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Vasant Vivekanand Bharath.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann’s, this 21st day of October, 2011.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Barbara Burke took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011

Sen. Faris Al Rawi: Mr. President, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to join in this debate. Actually, we are here to discuss the Appropriation (Financial Year 2012) Bill, 2011. It was exactly one year and a month ago to the day that I stood in the Red House contributing on the budget of Trinidad and Tobago.
It has been an interesting experience, to say the least, to participate in the discussion in this honourable Senate on the affairs that regulate Trinidad and Tobago. We are in the hands of the Government that is now in charge of this country. They are the drivers of our economy; they are the drivers of our State and we are here for a purpose. Our purpose, on this side of the Senate at least, and this Bench in particular, is to analyze and critically examine the policies and positions that are given to us as recommendations and prescriptions for economic development and social delivery in our country.

In fact, this debate took me at times to feelings of euphoria and then again to feelings of dismay. None of it was at all directed to Senators opposite and Senators behind me. It had to do with the range of feelings that you experience in understanding the fate of your current position and the prospects for your future in the context of who is driving it.

This being a national issue, the first thing I thought to look at was the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and I was guided by the fact that the Preamble of our Constitution really sets out, in our prescriptions, what we believe we ought to be doing in terms of our economy.

Permit me to make reference to the Preamble of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular paragraph (b), which says:

“Whereas the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

(b) respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;”

That is our supreme law, Mr. President, and embodied in our supreme law are the prescriptions which drove us to create the very Constitution that we have. We sought to embody the concepts of equality, fairness and use of our general public wealth for the benefit of the public good.

There are, of course, many different philosophies which can take us there. There is the utilitarian approach. There may be, in current circumstances, a more direct approach than that, but the position is that we are here to discuss our national stage.
The first thing I notice is that there seems to be a great deal of resentment to the job of an Opposition or to the genuine criticism offered by the Independent Bench. It is our obligation, whilst you celebrate in the euphoria of government, to check you on your ideas and principles. The ideas and principles which define this budget, in fact, are taken into a larger matrix. It is noteworthy that Sen. Dyer-Griffith sought to draw the analogy of Christmases past and used the concept of three ghosts visiting, shackles and chains, et cetera.

Coming out of that, I also thought of a certain rubric under the Christmas yuletide songs and that is the many days of Christmas and then you are going up. It bears some reflection to the fact that we have principles set out here in a People’s Partnership manifesto, in their first and second budget statements and, more particularly, through Sen. The Hon. Dr. Tewarie, the hon. Senator that he is, the medium-term policies as articulated in his document.

There are, in fact, seven pillars, five poles, three priorities and three strategic imperatives for transformation framework. [Interruption] I think my friend, Sen. Hinds, anticipates where I may be going.

It would be uncharitable to say zero action on that declining line. To say that would be to fail to recognize that our public servants continue to operate this country and that governments are, at best, from time to time, politicians in a revolving door in a five-year cycle. They are going to come and they are going to go and we must respect the fact that we must better the system such that, when we leave the halls of our current contribution, there is something more integral standing.

I noted that there were two Ministers in particular contributing opposite me, who had the courage to identify some of what they had proposed in the 2010/2011 budget by way of measurement and then to mark their own performance. Really and truly, it was Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath who had the courage to identify, out of his 2010/2011 budget contribution, the markers he had promised and the positions he had delivered.

The budget, the national community assumes to be one where you are engaged in an exercise of checking what you have done versus what you proposed to do and then providing an explanation of perhaps why you could not have achieved some of the measures you have identified, identifying a future project plan and then engaging in a discussion as to the realities of delivering that plan.

While the population expects that that is what we are supposed to be doing—it could not possibly be anything further than that which we are engaged in.
Truthfully, I, being the 22nd speaker to stand here in the Senate in three days of contribution, if you were to distill out of the Government Bench their contributions and, if you were, in that distillate, to be looking for what they have actually achieved and what they have measured and promised to achieve, you will notice that the fluid left behind, the larger part, the extremely large part of their contributions is really engaged in political bashing.

Let us for one moment have the courage to say—I accept that you think that the People’s National Movement was the worst thing on God’s earth in this country. Let us assume that I accept that, which I am telling you that I do not. Let us assume that out of the 22 hours of contributions here in this Senate from the Senators opposite, that I accept that, although I disagree, then I dare say that we are probably left, perhaps at best, with an hour and a half of solid contribution.

If you want to call it the shackles as Mrs. Dyer-Griffith did; if you want to go down the line of raw political performance of the type delivered by the Attorney General yesterday, which provoked answers on the other side as well; if you want to say that we have engaged in difficulties of a lost decade; if you want to say that the worst scourge on earth was the PNM; take all of that aside and take a new approach to budgeting and to discussions of budgets and let us talk about you being in charge; you running our economy; you driving the economy.

State your goals; decide what your measurables are in a long-term medium-term and short-term perspective, then only after you have done that, let us engage in the analysis of where we are going.

Unless we do that, we are destined to be in a constant cycle of repetition, where the names change every five years and the acronyms change every five years. On the PNM camp, you will always have the PNM; those symbols will never change. [Desk thumping] Balisier is emblazoned in our history and on our hearts. [Desk thumping] The national tie that we wear today, not being exclusive of our Balisier ties, is a choice of many choices.

It is quite conspicuous that since we have worn our Balisier tie and since we have now worn our other Balisier tie, being the national tie, no one else opposite in this Chamber dares to wear one. In fact, I heard, in jest, someone cautioning the Leader of Government Business, when we first came on Wednesday, they told him: “Boy, do not wear that tie tomorrow.” He was wearing a national tie. The national tie, Mr. President, the colours are for us all. There is no copyright in a pin; there is no copyright in a tie or in a concept. We are all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.
11.45 a.m.

Mr. President, if we come on to analyzing our position today, the first thing that we have to do is to understand a few aspects of the arithmetic, because on the first measurable, if you look to performance of the Government, we have to understand, I would not say all of the arithmetic, but some of the arithmetic.

Mr. President, a budget package—and this budget package comprised of 11 documents—11 large, lengthy documents—which in the tradition of governments past and governments present, has resided close to the bosom of the Government, is given out only after the Minister of Finance makes his budget delivery, and then you are left with a couple of days to analyze the budget package. This is the level of discourse we have in Trinidad and Tobago. We are proud, it seems, to have a discourse where you read thousands of pages of financial information—projects, deliverables, plans and policies—in the confines of your existing lives on the Government side; you are running Ministries and you are running the State. On the Opposition side, you are running your affairs and your constituencies, and the Independents coming from the lives from where we come. We are in a cycle where we take thousands of pages of principled documentation and analyze them in two days, and that is a budget discussion.

Mr. President, I genuinely believe in the concept of full and frank disclosure. I would like to borrow from the practice that I come from, which is that you must disclose everything—that there is discovery. It is true you have discovery by things like freedom of information, and you can knock on the door of the Ministries, but, personally, I find it distasteful that consultations happen by any Government without the participation of an Opposition or the wider and entire community. I would like to see us move away from that.

In examining the 11 documents which comprised the package, and then going down to the deeper picture of your research, the arithmetic causes you to stop and asks you to analyze it for the benefit of establishing your true base point. So, we are told, Mr. President, as a precursor to the arithmetic, that we are going to engage in deficit financing, and there seems to be some form of indication from the Government, that the Opposition is against deficit financing, and it is assumed by them that is the reason we did not vote for the budget in the Lower House. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The concept of deficit financing is well known to anybody who has taken the time to even study economics at the very cursory level. It is Keynesian philosophy; it is the fact that you must spend your way out of difficulty through proper
investments so that you can catch yourself without having to go through the trough, and so that you can move from peak to peak. [Desk thumping]

What we have a problem with, Mr. President, is the issue of whether the investments in the current context, in the cycle that we are in, is a proper concept for today’s position. The hon. Sen. Ramkhelawann referred to it as the choice between austerity and deficit financing. That is the essential choice before us. What informs us as to the type of choice that we should select is the arithmetic as a first point.

It is essential to note that the 2010/2011 budget was prefaced upon an estimate of oil revenue and gas revenue set at $65 a barrel originally, and then moved to $75 with respect to oil, and then set at $2.75 per MMBtu with respect to gas. It was based upon a projected 2.5 per cent growth in the economy, and it was based upon an average unemployment position of 7 per cent with a debt to GDP ratio of approximately 5.5 per cent. That is what we had last year in the budget as the premise for the expenditure that was allowed and voted for by the Opposition then, to allow the People’s Partnership in their first year to proceed with their investment plans.

Mr. President, the problem that we have with the arithmetic and with the connection with deficit financing is that when you are looking under “appropriation” to take $47.130 billion as your expenditure in terms of your appropriation to be issued out of the Consolidated Fund, as is set out in the Appropriation Bill itself, you have to understand whether your marker is true. Can I, in fact, afford to run a $7.6 billion or $7.7 billion deficit as I have? To do that, Mr. President, we have to take the published documentation as being factual.

There is one serious issue with the published documentation that we have in the Review of the Economy, and that is when you look at page 49 of the Review of the Economy—From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation you will note that at appendix 2, the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago at constant 2000 prices as a percentage change—if you look through the years you will see; 2007, 4.8; 2008, 2.7; 2009, revised at 3.3; 2010, estimated at 0.02 and then 2011, which is last year’s performance, which is why we are here, at -1.4. Mr. President, that is the cornerstone of your analysis of where your debt to GDP ratio is going to go.

You will remember that the hon. Minister of Finance informed us that the reason that he felt capable of spending $2 billion more this year than he had last year was on the basis of two points. His first point was that the gross public sector debt to GDP was going to be approximately under 40 per cent, and his other point
was that the deficit to GDP was going to be under 5 per cent. Those were two magic markers. In doing that, he placed it upon a cornerstone—his superstructure was built on the cornerstone of only having suffered in a similar budget last year, a negative 1.4 per cent loss. If you look at page 49 in the review of the budget, that is 0.02 per cent from the year before. So to get to -1.4, he has pegged himself, essentially, at zero and said that there was no growth, and that we were essentially at zero the year before.

Mr. President, next to that 2010 column, there is a remarkable important letter of the alphabet that appears, and that is the letter “e”, “e” for “estimate”, and I cannot understand how we could be one year and one month to the day, post the last budget and have an “e” next to that column, particularly when the statistical information was promised to us by the hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie when we debated in September the need for statistical information as it related to the raising of the debt ceiling limits under the guarantee of loans and general ceilings and external loans, et cetera. When we went to raise our debt ceiling by some $31.5 billion, we were promised the statistical information, and one year and one month later we see that we have at page 49, flat growth for year 2010; that is 2009/2010. That is the premise of the last budget.

In reality, Mr. President, you have to move yourself to looking at the documentation that existed when the last budget was presented. Mr. President, I ask you to take careful note that at page 30 of the Review of the Economy then, the actual figure stated was to the best of my knowledge, for our growth as a percentage, 2.5 per cent.

Mr. President, if you do the simple comparison from revenue review last year to revenue review this year, the first thing that jumps out at you—your cornerstone for analyzing how much debt you can bring on to your books—is the fact that you have said 2.5 per cent growth last year as your starting point, and this year you have come and said with no explanation whatsoever, either in reply to the issue when it was raised in the Lower House, from the hon. Minister of Finance or when he piloted the Bill here. No explanation whatsoever as to how that figure moved from +2.5 to 0.02. No explanation whatsoever.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: Would the hon. Senator give way?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: If you could just let me develop the point and I would come back to it. So we have this position, Mr. President, of a +2.5 to 0.02 and we now have a -1.4, which means we have one of two positions, which I am sure my learned colleague will help to clarify shortly.
We either have a position of moving from 2.5 to -1.4 which is, essentially, a 4 per cent drop. You are looking at -4 per cent. That is one explanation or the other explanation is that you accept that you move from 0 to -1.4 which is a -1.4. So you have either got -4 per cent growth or -1.4 per cent growth. It might seem a trivial point to those outside there, why is one questioning the fact of a -4 to a -1.4, but the consequence is extreme in its effect, because it is that figure which assists us to analyze how much debt we can take on in our borrowings.

And as another part of the arithmetic, Mr. President, when you look to the draft estimates of revenue, the yellow book for this year, and you see that you are looking at a statement at page 5, if you look at our statements of revenue, Mr. President, at 2012 we are estimating $40 billion in tax revenue and $5.62 billion in non-tax revenue. When you look at that fact, there is another position which comes out at you versus your expenditure when you compare it. The question is, what is your real deficit for 2012 estimated to be? Mr. President, it is a very important question.

You are estimating from your lecture—from the documented information from the Ministry of Finance—a recurrent expenditure of $49.4 billion. That is without capital payments and contributions to the sinking fund. When you look at your capital expenditure and you look at that figure—sorry, Mr. President, the figure is actually $53.7 billion. I was looking at last year’s figure. When you look at the recurrent expenditure for this year—I am correcting it—it is $53.7 billion. That is without capital repayments and sinking fund.

When you look at your capital expenditure which you expect somewhere to be at $7.6 billion or so, and you factor out of that your Consolidated Fund amount—we are told infrastructure development is $4.3 billion, so you deduct that from $7.6 billion and you are left with $3.3 billion—you are compelled—if you are looking at your real total projected expenditure—to add the first figure to the second; $53.7 billion plus $3.3 billion and you get $57 billion. Now, this was raised by the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East in the Lower House, and the hon. Minister of Finance simply shrugged him off and said—he made some reference to being in Standard 1 versus Standard 2 and when you get to Standard 5 you will understand that. That was the response then.

Mr. President, I am a fellow who likes to check my facts so I wonder, could it be that it was only the Member for Diego Martin North/East who spotted that, Colm Imbert, the hon. Member as he is? Could he be the only person? When I dug and I looked to the reviews, one in particular jumped out at me and that is the review done—
Mr. President: I propose to take the lunch break at this point. We will continue at 1.00 p.m. This Senate will stand suspended until 1.00 p.m.

12 noon: Sitting suspended.

1.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: Before we took the break, Sen. Al-Rawi was on his legs. I estimated he had another 18 minutes of debate.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. That is surprising news to me. I am sure you are correct, but it is surprising to me.

Bearing in mind that time is not on my side, in terms of the breadth of issues one would want to discuss in a budget such as this, I turn quickly back to recap just on the point of the arithmetic. The point of the arithmetic was that there was difficulty in the numbers as presented in the Revised Estimates of Expenditure and in revisions of that as contained in the Review of the Economy 2011/2012 in the budget package. We are told that we must accept a negative 1.4 per cent contraction as our figure of the cornerstone of the superstructure of the economy that we are building, as opposed to the fact that it being, by my estimation and calculation, closer to negative 4 per cent growth.

The importance of that is, of course, in analyzing how much debt we ought to go into, and in truly reflecting where we are. If you look at the title of this budget statement it says, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, so we must essentially look at the issue of foundation. The arithmetic in the budget relative to foundation focuses and must focus clearly on what is the true state of our growth in the last fiscal year, the full year of the People’s Partnership having been in operation.

I was saying that this issue was raised in the Lower House, but in my research I enquired whether anyone else had seen this, bearing in mind that the entire nation is at a disadvantage to have a budget discourse in the period of only a couple of days with documentation being kept close to your chest, until you actually deliver your statement.

I came across in particular a very interesting analysis of the budget by KPMG. It is KPMG Tax News Flash Budget 2012, dated October 10, 2011. Quite interestingly it starts off, and I will just give you this initial statement before I get to the other point. It starts off:

“Budget 2012, Securing the Present, Sowing for the Future”
It reads, with your permission:

“When the honourable Minister of Finance opened his budget presentation with a quote from the Prime Minister’s contribution in Parliament in support of the state of emergency, many feared that he was going to declare a financial state of emergency for the country’s economy.”

If I turn over to page 3 of that KPMG report, there is discussion of the highlights of the budget revenues and expenditure. At page 4 it reads, under the heading:

“The figures revenue and expenditure

The Minister indicated a budget deficit of $7.6 billion based on projected revenue and expenditure of $47 billion and $54.6 billion respectively. The draft estimates prepared by the Ministry of Finance portrayed a different picture, as follows...

They show three tables, 2012 estimated, 2011 revised and 2010 actual. They provide the breakdown of total receipts and expenditure, and as to expenditure that is broken down between recurrent and development. The deficit shown is for the 2012 estimated column, $11.317 billion.

Quite interestingly, in the revised estimates for 2011, the total receipts being $43.7 billion, the recurrent being $49.36 billion, the development being $3.3 billion, we see a deficit of $9.011 billion. So what KPMG is asking us to consider in the first column, is exactly the extrapolation that I have taken us through, relative to the actual budget deficit. I am saying that the budget deficit, the actual foundation, the deficit for this last year is $11.3 billion deficit.

KPMG has noted that the revised actual deficit for last year, the first year under the People’s Partnership Government, full year, with a full budget given to them by 100 per cent vote in both Houses, no opposition, no nays, that the actual budget was $9 billion in deficit. Not $7 billion as we are told, but $9 billion last year.

So the theme of this budget being “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, we are told that last year we had a conservative deficit, by the hon. Minister of Finance. We are told this year the figures are going to show a similar deficit of some $7.6 billion. When in actuality, if you look at the estimates of revenue, in the financial year 2012, these draft estimates of this bundle, you would note that at page 5 that the figures when you add from the Ministry of Finance—not the budget statement of the hon. Minister—demonstrate very clearly that we are actually looking to an $11.3 billion deficit this year to come and that we actually had a $9 billion deficit last year.
Let us add that to the other aspects of arithmetic that we must pay attention to, and that is, my submission, subject to clarification by my learned colleague, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, and I have indicated I will ask him to clarify because he has asked. On one of the interpretations of the Government’s own documents, you are seeing a negative growth of minus-4, so that is our current position.

What relevance is that to where we are going? We are told, if I could summarize the arguments from those opposite, they are saying, which I do not accept, “PNM wants you to be taxed.” We have never said that. They say we are here to continue with the Public Sector Investment Programme, we are going to maintain the same social expenditures. We are going to have relatively the same transfers and subsidies. In fact, we are going to have $2 billion more of transfers and subsidies. That is what we are told. They say that the PNM says you should be taxed, and they say, “Praise hallelujah God Almighty. We are not taxing you. We are caring and considerate people.” They have further demonized the concept of taxation.

Taxation is not pleasant, it is perhaps the only certain thing other than death in life, in most democracies, recognized. I am sure you remember, in the rule of IRC v Tomlin, that famous case on Inland Revenue law. The fact is, and it has been echoed on the Independent Benches, we ought not to be telling our people in this country, as a mark of growing responsibility, that they should not pay their fair due. By demonizing taxation as they have, they have disconnected the ability to adopt austerity. Their disconnection has happened by way of an adoption of the very form of hubris that they said the PNM was guilty of.

In this budget we note that the figures demonstrate that lands and buildings taxes, by way of an example, are not to be collected yet another year; that we are to turn our eyes away from $.5 billion further of revenue collection and that we should not be collecting lands and buildings taxes. My question is, why? The answer must surely be because you so politicized the concept of responsible taxation in condemning the Revenue Authority and in condemning the property tax, one which started, mind you, under the UNC and was further developed by the PNM. Dare I say, badly rolled out by the PNM? I think the PNM could have done better to deal with the soft issues in relation to the property tax.

But the fact that the system is anachronistic and outdated is undeniable, and that is the very point you are wrestling with now. It must be, if I were to presume correctness as we do in law, omnia presumuntur, I must presume that you have logic by what you are doing. The reason you cannot bring the land and building tax back right now is quite simple: egg on your face. Political shame in having argued, “Axe the tax at all costs”, and realizing that if you are bringing back the land and building taxes, you have got to peg it in relation to your valuations. [Desk thumping]
Appropriation Bill, 2011  
[SEN. AL-RAWI]  

Friday, October 21, 2011  

The minute you start to bring up your valuations across the country, as we must, then you are going to end up with a problem of percentages. So the axe the tax campaign said forget to collect 3 per cent of your value of properties across the board, forget the disparity of 7 per cent and 9 per cent and varying percentages, do not take 3 per cent flat in its revenue collection relative to taxation, forget when it took down the progressive taxation from 33 per cent to 25 per cent, across the board. The idea was to tax everybody at the equal rate, encourage a tighter efficiency in the system by putting into place the Revenue Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, by consolidating and removing the leakages.

The Attorney General is good at giving you very graphic images in your head, of a leaky ship, a carpet in this leaky ship and rust spots coming out, and then he goes on the corruption bandwagon. I believe that the real focus we ought to have is on efficiency, which I am happy to say runs through the body and text of a number of the documents. The words are certainly there. I am confident that there are noble intentions amongst those opposite. There must be, they are honourable people. But the question we have got to look at is, how do we drive this thing? How do we achieve this transformation of the public sector in particular, if we are burying it in obfuscations, as to arithmetic for starters, number one?

Secondly, you know the old saying, “The road to hell is paved with the best of intentions”. We have got to ask ourselves: are we on a road to hell? I am sure “hell” is not an unparliamentary word. The point is this, let us look at where we came from. From a financial run-up to the delivery of this budget, we had very peculiar occurrence on the legislative side of things. We have sat for over one year in the business of law making in this country. We have dealt with 30-something Bills, Acts. I believe we have dealt with 32 Acts of Parliament, 14 Motions. In particular on September 07 and 08, we dealt with the increase in borrowing: the Development Loans Act, the External Loans Act and the Guarantee of Loans (Companies) Act.

1.15 p.m.

We were told, trust us. The AG: “Give us a little elbow room; we need some room to breathe above the water line,” he said; very good at visual imagery and lots of words. We were told, “We will give you the details as to how we are going to be able to sustain the levels of debt”, assuming that you borrow. Because there is an assumption, they said. They said, “Listen, do not worry with this $31.5 billion ceiling. We are going to borrow what we need.” We were told we would get the details in the budget and that we should forget what is normally done; we should not debate the debt ceiling limits after a budget; in fact, we should debate them before.
So we said, “Okay.” We said, “Let the budget come”, and the budget came, and we are looking now for the details. But what do we see? In the figures we see $6.6 billion to be borrowed this year, because we are no longer in the erstwhile deficit financing scenario that we were under the PNM, for whatever reason it is, whether the money existed or not. The point is, we ran deficit financing on one occasion to dry up liquidity—sorry, we did borrowings to dry up liquidity; we ran deficit financing out of surpluses, but this is the first year that we are going to be borrowing the quantum of money that we are now authorized—by having raised the debt ceiling limit in September—to do. And we are moving from borrowings in 2008, 2009, 2010 of, I believe, $1.2 billion, $2.5 billion, $.3 billion, and we are coming now to $6.6 billion to be financed, some on the local market; some on the foreign market.

So potentially we have got $11.3 billion deficit on top of a $9 billion deficit last year. Remember this is the same Government that says, “No off-balance sheet financing. Come clean with the figures. We are here for change. We are going to be different. Trust us. We know what we are doing.” [Desk thumping] And we see in the figures, $7.6 billion versus $11.3 billion; we see $7 point something billion versus $9 billion. We are seeing hidden figures which, if you drill down in the time that you have, you can find, and others have found. Not me, as they perceive the mad conspiracy theorist Opposition Member—

Mr. President: Senator, you will have to wind up. I will give you some time to wind up.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: No, Mr. President, my extension of 15 minutes.

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. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I thought my time had run way too fast. But thank you very much; thank you, my hon. colleague. Mr. President, you may notice that Presentation men tend to stand and support each other despite whatever side you may be on. But the point is, we have us on the Backbench, the Independent Bench, on the Opposition Bench and there will always be free and fair exchange of ideas without fear or criticism of each other’s points of view, because we want to engage in the national best interest. [Desk thumping] So I thank my colleagues and hon. Senators of this House.
The point is this—

**Sen. Dr. Tewarie:** We have to say something about QRC. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. F. Al-Rawi:** QRC will come in its time.

We are in a position where the basic foundations do not look right, and when you take us now, in the 15 minutes that I have, into the areas of energy, international security and into public procurement, you are left with serious concern, because we are told, listen, let us accept that if you were to crystallize everything that the Government says, that they are definitely going to achieve tightening of measures and solve leakages in the system, that is what a ministry is supposed to do. Each man in his ministry being noble as he is, on the road to somewhere, hopefully altogether, is busy doing his job. But we have got a five-year political cycle and in that five-year political cycle, how do we deliver the salvation that we need, knowing that the foundation is not what we have been told the foundation is?

So how do we get there? Dare I say the way that we get there is to come and, in particular, pay attention to energy. Energy, if I were to cut it down in its quickest form, is not a mere 43 per cent of our revenue. The energy sector contributes well over 50 per cent, because you have to factor production-sharing arrangements, royalties, the impact from the transportation sector, the actual revenue delivered. When you look at it, energy is 50 per cent of what we do, at minimum.

We have noble sentiments expressed by a young Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, one year my junior. I am actually one year older than someone. When we look at the energy transformation policy, that is the thing that we have got to focus on, because if you want to answer the riddle that echoes in the mind of the Minister of Finance as to why it is that people do not have confidence, the statement is, you need to have confidence by an expression of a stated plan that is bankable; bankable to the private sector, in particular, upon whom we have openly stated we are going to rely.

Three kickers—three horses—as Sen. Ramkhelawan refers to them: the private sector; the consumer sector; the Government sector. The Government has come forward and said, “Private sector, baton over to you, but I am still holding on to piece of it.” I do not know how that is going to run, unless we can inspire the confidence for bankable projects. One very serious bankable project in energy that I would have hoped the hon. Minister of Energy could have had the blessing from his Government to come with is to tell us how we are going to solve the very difficult situation of the inefficiencies of Petrotrin. Let us accept: AG run off and do what you need to do; sue the whole world if you want to. How are we fixing Petrotrin?
For one moment, say I am the new manager. Petrotrin has a difficulty on its plate. We have got oil production that needs to be bettered, but at the same point in time we have resources as a country vested in natural gas, and then we have resources vested in urea, and resources vested in ammonia. So we are competing in our own environment with very limited skills, and we are continuing to leave Petrotrin as a stand-alone aspect. We know Trinmar is its jewel; we know Petrotrin has a very difficult problem that I hope my good friend, Sen. Abdulah, can help us with, because part of the reason that people accept the People’s Partnership’s position as a Government is the fact that it came on board hand in hand with labour—and Petrotrin, if you call a spade a spade, has a very peculiar labour environment that needs serious attention to foster proper tripartite relationships, as my learned Senior, Sen. Prescott SC, said.

We have got to get that engine working inside there. So what is the solution? NGC, with resources competing; Petrotrin, with resources competing; Trinmar, with resources competing; Urea; Ammonia. Does it not scream out to us by way of a possible alternative that we should consider amalgamating the energy enterprises that we have, under one umbrella, rationalize losses and profits and centralize delivery systems? It does a number of things: one, it allows us to step onto the marketplace as a bigger man; two, it allows us to adequately encourage market development of a type that we have not seen, and that is on the global financial position and, in fact, on the equities market. Because, as a larger amalgamated enterprise, this new energy corporation which we could have, would have the benefit of significant revenues, serious asset bases.

But it could go even further, and more importantly, addressing the three “Ms” that Sen. Ramkhelawan spoke about, in addressing market and manufacturing. We can look particularly at the market aspect and say, we now have the opportunity to take our product to a different level. If you really want to stimulate encouragement into the capital market, the stock exchange, I agree that the junior market is a good idea. I think that there are a lot of problems in how we are going to solve the balancing between the $5 million and $50 million capital that we have in the environment of the companies legislation that we have.

Put that aside. It would be a wonderful thing—and something which I promote and ask all Senators to consider—if we were to, in fact, take that new entity that would own these enterprises in the energy sector, put them under one umbrella and then do two things: firstly, go out to get a partner to market our products further down the line so that we are not stuck with a net-back position—well-head position, where we are looking at getting, as last year Sen. Ramkhelawan told us,
the crumbs off the table; where we should be looking to market along the line; secondly, it would allow us, in that point, to have something when the oil runs out.

When oil and gas are depleted here, the position is going to be that we would have structures in place. So what are we going to do with Point Lisas, Labidco and the different industrial estates? Are we going to turn them to scrap metal? Why not do exactly as Sen. Karim has recommended; get the Singapore model and put it in, such that we can actually process other fields?

On that basis, I call upon the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, to account to us, not only on the gas pricing formula, in a way, because he has not really gone on to the formula itself, but his basis for pegging the gas and oil as to where he has, but to tell us, what has happened. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, then Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, last year came, beat the table all how, on September 21, 2010, as to what she was going to do in relation to gas and Venezuela and CNG. Nothing has happened; absolutely nothing! If you bring them on to the table and say, this is your list on the left-hand column, as Minister Vasant Bharath did, and here is your performance on the right-hand column—Sen. Karim is right—we would have to, in fact, give an “F”.

But the problem is, when we looked at this model that I am proposing—and we in the PNM are seriously looking at this as a proposal—we can take our gas further down the market. We can then, in fact, bring it onto the financial floor, onto the trading market, and it is not as if this does not exist elsewhere. It exists, for instance, in Ecopetrol from Colombia, a very successful model. When you look at that model—it was articulated in the Energy Chamber. In fact, I believe it was the past Minister of Finance, Mr. Mottley, who raised the issue. I myself took note of it when I visited Colombia last month. When you look at the position, there is serious room for us to have a partner on the exercise of taking our shares, putting it onto the capital market, buying and trading. Ecopetrol had the experience of taking a bust, fragmented company, centralizing it, putting it together and then taking it onto, not only their local market, but onto the foreign markets in New York.

That is a model there. But do you know what the tragedy is? I can say with absolute certainty that the PNM, when it left the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, in fact, signed an MOU to this effect, a formula which would have resulted in the bringing on of a partner to work with the NGC. The NGC would then have had a partner on board and another partner to be brought on, one in the banking and finance sector and one in teaching you how to market your product further downstream.
1.30 p.m.

That MOU was signed, Mr. President. It fell apart under this Government, there is no account for it, they have not even bothered to tell us about it, and you know what happened with this particular MOU partner? With this particular MOU partner, it then went to Latin America and forged links there; in Africa as well and elsewhere; it is now a favoured son of the United States Government, and they are in fact in relationships with our other partners: bpTT, BHP Billiton, et cetera; so we have lost the opportunity. So what happened? This thing came about, they cancelled the MOU, much like they cancelled the OPVs, and they cancelled Alutrint, and Alutech has been sitting rotting; even though Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, then the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, said she would account for it, nothing has been said. They cancelled all of that and when the other partners came knocking on NGC’s door and said, “Listen, we heard you are good at services; we want you to come on board, we are excited”. The partner then with those said, “Hold on, hold on, who yuh talking about? NG, who? From where? Trinidad and Tobago? That is not a Government to be trusted”.

Needless to say NGC is not going to go along the lines of service export of the type that it had hoped it would. So, we have got now a terrible situation which causes me great concern, and I am concerned because I am in this budget saying to this Government—Mrs. Dyer-Griffith, said, “Why don’t you support, and you all should support”. How do you support a budget when you know $6.6 billion is to be borrowed on an $11.3 billion deficit with $9 billion the year before, with negative 4 per cent growth the year before that? How do you authorize a Government without a plan as to how to kick-start its most important sector—energy—to spend that money? We are on the fast road to the IMF. [Desk thumping]

And we have an obligation, as much as I genuinely like and appreciate my colleagues opposite; it is my obligation in the national interest to the stand up and say the things that I say and, Mr. President, when we look at this—Mr. President, may I ask you how much time I have?

Mr. President: One minute.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. [Laughter] When we look at what our friends say, we are really dealing with a concept of lots and lots of words, platitudes, backslapping and congratulations.

I do not support corruption; let the Attorney General do what he must. [Desk thumping] Deal with it at any point. But, when I looked for what words are—and I was inspired by the many quotations of my colleagues opposite—I had to return to
literature and I want in closing to say this. In Alice in Wonderland she later went on to meet Humpty Dumpty and something struck me there. This is at chapter 6 of *Through the Looking-Glass*. Here is what happened, and I quote, Mr. President, with your permission, I am sure. When Alice met Humpty Dumpty, Humpty Dumpty said to her:

> “When I use a word’, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’
> 
> ‘The question is’, said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’
> 
> ‘The question is’, said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that’s all.’”

Unfortunately, Mr. President, from my perspective, I just met Humpty Dumpty, sat on a great wall, whose words mean anything he wants them to mean, who is happy to just brand you as the “conspiracy theorist”, to create red herring issues to distract the national population. But I want to say I agree with my learned Senior, Sen. Prescott SC; we cannot allow Trinidad and Tobago to fall into somnambulism. We cannot allow our people to walk around in a drunken sleep not knowing that they have gotten to the edge of a cliff and if they take one step forward with this Government they are going to fall.

With those words, Mr. President, I thank you.

**Sen. Dr. James Armstrong:** Thank you, Mr. President. Let me start by saying Happy Divali to my Hindu colleagues here and I hope that you enjoy the festival. I understand that it is celebrating prosperity and I wish you all the best.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the staff of the Parliament, because when I came into this facility I must say that I was extremely impressed. I think that the work was very well done, as has been indicated; it was done on time and I think that it is really an indication that we do have the sort of skills within Trinidad and Tobago to really produce and produce quality work when given an opportunity to do so. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. President, moving now to the budget, I would like to commend the Minister of Finance for the budget that he presented. There are several things that I quite like about it, that I admire about it and there are some concerns that I have about it, but in general, I think that it is a good budget. I felt that the budget could have done a lot more with respect to outlining income, the revenue side of it. That confused me a bit. I really could not get a proper grasp of a budget without some consideration of income revenue and how you match that to your expenditure.
A budget, really, is intended, in my view, to guide expenditures over a fiscal period. It is to help us really in accounting for public money, and therefore those are the areas in which I felt that the budget could have been improved. I think that Sen. Al-Rawi expressed a number of the concerns that I had and I do not want to get too much into the arithmetic, and therefore—I think a lot of people have done that already—I really want to concentrate on the process and how we are going to use the funds that we have set aside to really transform the economy and the country in the way that we are talking about it.

I also want to indicate that one of the shortcomings, and I think that was made up really for the additional documentation that we got—as indicated it was a tremendous number of documents that we got, and I want to really commend Minister Bhoendradatt Tewarie for the excellent work that was done with respect to the documentation that was provided. [Desk thumping] I found that to be extremely helpful, I now have a much, much better idea of where the Government wants to go—where the Government would like to take us, I should say and I am very, very appreciative of that. Now, without that documentation the budget really would have made even less sense to me, all right. So I must say that I appreciate the medium-term framework that was provided. I think it is an excellent document, very well written; it reads well. Clearly some great minds worked on it.

Some of the things that I like about that document are that it indicates the vision, it sets a framework for planning and development. In my view it is not a plan. A lot of people say, “Well, look, where is your plan?” That, in my view, is not as yet the plan, but I am comforted by the fact that it does point to the process of planning and putting in place, making the interventions that are necessary to guide the Government, guide the private sector, to inform the public about the process and where we are going and where we are at a certain point in time. So, the document starts with the focus, goals and strategies; I think it needs to be strengthened in the area of situation analysis, and that was another shortcoming that I saw in the budget.

I think that if you are going to do a budget, one has to start really with, where were you last year—and you spent $47; $50; $60 million—where were you last time you presented a budget; how you spent the money over that period and give some accountability for that. I think that was another shortcoming that I saw and we still have not determined what the situation is that we are really trying to resolve. In other words, what is the starting point?

What I have been hearing and what has been very disturbing to me really is an explanation of the problems in a manner that is really partisan, in other words, well you did it and the other side will say, well no, it was you, and that has been going on for a very long time. But in terms of looking at the documentation to determine where we
are as a country, what is the problem that we are going to try to resolve or the problems that I think we are going to try to resolve, I do not think that was very clear. Now, I found it in various parts, for instance when I went to the Social Sector Investment Programme, I found some of the things that I really would have liked to see; one in the medium-term plan and certainly mentioned in one or two paragraphs in the budget document itself.

Prior to these documents, the only thing that I was able to wrap my mind around really was the document provided by Minister Fazal Karim—that you mentioned this morning—and I studied that document very well. I think that was an excellent document as well. What I found that was very, very good about that document as well was the fact that—and I should congratulate you for that; I did not have an opportunity. But I remember that document going back and talking about what had happened in 2004, 2008, 2009; because when I looked at it I said but, some of this is familiar to me, and I saw that, I think it was Prof. Imbert who was involved in it, Joseph Eldridge and a number of—and that impressed me, because what it meant really is that you were bringing over work from the last regime and running it into—

**Sen. Karim:** Which I had started too in 1999.

**Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong:** The point is this, that there was continuity—

**Sen. Beckles:** “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong:**—and that impressed me. In fact, it is the only document that I saw that really recognized that work was really done in a particular—go ahead, modify it, that is fine, I do not have a problem, but the point is that we were not really starting from scratch. [*Desk thumping*]

I have suggested as well that with respect to Vision 2020, I suggested that that is in fact what could have been done. Do not take everything on board, but I think that we could have got that documentation much earlier [*Desk thumping*] if the process had continued. [**Interruption**] I think that Minister Tewarie improved on what we call—I think I spent about three or four years working on one of the sectors in Vision 2020 and I was very, very disappointed with all that work, and it was pro bono work. I was back in Trinidad and a permanent secretary met me and asked me, “Wha yuh doing”? “I am painting”, because I fancy myself as an artist as well, and she said, “Well, no, we have some work for you”. It was no problem, so I spent a lot of time doing that and then it got to a certain point and it went off the track, so I have no problems with that, but up to a certain point it was very good.
1.45 p.m.

What I also like that you have included in your documentation—and some of that was also in Vision 2020, so it is not anything that is new. [Desk thumping] the fact that there are indicators, benchmarks going through the mid-term plan, so that when you look at those boxes I see the percentages—you know you want to do so and so by this per cent, you want to do so by this time, that is what I have been looking for a long time now. [Desk thumping] Because when we come back as we continue this dialogue through the year, we have a benchmark or we have benchmarks, we can see where you are going and how you are progressing. When we come here next year to do exactly what we are doing now, one, the budget document I hope, would make reference to this document and then say okay, this is how we used the $54 billion and this is what we have achieved, this is what we did not achieve. And that I think is—I must commend you for that. I also found the—[ Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: Mr. President, on a point of clarification. If the hon. Senator would give way, I would like to say that I too, like you, had the experience of working on a subcommittee of the Vision 2020 committee. I did in fact, contribute as I have contributed under almost every administration in this country, during the time that I have been able to do so. Having said that, I want to say, as the medium-term plan indicates, that there is need for a point of departure, there is need for a shift. And I think it is not to discredit anything that has come before, it is really to take into account where we are.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Thank you very much for the clarification. But what I was suggesting and I think you raised that point, and the Minister of Finance made that point as well, is that we are quite short on statistical information and so on. And very often we are not working really with primary; we have to work with secondary, with information that you either collected in the communities or from consultations with people. What I am saying is that a lot of that work had been done. There was a lot of groundwork, so that you could have taken the sectoral reports, not the Vision 2020—operational document—I had a lot of problems with that—but, I think the sectoral reports that a lot of people who were inside here, on both sides, worked on it. So it really was not a partisan kind of—and that is what I am talking about. [ Desk thumping]

The Social Sector Investment Programme, I also quite appreciate that. I think some of the documents that are disjointed in part, but I do not have a problem with that because I think it was done in a short period of time. As you indicated people were working very late at nights and so on, but at least it gives us something as a reference.
Having looked at all your documents and in a lot of work that I do really, I try to craft an objective based on the various policy documents, budgets, five-year plans, 20-year plans and so on. And my understanding from the documentation that you have provided is that, we are really looking at socio-economic transformation, innovation-led economy, economic inclusiveness, greater equity and participation, people-centred development, private/public sector relationships, diversification of the economy. I want to add to that, and I would explain later what I mean, harmony. Now, that is not something that one would say, well, it is an indicator or an objective within a normal development planning situation, but it is something that I think is required in Trinidad and Tobago, and that if we cannot find techniques or strategies, we will have to invent our own to incorporate with those things that I have just mentioned.

I sat down and after I read the documents I crafted a development objective. What I had in my development objective is the people of Trinidad and Tobago enjoying a better quality of life, as evidenced by greater equity, economic inclusiveness and greater prosperity. Because I always like to start my work with: what it is you are after? Where do want to go? And that is what I came up with. As I read on, I saw what you call your vision and mission and I much preferred what you had, so I discarded mine and I modified yours slightly. So that it now reads: self-fulfilment achieved through economic inclusiveness in an innovation driven growth economy with greater equity, more meaningful participation and a rising tide of prosperity for all in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, I have changed only a few words. You had yours stated as an activity. I do not like objective goals, outputs or whatever. I know it is used in strategic planning. To me strategic planning has lost—I do not particularly like it, but I know it is used. But the way in which I have stated it, is that we would be able to measure, it is not an activity that we hope to do so and so. It is a state at which we are supposed to arrive at. So that I have changed your vision and mission and restated it in a way that we can measure a state, a condition that we are supposed to arrive at. Having done that, I then had to determine what are the outputs. And here I see a tremendous amount of confusion between what is an input, what is an output, what is an activity, what is a strategy. And I condensed it really into one output. If you agree with the logic, critical thinking, we are really talking about people. All that we have said so far, that you have said in all these documents, and you have said it over and over again, is really to improve the conditions of the people in Trinidad and Tobago.

So that is the conclusion, that is the flow that I see taking place here, and that all the other things that you are doing really should lead to that output, following on from the objective that I just said. So that all the roads that we want to build or the
hospitals or the schools or whatever, should lead us back to this. In order to do that however, we want to improve the national economy. That is fine. But that is not the output. It is not the end in itself; it is the means to the end. We want to improve education, wellness, but very often in the process of doing that, we consider those things which are the input to the development goal to be the output in itself. And as we often hear from the other side, so and so done, so and so done, whereas on my checklist it is simply the beginning. And the mere fact that you just indicated that you wanted—well, I guess a different point of departure and so on, it means really, that it is simply the beginning or that you are at an intermediary level.

So I think we need to be very careful when we are checking off things as done, done, done. They are really intermediate deliverables that are leading us somewhere else that very often we seem to lose sight of. As you have indicated we have had a tremendous amount of money in this country, vast amounts of money. I was telling somebody a while ago, my last job, in fact in the UN was working for Gaddafi. Vast amounts of money and I could not understand all the work that we were doing, we could not—the infrastructure, fine, a lot of roads and so on but the people—he missed the point completely, and we are likely to do the same thing; spend vast sums of money. I am trying to figure out where the money we spent last year, I am really trying to figure out in terms of—I am not saying that you did not build some roads, but I am trying to really see how that is leading us to development in the context that we are talking about. And the budget really—that was not explained to me. That was missing. That was really missing and we need to keep that in mind.

Another thing that I like, Sen. Dr. Tewarie, is the fact that there is now what is called a National Transformation Unit—I think it is called. I was quite pleased to see that because it means that there would be some mechanism through which the progress to development would be measured, and that all those indicators that you have in the medium-term plan would also be measured. There was in fact, I remember when Vision 2020 was done, something called a PMO, which I guess would have performed that same function. In addition to that, there is an indication that you also have a monitoring and evaluation mechanism within the NTU; within the National Transformation Unit. So that I am happy that within the public sector there is this mechanism and that there would be some technique, some strategy for monitoring and evaluation. That is important and I am glad to see that. What I would like you to add to that, is to find a mechanism whereby the people—because you can hold that mechanism, you can house that really within the public sector, within the Government, and we still do not know what is happening. Maybe within the Parliament here we put a question and say “so and so”. If we can find somewhere really to include the people in that process, to include the private sector,
because we talked about, all through the documentation, private/public sector collaboration and relationships, particularly private sector because they are not going to get the private sector on board, one, if they do not know where you are going, where you have reached, you are going to have some difficulties with that.

The other thing that I want to say, why I am so pleased with this work, is that it seems to have reinstated the mystique of planning. I am very pleased about that, because, as I said, the planning is now starting. You have an outline, you have a framework and the process for that is what is going to determine really whether you are doing what you said: whether you are being inclusive; whether you are really achieving equity; how you are going to do; and who are the people that are participating in that process. So that is the work that you now have to do. And you yourself indicated yesterday, I think it was, that there is a need to, for instance, bring the other Ministries and so on, on board.

2.00 p.m.

I was reading in one of these documents about the policies and the strategies from the other Ministries that would now have to fall in, or be within, or contribute to, be part of the process of achieving your objectives and your goals in the medium-term plan. That is going to be extremely difficult. I am seeing it already. You would not have that problem with Minister Karim, because I can see the synergy. But to really do what you are talking about also bringing in the private sector is going to be very difficult. And, therefore, the way in which we used to plan we have to change that completely, especially in this country, because we have peculiarities here that you do not learn about in university, you do not pick up in a lot of other countries.

The Minister of Finance knows exactly what I am talking about. Actually, I hope he does not mind my saying it—he is not here—but I had an opportunity to work with him about—it must have been about 18 years ago. I was looking for an economist doing some development work up the Islands and his name came up. I did not know him really. And we were doing an integrated development plan—I remember that clearly. I had about three or four economists that I was working with, I asked someone and I said “Yeah, yeah!” He was in politics and so on, and he came and we worked together for about
a month. He was very, very useful, because there was a dimension in the planning process, whereas we were talking about integrated, social economic and physical planning, we were having a lot of difficulties with it, all over the world. We mastered it in South Africa eventually. He brought a whole new dimension to it, and that was the political dimension which, as planners, as development planners, technocrats, normally it is something you do not take into consideration—the political dimension. And, we were able to put that plan together for the first time in the Caribbean. You must ask him about it.

When we were finished—not when we were finished, but we actually came down to the university—Engineering Continuing Education, I think it was called. I worked with a company that was called—I do not remember the name of the company, but that was one of the first integrated development plans done for the region, and that is the direction in which I really would like to see us going here, in this country, and that responsibility has to be within your Ministry. That, as I have said over and over again, is the engine room of this process and from there it feeds out again into the Ministries, into the communities, the private sector and so on.

So I think the planning that you have to do really is, what I would call, integrated development planning and not the traditional—a physical plan here; a five year economic plan here; one is a five-year time horizon; one is a 20-year time horizon; a three-year medium-term plan.

Apart from the politics, I also mentioned harmony. One of the reasons that we have to, as we go along, develop our own techniques, is that there are certain peculiarities in this country that in a normal planning and development situation you might not have and we seem to skirt around it here. That, as I said some time ago, has to do with the whole ethnic composition of this country. And we have to plan for it, we have to face it; I mean, you hear it coming up all the time. It is out there, and if it is out there we have to deal with it in here and deal with it effectively. It is not a situation that, as I said, I mean, you find in the textbooks; it is a situation that we are faced with in this country. There is a reason why you are talking about equity, and I suspect it is not simply in the context—in fact, if that is what you mean that is fine. You may be talking about it in the context of an economic imbalance. Others are seeing other dimensions of it, and we have to take that into consideration.

In a number of the countries in which I have worked, it is something that I have been faced with and we had to deal with it. I worked in Sudan for three years. I said, “Why you are sending me to Sudan?” They said, “Poverty, urban poverty, you are going there to alleviate urban poverty”. When I went there, there are 2 million
Southern Sudanese in depressed communities, but they do not look like anybody in the mainstream in Khartoum, and that is a whole new dimension.

I went there with a bag of tools and techniques—technology and so on. But it is something that we had to deal with, that we had not planned. You know, I believe they still have the Sharia law, and so on; so it was a very interesting experience. What I am saying is this; because of the peculiarities of that situation we had to take into consideration all kinds of factors that we normally would not have had to deal with. And if we do not deal with that in this country we are going to have a problem. I do not want to belabour that point too much here, but I just want to say that as we go along we have to introduce a number of, if not indicators, techniques that we must take into consideration.

I want to quickly touch on the national physical development plan which I mentioned, since you have been here. The fact that I noticed that it has been mentioned, I want to emphasize that, because a lot of the things you are talking about here, all these economic activities are going to take place in a spacial context; whatever you are talking about they are taking place in a spacial context and we do not have a lot of space. So that national physical development plan is very important. It is important for another reason in that the economic development plan is not a statutory plan, the mid-term plan is not a statutory plan, but if you bring a national spacial development plan, it is a statutory document. It tells us, it reconfirms to us, it amplifies in a long-time horizon where you are really going.

So if you are talking about a highway, the private sector picks up on that immediately and says, “Well, this Government is serious; they went in, they have a 20-year plan, it is approved.” And, you will find that—when you are talking about the private sector—was it the Minister who mentioned about expecting about $20 billion investment in the private sector. The private sector does not operate like that, they are not going to do that, unless they say, “Well, look you are serious”—you understand? Because you cannot jump up tomorrow morning and say well look, we are not doing this anymore you know, today we are talking about this airport. If we want to do an airport put it in the plan and say we want to do an airport, and this is why we are doing it, and this is where we are going.

The campus—100 acres: I try to wrap my mind around that, I do have a problem with that, but let us put it in the plan, look at it, see why we are doing it. I perhaps would not have done it—I do not know—I have some good lawyer colleagues here, I do not know what the complement of the profession is. But from looking at Minister Karim’s document and the kinds of indicators that you were coming up with I really would have gone with something related to the petrochemical industry.
Sen. Karim: That is coming because it is located in south.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Would have started with that. I would have gone to Ghana, to Gabor, Southern Sudan—they are struggling in Ghana and some of these other countries—Uganda, they are struggling, and say look we have 100 years’ experience in this industry. I am not talking about the hiring part, the engineering because I think we have—so that is where I would have started. And a number of the things that I saw in your document that is what I thought would have been located there. And it is justified; you have your planners saying well this is the reason why. So that is why I am very concerned that we do not have a national physical development plan and we keep saying it is coming, it is coming, it is coming.

The planning and the land development Bill, I noticed you mentioned that and we are also looking—in fact, you indicated that we would have it, I believe before the end of the year.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: We should have it in early December.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Okay. So I am also looking forward to that diversification of the economy. I have some notes on that, but I think I want to move ahead a bit.

Growth poles: that was mentioned by the Minister also mentioned in the mid-term plan, and I have some concerns about that. The first concern—well, it was also grouped with a number of other strategic interventions that you want to make.

Before I get on to the growth poles, exactly, two things: Invader’s Bay; I have a serious problem with Invader’s Bay; 70 acres of land, estimated to cost something like a billion dollars from what people are telling me. That is extremely important in terms of the economics of development in this country and economics in a special context. In other words that land strategically located as it is, is what we call the sphere of influence—that would have an importance—it is not something we can really gloss over slightly.

So there are two problems: one is the fact—and I have been reading all kinds of things in the newspapers. One man said well, he met so many Ministers, he talked to so many Ministers and what was promised. Now that is very, very dangerous because we also have the procurement legislation that we are talking about and the kinds of things that you are talking about in transparency and inclusiveness and equity and so on. How could that be treating with inclusiveness? It is something I would have been particularly interested in, and I just got up one morning and there it was, and I think you need to take some time on that one. I am not saying do not do
it. In fact, I will tell you something else. A lot of the ideas that I saw in the man talking about his proposal, I love the ideas. In fact, those ideas are ideas I had for—you see this site where we are now, where this building is, that is what I would have liked to do here, and have about four or five ships lined up outside right here, and have them fighting to come into Port of Spain. And when they come, see our mas; not Monday and Tuesday once a year, see our mas every night; see our fashions every night; eat our food every night; listen to the music, but nobody would listen.

2.15 p.m.

This building—and I hope that my colleague, Sen. Hinds, I hope that you would not have me counting pawpaw seeds.

Sen. Hinds: Certainly not! You are a man of truth.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Sen. Hinds yesterday was talking about this building—and we keep talking about big buildings, big buildings. I do not have a problem with the big buildings because in your city, you have to increase your density; you have to put up big buildings in the city.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: Tall buildings.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Tall buildings, yes, I do not have a problem with that. Right.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: I agree with that. Who paying for it?

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: I will tell you who pay for it. Who would pay for it is not necessarily the State.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: That is right. The private sector could pay for it.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: The private sector could—right; I do not have a problem with that. The problem is that the way in which we approached it and what it is being used for, it is not efficient, it is not effective. So that, for instance, if you take the spot where we now have Salvatori Building or where we used to have the Salvatori Building, you can make a deal. You have three banks on the corner there, you have excess liquidity, go into them, make a deal and say, “Look, Republic Bank, Royal Bank, FCB, this is our equity in this whole thing here.” We need to have some middle class in the city; we have not built a single housing unit in this city. So the way in which we have created all this space in the city is creating more confusion. I did some calculations once and to make it effective, you really have to bring another 150,000 people into Port of Spain every day. So, it is not the fact that you have big buildings; it is what the big buildings are there for.
Since that is being criticized, and it has been criticized severely because somebody got up and said, “You know what, look a spot there, put that there, NAPA, so, so,” but you are going down the same road now. You are going down the same road now with that site in Invader’s Bay. So pull back from that a bit; have the consultations. Consult the private sector, consult the professions—the NGOs and so on. I will tell you something. There is no architect, no engineer, no planner or valuer who will not be looking forward to that coming on stream.

So, the issue really has to do with transparency—nobody is saying there is corruption, you know—we are just saying the perception that could be there. I know that the kinds of discussions going back and forth, you really should not be proceeding in the way in which you are proceeding. I really would like if you would take that into consideration and see in what way that land really fits into the economy of the city. We do not have much left, so, it is very, very important, and that would be my advice on that.

The other thing is about the growth poles. I saw five growth poles mentioned, fine; I do not have a problem with them. But, East Port of Spain, there have been plans for East Port of Spain for a long time, several plans, in fact, there are plans now. We have to be very careful about how we approach East Port of Spain as well. I really would not like to see East Port of Spain being a set of land use modifications. I really want to see us changing the economy of East Port of Spain—the economic base as a community; and to do that, you cannot draw a line around it and plan for East Port of Spain. You can manage it, you can change it, but you have to take into consideration the adjacent areas—Port of Spain proper.

I want you to bring the Drag Brothers from back inside there; give them a space. So when you start to talk about what is happening down at Invader’s Bay and you are talking about innovation, what are the new products that we are producing? My argument is that we have produced many things in this country and we have done nothing with them. [Desk thumping]

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 agreed to.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Mr. President, thank you and thank you colleagues. I will try to speed up because I have quite a bit here. So still on the growth poles—East Port of Spain, central, north coast—I could not understand the north
coast because I saw a whole strip—there is a map and I did not understand what that was about, and it was not really explained. A growth pole to me is really a nucleus—whether it is a natural attribute or whatever it is—that attracts other kinds of things, or whether it is installation, economic or otherwise, that would really then lend itself or play a catalytic role in expanding the economy in that area, and I could not understand what that was about.

North-east Tobago—I could not understand that either, because when I actually went to it and I looked at it, it really points to an area in Speyside which I think, yes, I can understand that as—

**Sen. Dr. Tewarie:** Speyside, Charlotteville.

**Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong:**—Speyside, Charlotteville. Right, it talks about diving and so on, so I can see that. So if that is what you want to do then fine, but one can think in terms of development of a region but not as a growth pole.

I was at the Blue Food Festival for instance, last week—and I have been going for a few years. A lady makes dasheen wines—nicely packaged—dasheen cakes, dasheen sweetbread; all kinds of things. Is that not something that we would consider, I do not know if it is a growth pole, but an activity that where you can say, “Okay, if last year, you sold 100 bottles, now we want you to sell 5,000, and then we want, to sell 15,000” but the market is small there. So, in order to sell that we have to now, again, look at how we can do that on a broader—can we use some of the land down in—depending on what we do—Invader’s Bay, to serve that product, as well as a lot of the other products up here? So we have to think about it in a very creative and innovative way.

The other thing about Tobago that I want to mention quickly is the Integrated Campus. I think it is a good idea and I am sure that the THA would not have objections to expanding education facilities. However, I really want to urge that there should be consultation. **[Desk thumping]** When I saw some of these things here for Tobago and so on, I was excited by it and rejoiced, talked to some of the people and they said, “Well, yeah, we heard it, but”, so that you really need to increase the consultation with Tobago.

My colleague, Sen. Dr. Wheeler, for instance, indicated that the matter of the TRHA has been resolved and I am very happy about that because it is something that was really distressing me. So, I think that one, in respect to the growth pole in north-east Tobago, the Integrated Campus—those are things that whatever you want to do, the reality of the situation right now is that the THA is in charge of Tobago, so whatever you want to do there, have a discussion on it. All right. **[Desk thumping]**
The matter of the contingency fund was mentioned, and I think that the planners in Tobago are very wise to really deal with that in the way in which it is being done. My understanding is that a number of things that are actually presented for funding are not funded, and that really some of the funds are put aside to fund things that are essential—CEPEP, URP; and some of the things they may not have all the money for. So I think that explains some of the things that were raised here.

Land for the landless: that is a scary proposition. [Interruption] No, it is very, very scary; it is extremely scary. I think that what you are talking about really is shelter for the homeless, something like that, but when you say, “land for the landless”—in fact, I went, and I am sure that you are aware of it and allow me, Mr. President, to just make reference to this document from Prof. Opadeyi; and I think Azard Mohammed, and they are involved in it, in engineering up there—his professorial lecture was “Managing Our Land, Managing Our Future.”

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: I am aware of it.

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: You are aware of it? Good. He has indicated in here that we really only have 10 per cent of land available for development, and when you hear what Minister Bharath is talking about and your plans for agriculture, I do not see where you are going with this. You cannot have land for the landless in the way in which you are talking about it and having sprawl. So we have to increase the density; you have to increase your density. [Crosstalk] Well, it is a little outside what we are talking about, but increase the density, if you do that, the next generation, what are they going to do?

In fact, in Prof. Opadeyi’s document, there is an African saying: “Land belongs to the vast family of which many are dead, few are living and countless members are yet to be born.” So we cannot treat with land the way in which we are treating—and this is why your national plans, your regional plans, are very, very important.

One hundred and twenty-nine applications for housing; something is wrong. Multiply that by 4.5 or by 4 and one gets the impression you are not living anywhere—do we have any homes here! It does not make any sense; something is wrong with that, go back and look at that again.

Sen. Drayton: Exactly!

Sen. Dr. J. Armstrong: Procurement: I want to talk about that again; I keep talking about it. I was very, very pleased to see in both the budget document as well as in the mid-term plan that reference was made to it again. In that context, I was also happy to see that the Ministers would have accountability for performance within their Ministries; it is in the document here, and their strategic plans and so
on. But, in order to do that, we need the procurement legislation. So I urge you again, that is another piece of legislation that we really need to bring to the Parliament as soon as possible.

I want to touch on GATE—let me leave GATE for a while in case I run out of time. I want to touch on the business of the computers, and I was listening to the discussion in the other place, and there was a Member of the Opposition who made a very, very passionate plea for this whole business about computers.

2.30 p.m.

I am convinced by the position that she was putting forward, for the same thing that I explained earlier. Computers really, in schools, it is not an output—done. It is simply a means, it is a conduit, to something else and that something else, clearly, is not happening. So, do not count it as an output.

The other thing is if you are talking about equity, I have some problems with both GATE and the computers, because you can have a situation where, you have a computer, you have 10 students, five are coming from an environment where the family, maybe the father, the mother, the brother or whoever is familiar with computers. I have a grandson, for instance, and he does all kinds of things on the computer, look at this, look at that, all kinds of things, but he is having a problem because he has to fight with his parents for the computer. But he understands it. Now, he eventually got his own computer. “He gone clear.” He has gone clear.

There are other situations in which you have a computer as an end result, as an output, but you are not moving anywhere. So, what is happening there is that, of those 10, the five who are ready for it, where you have teachers in the schools who are trained, they have gone ahead and left the others. This really speaks to the question of the Early Childhood Centres. Years now, I have been trying to track that, not only with this Government, because if we are talking about development, the objective that I spoke about and the output, the people, some are already way behind. You are not starting at the same point and, therefore, there are certain things that you have to do within the development plan that would move those who are at a certain position to try and accelerate that movement, to elevate them to a certain level, so that to benefit from GATE, you need to get to the GATE. I do not know if you are following what I am saying. So that 20 years from now, when you go back and examine GATE, it may very well create, unintentionally, it is not intentional, inequality in an environment in which it is very volatile. So that, we really have to—our situation is that it is extremely complex. Therefore—[Interruption] I think I would have to leave some of this.
Let me conclude by saying again, that I am very pleased with the documentation that we have been provided with. I think I am in a much better position now to really, in my own way, monitor and evaluate, to contribute in a meaningful way, to where we need to go as a nation. And prior to this, I was not sure. I would assure you of whatever contributions I can make in whatever way I can share my experiences, I would be happy to do so. I thank you very much, Mr. President.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I rise to give my contribution in this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2012) Bill, 2011. First of all, let me join all my parliamentary colleagues and you too in congratulating the Parliament staff for the wonderful job they did to relocate us to these premises, and it was done in very, very quick time. In fact, I recall on the last day of our meeting at the other place, in speaking to the Clerk of the House, she did indicate that they needed to do the move, the set-up and movement in 10 days. I thought to myself when she told me that—I did not respond to her but I said to myself silently—that it was impossible. I am happy that I was proven wrong. That underscores the admiration and the congratulations that I have to extend to the Parliament staff.

I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Hindu community on their celebration of Divali and its significance of light in triumph over darkness. In my discourse this afternoon, I would try to shed some light on a lot of the darkness that those on other side have been expressing.

I would also like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Dookeran, for an excellent budget presentation and document; a budget that has been welcomed by all of the population of Trinidad and Tobago and, according to my colleague, Sen. The Hon. Tewarie, gave to many and took from none. I too, appreciate the fact that the budget did not impose any additional taxes on the population and I am certain too that the population is very, very happy for that. That was after nine years of a lot of stress and pressure being put on the population by the previous administration.

I think that it is extremely difficult for the Opposition PNM to understand a philosophy that is different from theirs; a philosophy that says that we do not just go taxing people every year in a budget, but that we need to give them some breathing space, sometimes. It is an extremely difficult philosophy for them to understand. That accounts for how they have responded to the fact that there have been no additional taxes in the budget.
I want to congratulate also my colleague, Sen. The Hon. Bharath, in his absence, for the wonderful initiatives he has been pursuing in the agricultural sector. Those initiatives, as we are aware, have produced a situation where output is increasing, prices are falling and the farmers are appreciating that for a change someone in the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs is interested in them and in their success. I would like to underscore that by saying that no amount of disparaging comments as the one about cutting up 50 pawpaws and making him count the seeds would change that. I would say to him, simply, “Minister Bharath, continue to do your good work.” [Desk thumping]

I would like to congratulate too, the good Senator, Bhoe Tewarie, for his production of the medium-term policy framework. And I noted that Sen. Dr. Armstrong took pains to express his delight in the fact that this document has been produced and also in the fact that he has offered his services to Sen. Tewarie to continue the good work that is expressed in this document and to make that good work and all these plans come to reality. I want to thank you very much, Sen. Dr. Armstrong, for the offer of your assistance. I am certain that my colleague, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Tewarie, will not refuse and will certainly appreciate.

You did indicate that you found, in some cases, that there was some reference or some copying of the 2020 vision. [Desk thumping] I want to say that—and Sen. The Hon. Tewarie would reply for himself whenever the time comes—there is really nothing new under the sun. But, as a former public servant myself who was around when that vision was being designed, I would like to indicate that the romanticism that we seem to want to attach to it is ill-founded, because it was more in the order of a breach than the adherence when it came to the application of that 2020 vision and I leave that there.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague, Minister John Sandy, who has given this population new hope and a new feeling that their safety is a priority for this Government and that we would no sitting fiddling, like Emperor Nero, while they become collateral damage to rising crime.

Let me take the opportunity too, to congratulate all of the other hard-working Ministers and Members Parliament of the People’s Partnership Government and to say to them, just continue to do the hard work. The population will be your judge.

Returning to the issue of the debate, I would like to thank again Sen. Drayton, for her gracious compliments on the successes we have had with the Water and Sewerage Authority in improving the supply to the population of Trinidad and Tobago and also in that regard, to the good Senator, Prof. Ramkissoon, for his
compliments too in that area. I want to refer to his comment and his very good suggestion that we implement metering of homes to control the use of water. I want to say to him, the Ministry is ahead of the game, because as we speak there is a note. The note is here. It is done and it is called Implementation of a Universal Water Metering Programme for Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry is ahead of the game in this regard. This is dated October 10. It has come after considerable thought and discussion. In that regard, I want to thank all of the officers of the Ministry, who have been working very, very hard and very diligently to assist the Government in implementing its plans and programmes.

As a Permanent Secretary, when I wore that hat, I would say over and over to my staff at the Ministry that I as Permanent Secretary cannot do this work, I can only lead. But all of the people in the Ministry are the people who really are the hewers of wood and drawers of water. They are the ones who do the work. Now that I am Minister, nothing has really changed it is the officials at the Ministry who do the work. We simply set the targets or set the policies, but without them the work would not get done. I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to my staff at the Ministry for all of the work that they have been doing and all of the support that they have been giving to me over the last year. This extends to the previous Permanent Secretary who retired in June and to the new Permanent Secretary who came along at that time. I also want to say that I appreciate very much Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon’s very thoughtful critique on the budget and that particular recommendation.

2.45 p.m.

Just a couple of comments before I get into the meat of my contribution; just a comment to Sen. Dr. Wheeler. He said yesterday, Mr. President, in his discourse that it was perplexing for him that an agency would not get the funding it asked for, and yet at the end of the year it could have savings. I think that is a simple thing to understand. In the budgeting process all that the Minister of Finance does is to say, “I estimate that I will receive these moneys as revenue,” and he asks the various Ministries which are involved in the expenditures to say what they would like to have. Very often, what they would like to have exceeds his estimates of revenue.

So he sets it out in these books and he comes with his budget and, he says: “This is what I expect to happen.” But it may not happen, he may not collect those moneys during the year. So that if you ask for $100,000 he might give you $90,000, and then in your expenditure of that $90,000 during the year you may only spend $50,000, for whatever reason and, therefore, you would have what should more accurately be called unspent balances, and that is what we refer to as savings. So it
is not, I think, very perplexing to understand why you could have at the end of the year savings, when you did not get all that you I asked for; simply unspent balances.

I was going to take some time to make mention of an issue yesterday having to do with a discussion, Mr. President, by my good friend Sen. Prescott SC and the state of emergency, but I will leave it because it will take too much time, and I do not have very much to say what I have to say.

With respect to the contribution of the Opposition Senators, I just want to make a little comment on Sen. Al-Rawi’s indication that what we should be doing and what he did not hear enough of, was that we should indicate at the beginning of our contributions, what we promised to do the year before, what we did achieve, and what we plan to do in the year to come. So that you have a measure of what you said you would achieve, what you actually achieved, perhaps giving some indication as to why you did not achieve it if you did not, and then you can say what you are going to achieve. I am saying, Mr. President, with your leave to Sen. Al-Rawi, that it appears that once you are in Opposition you seem to know all that is proper and right to be done, [Interruption] but once you are out of government all of that knowledge comes back to you.

Sen. Al-Rawi: I have never been in government! I have never been in government!

Sen. The Hon. E. George: He spoke about Humpty-Dumpty and that words mean anything, Humpty-Dumpty’s words meaning anything. At least in the case of Humpty-Dumpty, his words meant anything, but in the case of the former regime their words meant nothing. [Desk thumping] I will give examples of what you are—[Interruption]

Mr. President, I now want to get to the issue of the Opposition Senators and what they had contributed here, and I want to say that with respect to those contributions, the least said about the combined contributions the better. The overall impression which one got was that they were simply floundering around and it is reflective of a situation—when I was teenager I was a fairly voracious reader, and one came across the notion of walking the plank. When you walk the plank, if you were forced to walk the plank, you ended up very often in very deep waters. You knew that your chances of survival were virtually nil, so you were grasping at straws, and you were fighting to see whether your foot would at all touch the bottom, that is where the Opposition PNM now finds itself and, therefore, their comments suggest persons who have been simply floundering around, looking for something to hang on to.
Mr. President, in this discourse I would like to give an account of my stewardship for the last year as Minister of Public Utilities, and like Sen. Al-Rawi had indicated earlier, his view was that you needed to say what you planned to do, see whether you had achieved it, so you give an account, and then you say what you will do in the coming year. I had planned to do this thing a little differently, but in the face of that suggestion, I will start by giving an account of what has been happening in the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Last year, I had said that the plan was to give to those members of the population, those customers of WASA who were connected to the system, but who were not receiving water, or who were receiving water less than 48 hours, two days per week, that we would try to get those customers of WASA that 24-hour supply, two days’ water per week. It was an ambitious goal and several times over the year, there were indications from naysayers that we would not achieve it.

I want to say to the nation community this afternoon, that in a meeting to discuss that entire issue about two weeks ago, the Water and Sewerage Authority had managed to give to 94 per cent of those targeted that supply of two days’ water per week. [Desk thumping] I want to repeat that. About two weeks ago, in a discussion on this matter, WASA had been able to give to 94 per cent of that targeted population that two days’ water per week.

I want to refer to a document which came out on that particular matter—and that document is the MORI poll which came out I think about two months ago. The MORI poll shows that persons were satisfied with WASA’s performance. Of those persons asked, those persons questioned about whether they were satisfied or not with WASA’s performance, WASA achieved, a 67 per cent positive response. [Desk thumping]

I think that the fact that people are saying out there that their water supply is improving, is testimony to the fact that we are achieving the goal which we have set ourselves. We got to 94 per cent and so you might say well, the goal has not been achieved, so I need to explain, according to Sen. Al-Rawi, why the 6 per cent had not been reached, and that too I can explain. Because I have my own ways of finding out—in addition to what the Water and Sewerage Authority would tell me, I have my ways of finding out.

Persons who have been listing to me on the whole issue of water for the last year, now around 16 months, must recall a gentleman by the name of Arjoon Seepersad, who lives at Duff Trace in Penal, because I have spoken about him repeatedly, and the fact that I am motivated by the fact he, in his very late years,
could not walk into his bathroom in his home and turn a tap on and get some water to fall on his head, so that he could have a proper shower; he had been bathing from a bucket. I was motivated to try to get him out of that situation.

It has been a systematic approach by trying to get WASA to deal with that particular situation down at Duff Trace in Barrackpore. I called Mr. Seepersad last week, to speak to him, to find out how his water supply was and his response to me was: “Mr. George, de water coming every night yuh know, but it coming about 10 o’clock and by four o’clock in the morning it gone”. He said: “So although ah getting it every night, ah still not getting it in the day. Why ah cyah get it in de day?”

But previous to that he was not getting it in the night. He says to me it has certainly improved, he said: “Ah also know dat it improved, because I livin up on ah hill and maybe that is the difficulty, but the people who living lower down in the valley, they are getting water all the time, and they never use to get.”

So the reason Mr. Seepersad—that 6 per cent is not getting water is because of technical and infrastructural reasons. Those who live on hills are going to be much more challenged than those who live on the plains, or in the valleys, and we will have to find the solutions to get that water either by putting reservoirs and gravity feeding these persons, but we will search for those means and measures in order to solve the problems of persons like Mr. Seepersad.

I refer to Barrackpore, but the improvement in the water service to the population is widespread, because in this business there is no discrimination, water is life and, therefore, while I refer to Barrackpore and Penal which is way down south; right up in the north in the constituency of Carenage, Diego Martin West, there too, the water supply and has improved and is improving.

I want to speak of that because last year in June or July I had asked all of the MPs by letter, I had written to all of them saying, please tell me the areas in your constituency where the persons are challenged, your constituents are challenged for water, and I will see, so that I can get some reference points, and some understanding of how widespread this particular problem is, and persons to whom we will have to give this two days’ water per week.

I did get responses, not from all of the MPs, but the first response I got was from Dr. Keith Rowley, the Leader of the Opposition. I want to say to him he was the first to respond and that gave me an impression that he was really interested in the welfare of his constituents, and in improving their supply of water. The strange thing was that he believed that I could do it and that was the reason he responded so
quickly. I want to say to Dr. Rowley and, in fact, to all of us here, Mr. President, that most of the areas identified in the document now have a better supply of water, for example, Upper Scorpion in Carenage.

3.00 p.m.

Upper Scorpion if you know Carenage, you have to go through Abbe Poujade in order to get to Upper Scorpion—it is up on a hill. My secretary lives in Abbe Poujade, so she lives on the way, on the road to Scorpion, and over the course of the year and some months that I have been there, I would ask her about her water supply. First, she would tell me: “Well, it normally would come on a Tuesday alone, if it comes at all”. And by following it through with her and with WASA, and talking with her every Monday morning asking her: “How was your water for the weekend? Did it come on the weekend? Did you get it on Tuesday?” and so on, and urging WASA to address the entire issue of the water supply to the area of Abbe Poujade, and Scorpion and Smiths Hill and in fact that entire area coming from Tucker Valley and coming through Carenage and coming up to Westmoorings, we have been able to give to the people in Scorpion a much improved water supply. I think they get water now about four or five times a week.

My secretary has come to the stage now where she who lives a little lower down the hill gets water 24 hours a day. Now that is a change within a year of a doubtful Tuesday water to 24 hours’ water. So the day that the pump breaks down—and I asked her, she said: “Well, I did not get water”, and I would call WASA and they would say: “Well, we had a little problem with the pump, electrical problem”. So she is now so accustomed to getting the water 24 hours a day that when it does not come, she has a problem. The problems that we are having with water in cases like this has to do with old infrastructure, and we have to try now to change all of those pumps and so on.

So, for Sen. Al-Rawi who is saying that we have to give an account of our stewardship, my secretary accounts to me every day, because I ask her about her water every day so that I get a sense of what is happening in Abbe Poujade.

The other area that we are trying to bring water to—and I will also give this little story. On Sunday last I called a woman by the name Cora Charles, and I will give a little background to that. Cora Charles lives in Upper Covigne in the constituency of Diego Martin West, also one of the areas that the Leader of the Opposition had identified in his letter to me, and I had gone to visit and promised that we would do our best to get water to Upper Covigne in the shortest possible time. I went there last Saturday to check on the progress of the work, and on Sunday
I called Ms. Charles and I said to her: “This is Emmanuel George, do you remember the name?” and she said: “Of course I remember your name, and I remember that you came to visit us on the 28th of May and then you spoke about our matter and called my name in the Parliament on the 8th of June, and I know that the work to lay the pipe began on the 25th of July”, and she just rattled off those numbers to me just like that. So I said: “What did you say?” You remembered those dates like that?” She said, “Yes”. I said: “Call them back for me”, and when she called them back she said: “You visited us on the 28th of May, you mentioned my name and our water issue in the Parliament on the 8th of June, and the work started on the 25th of July”.

She just rattled off the numbers just like that, and it signalled to me the importance of this project to Cora Charles and her neighbours in Upper Covigne. She has been living in Upper Covigne for 43 years—43 years in a constituency that has voted for the People’s National Movement from ever since, and a constituency in which the People’s National Movement in 2007, just before the election, she had advised, laid pipes promising water in 2007 and never delivered.

Understand the importance of water for Cora Charles, because she could remember the dates, and she said to me on Sunday that she is looking forward to the day when she turns her tap and the water flows in her house because that day too, she would record. That project to give to the people of Covigne—and when we are giving to the people of Covigne, the surrounding areas will also benefit—is about 70 per cent complete, our expectation is that well before Christmas the people of Upper Covigne will get an early Christmas present. [Desk thumping]

Two things I should mention in this regard. First of all, it is that a lot of excavation work is taking place there, as they are in other areas where WASA is running lines to bring water to the population. I have to say a very profound thank you to all of the people who are affected by the bad roads because of the excavation work that we are undertaking in order to lay these pipes. I want to thank my colleague, Sen. Verna St. Rose, in that regard also for her tolerance because she has also been affected deeply by this.

There is an article, I think on page 14 of today’s Newsday, that speaks to the issue of the road excavation work being done in Siparia which is proving to be an inconvenience to the public. I want to say to them that we will try to get those roads reinstated once all of the tests have gone on with the pipes to ensure that there are no leaks; we have an arrangement that we are working out with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to repave those roads. In order words, we prefer to have those roads properly redone; not only to patch simply where has been excavated, but to do the roads properly and the intention is to pay the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to do those roads properly.
So for all of the people in Upper Covigne who are now experiencing those difficulties, thank you for your tolerance and I know your tolerance has to do in part because you understand that at the end of the day you would be receiving a water supply for the first time. But for all the other areas in which there is excavation work taking place to lay WASA mains, we ask that the population be tolerant, but we will do our best to reinstate those roadways as quickly as we can.

I want to say too, that in respect of a lot of the other excavation work that we are doing that has to do with the very, very poor state of the pipe infrastructure which is old and leaky, that we are also attempting to work with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to devise a method. I have challenged the management of WASA to move away from the days when the excavation work would be done, the pipes would be repaired and then the road is left unpaved for weeks. We have to try to resolve that problem because it proves to be too inconvenient for people, and it also gives a very, very bad image to the Water and Sewerage Authority and to the Ministry of Public Utilities when all of these patched roads, sometimes even when the roads are recently repaved, and all of these patched roads remain untouched, or not repaired in good time.

I want to return to the issue of the NSDP and to people who because of their economic situation require assistance in meeting their water and electricity bills. Sometime earlier this year, we brought into being what we call the UAP, Utilities Assistance Programme, and that assistance programme is to assist people who are financially challenged to pay their water rates and electricity bills. What the Government does is provides a subsidy that ensures that some portion of your water bill and some portion of your T&TEC bill is paid for you if you fall beneath a certain economic poverty line that is drawn by, I think, the Ministry of the People and Social Development. We have been helping people with that, and I think some time during the course of this year we were able to reach over 10,000 people who benefited from that programme since it was introduced in January of this year.

That Utilities Assistance Programme is going a long way to help people who are economically challenged to meet or to have access to both water and electricity, and we plan by a programme of advertisements and going out and letting people know what is on offer, to have a lot of other people who perhaps may not now be aware, to have them come into the programme so we would help more and more people that way.

We have also been helping hundreds of people at the Ministry under the NSDP Programme where the Government provides funding for persons whose homes do not have electricity and plumbing, and this work is done in the Ministry where we
will recruit a grouping of electrical contractors and a grouping of plumbing contractors and fund the plumbing and electrical work done to these homes.

So, Mr. President, in the case of the Water and Sewerage Authority and the progress that they are making, the facts speak for themselves. In the last year as I said, we had said that we would give two days’ water to the people and we want in the second year—we think we can move to 24/4 or 24/5. The goal is set to give to those people whom we give 24/2 now to get it up to 24/5, that is five days’ water per week, and if we can get to that point—it is extremely ambitious I know to try to get to that point within a year, but if we get to that point within a year, I think we would have broken the back of the water challenges that people face in this country.

I want to speak about another area which would contribute to us attaining that particular goal. You would recall that sometime earlier this year in this Parliament, I did speak about a problem that we were experiencing at the Caroni-Arena Treatment Plant, and I had said then that the neglect by the PNM government of that, our most important water facility, threatened the supply of water to the entire population.

3.15 p.m.

That is our largest facility it produces about 75 million gallons of water per day, and because the breakdown of all of the equipment, and its being left virtually rot, the production at the plant was threatened.

I had explained then that—I think it was sometime late March or early April of this year—the process of treating the water had to do a lot with filtration, and that the treatment plant took water from the Caroni river and carried it through a process but the process largely involved filtering from the large filters into smaller filters and through pumps and so on, and up into near the trash racks, near the travel bridges and so on.

And I had said that first filters which we call trash racks were broken and so that a lot of the large material that was supposed to be filtered out the river before it came into the band screens and the pumps, was not being filtered out and this was damaging the band screens, damaging the pumps and when it got up into other facility the travel bridges were not working, so that the slush, the mud that was taken out of the water was not removed automatically and had to be done manually.

So, just picture—the water comes again through the trash racks, it goes up into what we call band screens, then it goes into the pumps which pumps it up into the area where it is treated with chemicals, the mud drops out and the travel bridges take the mud out, and then the mud is taken and put into sludge ponds.
And when I made that comment in the Parliament in answer to a question posed by Sen. Pennelope Beckles, the *Guardian* of Wednesday, March 23—yes, it was around the end of March, I was right—on March 23, the *Guardian* had an editorial which said, and I would just quote the first two paragraphs:

“The nation owes Public Utilities Minister Emmanuel George something of a debt of gratitude for his decision to raise the issue of the neglect of the facilities at the Caroni Water Treatment Plant in the context of his response to an Opposition question in the Senate on whether the Government had commissioned a study on the privatisation of the Water and Sewerage Authority. It was open to the Minister to offer a simple no to the direct parliamentary question. Instead he chose to couch his denial in the context of a scathing attack on the former administration for its neglect of an institution as important to the nation’s well-being as WASA. If one wanted to privatise an agency like WASA the worse time to privatise it is in this type condition—when all of its infrastructure is depleted. All of the infrastructure has been neglected by the previous government and this threatens—the well-being of the country because we depend so much on this facility which is our largest, our flagship producer of water.’”

In the end however, as is usual with the press they will praise and then they will give you a little tap.

It said:

“It should go without saying that having raised a public alarm—”

This is the last paragraph of the editorial—

“It should go without saying that having raised a public alarm over the possible deterioration in the quality of our drinking water, that the minister would act expeditiously in resolving this problem. It should go without saying that a minister with so much technocratic experience of public utilities would ensure that the problem never reoccurs.”

I want to say to the national population and in response to this *Guardian* editorial, that since the end of March when that statement was made in the Parliament, we have identified funding—I think the funding amounted to in excess of $70 million, and we have asked WASA to ensure that steps are taken to protect, to refurbish and to protect the nation’s largest water production facility.

Today, I want to say to the national community that we have repaired all the pumps, we have repaired the travel bridges they are now working again; they were
not working for years, they are now working again. The trash racks will be replaced, we have already manufactured the replacements and we are going to put them in. In the meantime what WASA did, in order to protect, to provide for the filtration, was to build a screen in the river that filters out the debris at a state before it reaches the broken trash racks.

We are going to replace those broken trash racks as soon as—they are already manufactured—the river conditions allow. Right now is it very flooded so it is difficult to change them. As I said, appropriate action has been to protect or to ensure that we filter out a lot of the debris.

The band screens have been ordered from the manufacturers—I think the manufacturers are in France and those band screens would come in. So, that to all intents and purposes we have restored, for the time being, until as I said—virtually everything is now in place, again, to ensure that that facility is working properly [Desk thumping] that the supply of water to the nation is once more assured. I want to let the population rest assured that we have taken the steps to protect your water supply, and as we speak, although rated to produce 73 million gallons per day, that facility is now producing 80 million gallons per day. [Desk thumping] So, Mr. President, when Opposition—

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. The Hon. E. George: Thank very much. Thanks very much to my colleagues and I know that my colleague Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe said that tongue-in-cheek that I should speak for another hour, they would not want to hear me for another hour, saying all of the things that we have been doing to assure the population that they will continue to get that water service.

I have spoken on water for virtually all of the time that I have had, but there are other utilities that fall to my responsibility but it would be remiss of me if I did not speak once again about the work on the Navet trunk main and to pay tribute once again to those workers in WASA who slaved or worked night and day to ensure that that project came in well within budget and well within time. [Desk thumping]

That project consisting of 29 kilometres of dual trunk ductal iron main took August last year—when the first sod was turned—to May this year to be completed, a period of about nine months and came in at $117 million when it was expected or estimated to cost $303 million.
The people to benefit are the people in deep south, about 300,000 of them, and I am sure that they have appreciated the significant improvement that they have experienced in their water, but I want to underscore that performance beats “ol’ talk” all the time. And I want to repeat that that project ought to have begun in 2005, because all the approvals were there and I will tell you how I know that they were there. When I went into the Ministry of Public Utilities as Minister last year, as an old public servant you try to read all the files from before, because that is the only way that you get the information as to what is going on in the Ministry. After a few a weeks of reading I discovered this particular file with a Cabinet decision of 2005 that gave the approval and the funding and everything for the undertaking of the laying of this Navel trunk main.

So I called a colleague in WASA and I said to him, “Why was this project not done?” And he said, “Well, I doh know”. I said, “Do you have the money in your coffers to do it?” “Yes, the money was released”, I said, “Well, let’s do it.” And that simple reading of those files, discovering what had happened, and simply saying, “Let’s do it”, I did not even go back to our Cabinet for approval, because the Cabinet approval, everything was there and we needed simply to do the work.

So, up to now I cannot understand what would have prevented the decision to lay those mains between 2005 and 2010. What was it? And this simply said to me that the PNM administration was not ever really interested in the ordinary people of this country. Their heads seemed in the clouds I mean even here in our experience here we find a lot of comments being made, “Where is your plan? Where is the legislative agenda? Where is this?” Listen, you could come with all the 2020 vision and plans and so on—if I am a person living like my friend, Mr. Seepersad in Duff Trace in Penal, I do not want to hear anything about 2020 vision, I do not want to hear anything about plan. Put water in my pipe first please; give me the basics. [Desk thumping]

You coming and telling me about 2020 vision, and plan, and legislative agenda and we here and we feel that we are the best debaters in the world, the people outside there want water. They want good roads; fix their drains; and then when you have fixed them then you can come and talk about anything, but you cannot be giving people all of these highfalutin sounding plans and programmes and so on, and the people do not have the basics—the guy has to be bathing in a bucket every day.

And I cannot understand how this simple concept of fixing the people with the ordinary, everyday necessities and needs of life cannot sink in; that is what ordinary people want. Give them these little conveniences and let them live their lives in a little bit of comfort. [Desk thumping]
I have said so repeatedly that we are not important here except insofar as we contribute to people’s well-being and an improvement in their lives. It is not about me versus you; it is bring joy and a little improvement. I am always astounded as to how these simple things lift people’s spirits.

About a month ago, I went to visit Brazil Village at the invitation of my good colleague, MP Jairam Seemungal. The Brazil Recreation Ground had been illuminated and I did not go to the illumination, sorry, to the commissioning ceremony for the illumination of that ground, as I had gone to a lot of grounds—I think we have done about 32 grounds, and I want to thank again the T&TEC and the group of guys who are involved in this particular programme of lighting of these recreation grounds and basketball courts, and we have done it throughout the country.

3.30 p.m.

I went up there at the invitation of Minister Seemungal. Although I had another engagement, I said that because I did not go to the commissioning ceremony, I would attend. When I got up to the Brazil Recreation Ground, I was fascinated to see thousands of people gathered for a simple windball cricket match final.

The MP explained to me that he has this competition going, the games are played out among the different villages on the same ground and he had the final on that particular day. The sheer joy of all of these communities, even those who had lost in the preliminary games up until the final were all there participating in this final in the night.

There was food, drink, music and even a commentator giving a ball-by-ball commentary on the cricket. It was a fabulous afternoon spent with families bringing the little kids; from little kids to grandmothers celebrating the lighting up of a ground that facilitates the playing of a cricket game. It was unbelievable.

It is these little things, they are not asking for much, that lift the spirit of the people in the communities and that improve the quality of their lives. As politicians, we must never forget that. That is something that our predecessors forgot. We are unlikely to make the same mistake.

As I said earlier, the fact that they forgot it meant that on May 24, 2010, the population of Trinidad and Tobago made them walk the plank. As I mentioned earlier, walking the plank is one of worst sentences that could ever be assigned. They were made to walk the plank then by the population and, as I said earlier in my address, they continue to flounder around, searching for a straw to grab, kicking and trying to feel solid ground. It will be extremely difficult for them to survive.

In respect of the other utilities that fall to my remit, we are taking steps to address issues or challenges that we have at the post office. What I have found is
that it has gone out of its core area of responsibility and into areas where it is pursuing commercial enterprises. We have indicated that in cases where these commercial enterprises are profitable, we have no problem with their continuing, but in cases where they are making a loss, they should get out because their core responsibility is to deliver mail to the population, a responsibility in which, as the MORI poll has indicated, they are doing extremely well. According to the MORI poll, TTPost received the highest satisfaction rating from among the population of 86 per cent. [Desk thumping] So, TTPost, we said, “Get back to your moorings.”

When TTPost came into being—I must say this before I close—they cost the Treasury, annually, in excess of $40 million. When TTPost actually came into being, it was around 2000, they were able by 2001 to bring their deficit and their dependence on the Treasury down from that $40 million. It was $13.1 in 2000 and it went to as low as $2.4 million in 2001. However, from 2002 and going up, it reached figures like $12 million in 2002; $6.7 million in 2003; $17.3 in 2004; $42.2 in 2005; $33.5 in 2006 and so on; as much as $68.9 million in deficit in 2008. Last year, the deficit was $43.8 million.

My mandate to the board is that it has to get out of the loss-making areas and tighten up on its core responsibility of delivering mail to people so that it can deliver that mail to people at the least cost. This year, we have brought the subvention down from $43 million last year to $34.9 million this year and they have to live with about $11 million less. We are forcing TTPost to become more efficient because we cannot have them so dependent on the Treasury.

I also want to thank them, too, because they have been working extremely hard. During the early part of next year, we will have a new postal code in place that replaces the unspecified manner in which we have our address system in Trinidad and Tobago. That story is for another day.

In respect of the met service, we are doing two things. We are strengthening their human resource capabilities by awarding scholarships for further studies to officials of the met service and we are trying to deal with the accommodation and equipment issues. We propose to build a new building starting this year, at Piarco, and we will continue to outfit them with equipment and so on that they need.

In respect of the Government Printery, we have a lot of challenges there. They have been occupying that building since 1873. It has been virtually condemned and, on the one hand, we need to get them out of there and into new premises. On the other hand, we have discovered that if we were to outsource a lot of the work that the Government Printery is doing, the work can be done much more cheaply. The plan is to seek to outsource as much of that work as possible.
I must, however, do two things here. I must say thank you very much to the workers of the Government Printery for coming out on that Sunday when the state of emergency was declared to print all of the necessary documents that needed to be printed urgently. They really went over and above the call of duty. In order to print all of the documents associated with the budget, which we debate today, the team at the Government Printery did yeoman service and, again, I thank them on behalf of all of us here, I am sure. [Desk thumping]

I have T&TEC and TSTT to talk to. I want to say that T&TEC is one of the better run utilities, although we do have our challenges there. I still think that there are too many outages. They are working, but, again, they have to replace all their old equipment.

So, that is where we are, Mr. President. I thank you and all my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to speak and I want to say, again, in respect of the Water and Sewerage Authority, that our goal for next year is to try to give the population who do not have that level of service, five days’ water per week. I hope I can come here next year and say; not that we have got to 94 per cent of that, but that we have got to 100 per cent of that.

I thank you very much.

Sen. Pennelope Beckles: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I start by joining with almost all the speakers before in congratulating the staff, the House Committee and all those who have been responsible for ensuring that we were able to move the Parliament smoothly into what is now our home.

I think it important for me to start by saying that this was one of the condemned buildings by many persons who criticized as money being wasted the construction of this facility. Today, it is being heralded as probably one—[Interruption] You just finished speaking; let me speak! Tell him to let me speak, “nuh”. It is now being heralded as one of the best decisions of the PNM as we would not have had somewhere else to put the Parliament.

Mr. President, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Tewarie sort of told me to cool down a little. I hope that people allow me to speak. I want to congratulate him, not just for his tone, but the fact that he was one of the few Senators on the Government side who was willing to say that the standard of debate had not only lifted, but who was willing to give constructive criticisms and give people credit where credit is due. That, I think, is the hallmark of somebody whose work is to be given credit, [Desk thumping] rather than those who get up and talk about “I do this” and “I do that” and “I do the next”. [Crosstalk]
Mr. President, for example my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, talked about the fact that the MORI poll gave WASA credit and 67 per cent of the people were satisfied with the service of WASA. Do you know what is the biggest joke about that? They condemned the MORI poll that the PNM was doing for years. It is the same MORI poll. They said that we wasted money on the MORI poll; the same MORI poll that they are using now to justify that they are performing well. [Desk thumping]

You see, when we use it, it is corrupt and a waste of money. When they use it, it is good. I say to continue to use the MORI poll because it gave us a lot of good indicators.

I congratulate all the utilities. I will say to the hon. Minister, if he has improved the service for the many customers who have been waiting for years for water and if this Government has done any improvement, I give them the credit. That is why they were voted into office. I think that all the workers of WASA, T&TEC and TTPost who labour in the vineyard to improve the service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to be congratulated.

I have difficulty when he comes and speaks, but does not want to say that I was the Minister in 2005 when the decision was taken for the trunk main. He talked about that same thing last year and he has come back to talk about it this year. He gave the impression that, in 2005, I took a note to Cabinet, got all the money to do the entire project and the money was there from 2005.

He comes into office in 2010 and WASA, of all institutions, has hundreds of millions of dollars sitting there, did nothing with them and the Minister called and said: “Hear what? You all have the money? Proceed!” Is that some comic strip or something? That has to be a comic strip. Everyone understands; every Minister sitting on the other side, and the Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring more than anybody else understands the gestation period between when Cabinet takes a decision and a project is implemented.

Many Ministers sitting over there—the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; the Minister of Transport; the Ministry of National Security, will know that if you take a decision today that you want to construct police stations, you want to buy OPVs, whatever you want to do, Cabinet may take a decision today, but you need to do a feasibility study. You need to do a multiplicity of things. The Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring only gives you that amount and then it takes some time.
3.45 p.m.

He wants you to believe, as the magician he always is, that as soon as he came into office, he has been able to transform the whole water sector of Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot sit here and listen to that today, because I am getting a little tired of hearing him speak about that. I want to say a little further, he knows very well that the reason he was able to take up the phone and make the call is that the last Minister had already negotiated the money.

Hon. Senators: “Nah!”

Sen. P. Beckles: Of course, how could it be sitting in WASA?

Sen. Al-Rawi: You mean that IDB loan?

Sen. P. Beckles: But he gives no credit to the last Minister. [Desk thumping] You see, the Minister of Public Utilities has forgotten that it was his same Government who promised “water for all”, in what year?

Hon. Senators: In 2000!

Sen. P. Beckles: In 2000! We are in 2011, but he is coming to talk about 94 per cent and 67 per cent. Look, I am not going to waste my time saying anything more about that.

Mr. President, I want to move on to another point. You see, sometimes they do not even know to give their own selves credit. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs talks about finding out all about this fuel subsidy and, of course, the impression they gave is, had it not been for the state of emergency, they would not have known about this diesel racket. You know, the state of emergency has been able to help this Government discover everything under the sun. All that was never discovered before has been discovered now because of the state of emergency.

You know, it was the former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, who since in the month of February discovered this fuel racket and actually triggered the investigation. The difference was that she took a policy decision to keep it quiet so that she could easily go—let us say as we say in Trinidad, in the dead of the night—and find all the culprits. So she decided not to expose it. But within days of this new Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs coming, he goes and you see him taking out all these pictures saying that he discovered all this racket. Since then it was discovered but, you know what? The present Minister did not give the last Minister any credit. So if we do not get credit, then, I mean.
I want to go on to say that we have been blowing our trumpets about this building, and with outfitting and so on, this building cost a little over $30-something million. I think the approval might have been about $40-something million or about $45 million. So far, I think, they have spent about $32 million and you have everything here. You have a gym, you have bunkers for the staff; three or four floors for the staff and officers for a lot of the Members of Parliament, the Chief Whip—Mr. President, I hope you do not mind, because I did have a little peep into your office—supervised, I did not go in the dead of night—and I see that your office is fitting of the station and the status that you hold, and I am quite happy. [Desk thumping] I also had the opportunity to see where the Cabinet can meet. Actually, it is even better than the existing room where Cabinet meets. [Desk thumping]

But, you know, the first thing that came to mind, Mr. President, is that whilst, to date, they have spent some $30-something million, I looked at this document here Public Sector Investment Programme “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” and I saw where the refurbishment of the facility at Santa Rosa Heights cost $50 million for the use as a detection centre during the state of emergency.

Hon. Senators: “Nah!” How much?


Hon. Senators: Fifty million?

Sen. P. Beckles: Fifty million! You would have observed—

Hon. Senators: Fifty million!

Sen. P. Beckles: Fifty million! I am reading from their book not mine. You would have observed, Mr. President, that just yesterday or two days ago, that $50-million refurbishment exercise, the roof seems to have collapsed, it is leaking—

Hon. Senators: “What, nah?”

Sen. P. Beckles:—and they had to move out the prisoners.

Sen. Hinds: They had to move out the prisoners.

Sen. P. Beckles: That is the same facility that we do not know if it is prison; if it is a detention; if it is a correction facility; if it is Guantanamo Bay, or if it is a warehouse.
Hon. Senators: “And dey talk about HDC houses!”


Sen. Hinds: It is place for the Cabinet.

Sen. P. Beckles: You see, whilst they are now saying that they are putting some kind of a hold on the airport in central to consult with the people and to do a feasibility study, you know, in constructing this $50 million refurbishment warehouse centre, that is leaking, that they had to move the prisoners in the dead of night, you know, they consulted with the residents of Santa Rosa Heights after they made the decision? [Desk thumping]

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Nah!” They consulted on backhoe this time?

Sen. P. Beckles: “That is why dey say de Lord doh sleep.” They would not listen to the people. They just went and constructed. They took a warehouse and paid somebody all of this money.

Sen. Hinds: “Yeah, their friends.”

Sen. Deyalsingh: But the MP say he is going to stop it.


Sen. Hinds: Clumsy Government!

Sen. P. Beckles: They said it is going to take 10 days. I wonder, having spent this $50 million to refurbish the facility, and the roof is leaking and so on, how much is it going to cost now to repair this facility? [Interruption] I think, yet still, they would not listen to the people. This is a Government, if you read their manifesto—I normally have the manifesto with me—consultation; serve the people; serve the people: listen to the people; not the people of Arima. They did not listen to the people of Arima. What they are doing with the people of Arima, they built this facility and they tell you, take it. All we will do is change the name. You do not want a prison? We would call it a correctional facility. You do not want a correctional facility? We would call it a detention centre. You do not want it there long? We would only leave it for the state of emergency.

Sen. Al-Rawi: On time and on budget.

Sen. P. Beckles: On time! And then they said that after a few months, they are going to convert it into some kind of place where you can have this bargain, and people can go and purchase things, but the people are waiting. They are waiting very patiently.
Sen. Hinds: Yes!

Sen. P. Beckles: You see, Mr. President, I just want to put a plug again, because we have congratulated the staff of this place so much for all the work they have done—

Sen. Hinds: And really they deserve it! [Desk thumping]

Sen. P. Beckles: They deserve it. [Desk thumping] And the person I am going to charge with this responsibility more than anybody else is, my good friend, Comrade Abdulah. You see, every time we get up and we congratulate the staff—and I have had the good fortune to be Deputy Speaker, so I think I speak a little more with knowledge of what goes on in the Parliament. You know, this is the first time in the history of the Parliament where the House has sat in such a short space of time to debate the budget, and before a blink of the eye, not even 24 hours, Sen. Abdulah, they gave the staff—and you know the Senate sitting—a Government who has boasted about labour for the workers; for the workers.

Hon. Senators: “Nah!”

Sen. P. Beckles: I am telling you. Mr. President, that is a very, very, important issue.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Surely they are getting overtime pay.

Sen. P. Beckles: Because the Hansard staff and the palantypists, they are paid—their salary as compared with the courts and so on is less.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Nah!”

Sen. P. Beckles: So we lose them from time to time. Many of the staff members here who have opportunities to go and work in other parts of the public service—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Like the SRPs.

Sen. P. Beckles:—because they are committed to the Parliament, they stay very often, but some of them are going to leave. Those people who are serving us tea, lunch and breakfast sometimes, because when stay here in the morning three o’clock and four o’clock sometimes, it is breakfast, they would have served the House. It is the same people.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Exploitation!

Sen. P. Beckles: Late in the night.

Sen. Deyalsingh: If the PNM do that was exploitation.
Sen. P. Beckles: “Yeah, it would have been exploitation.” I have to share some information to make my point. [ Interruption ] In 2010, the debate in the House was between the 14th, 15th and 16th and the Senate got four days. That was in 2010, before it started. In 2009, the 16th the Senate met on the 22nd—six days. In 2008, they completed on the 2nd and the Senate met on the 6thsixth, four days, August 30, 2007. The Senate on September 03. In 2005, House completed in 2005, the Senate met on Tuesday 11. In 2004, the House finished on the 19th and the Senate met on the 21st. In 2011 the House started meeting on the 14th, that was the Friday, and they sat on the 17th and the 18. When do you think the Senate meet?

Sen. Hinds: The 19th!

Sen. P. Beckles: The 19th! Do you know why? Because so many people have to travel.

Sen. Hinds: Their agenda.

Sen. P. Beckles: So less than 24 hours, but we are coming and everybody jumping up, the staff— [ Desk thumping ]

Sen. Hinds: What a shame?

Sen. P. Beckles: That is the reality.

Sen. Hinds: Take that in “all yuh—take that!

Sen. P. Beckles: I just want to say, Mr. President, and not even a phone call to anybody from Opposition to say, “Okay, Leader of Government Business in the Senate, we are going to start on Wednesday.” How we got the information, by email from the staff. That is how we got it. Under a state of emergency, a lot of people have given up their rights; I have not given up mine. [ Desk thumping ] I just hope that they could have greater courtesy. That is what I hope. [ Desk thumping ]

Sen. Hinds: Too much to expect. That is too much to expect from them. They are bullies! [ Desk thumping ]

Sen. P. Beckles: You see, at the end of the day—

Sen. Hinds: Political bullies!

Sen. P. Beckles: —when we are serving and we are serving and we are serving, we must serve everybody. I only hope that there will be greater commitment from all of us, because I am one of those who have spoken on this matter over and over to have some more consideration for the staff that works for us, including the security officers.

Sen. Hinds: Oh yes!
Sen. P. Beckles: —because, Mr. President, we now have our own security and that is not something that happens in a lot of Parliaments. This Government is not to be blamed for a lot, or even the last government, because many of the issues have to do with the CPO and the DPA but, at the same time, there are influences and cooperation that could exist between the Government and Opposition on this matter that I am sure could bring some changes. I really hope that when the House Committee meets, it is something that we could look at. Sen. Al-Rawi sits on the House Committee.

Mr. President, you see, Trinidad and Tobago is in a very unique position. If you go through the entire Caribbean, we are the only Parliament, I repeat, we are the only Parliament that meets almost every week. We are the only Parliament where you can get a report from Hansard very often the day after. [Desk thumping] There is no other Parliament and I know it, because I have been to enough conferences, and there are some Parliaments you cannot get Hansard report for a whole year.

Hon. Senator: Jamaica.

Sen. P. Beckles: So let us be committed and let us be a little more serious when we are talking about these matters. I want to move off from that.

Mr. President, I want to talk a bit and respond to my colleague, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. He talked on two issues, and one had to do with the issue of the airport. He gave the impression that there was a Cabinet Note and we supported or in some way approved an airport for central.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. President, I want to place this on record. He said we misled at some point in time, let me just correct it. That was totally false. The Civil Aviation Authority approached the then Minister of Works and Transport to make a request to rehabilitate what was an old runway at Camden. If you are a pilot and you want a commercial licence, you cannot do that in Trinidad and Tobago, you have to go elsewhere. All the Civil Aviation Authority was seeking to do was to get support from the Minister and Government to rehabilitate that old runway for the purposes of doing more training and basically offering greater services to pilots; that was all.

Hon. Senator: Not an airport?


Sen. Karim: A runway to train pilots, what do you call that?

Sen. P. Beckles: To rehabilitate an old facility. The Cabinet Note speaks of no airport. I will sit; you read and see where it says a new airport, you cannot.

Sen. Karim: I did not say that. [Desk thumping]
Sen. P. Beckles: You gave the impression that is what it was. It was not any new airport. That is all it was. That is as much as I am going to say about that. He said that we built houses where they have to do the glide. The point about it is they cannot do certain things at the airport. There is a helicopter facility that exists. All they wanted to do was improve it to offer people who wanted to become pilots and were in the helicopter service. That is all. He talked about some DC9—what DC9 could land there? Please. [Interruption]

Sen. Karim: Will the Senator give way?

Sen. P. Beckles: Not at this time. I sat and gave you the opportunity, why did you not take it then? I sat and gave it to you.

Sen. Hinds: Put your political tail between your legs. [Laughter]

Sen. P. Beckles: The next item has to do with the issue of GATE. Mr. President, the hon. Minister, or any Minister, is entitled to review programmes. So when the hon. Minister talked about GATE and people talk about slackers in the programmes must be removed, we support that. If the Government is spending money and people are not utilizing it for which it was intended, I agree 100 per cent, the Government ought to have the right to deal with that. But the impression that was created was that the PNM set up this GATE and we did not have any policy in place to treat with that, and they are comparing it with dollar-for-dollar. This has nothing to do with “no” dollar-for-dollar. There is no similarity, none. [Desk thumping]

The PNM had a policy under Vision 2020, that by 2020 we must have at least 60 per cent of persons who attended secondary schools who must have the benefit of tertiary education. That is the PNM’s policy. I just want to refer to the fact that on October 20, 2009, the hon. Minister as she then was, Christine Kangaloo—it is very long and I do not have the time—the point is she came to this honourable Senate and made it very clear what GATE was about. She spoke about the same private sector arrangement and the GATE clearing policy.


She said:

“To access GATE funding on registration, students must complete a GATE application form. On said form, there is provision for the student agreement. The agreement must be signed by the student or his parent...”
And she goes through the list. You have to obtain approval from the Ministry in writing. If you withdraw or are suspended an approved leave of absence from the programme or institution…That must be given. You must inform the Ministry if you want to terminate or suspend. You must inform the Ministry if you want to terminate or suspend. You must inform the Ministry forthwith upon the successful completion.

Then it goes on to say:

“The student…agrees to inform the Ministry of the details of his employment and his period of service shall be related to the cost of the funding.

Cost of service award…$50,000...”—and she goes through the figures.

It says:

“All moneys expended on his programme shall be a loan from the Government to the student and shall be repaid to the Government with the interest, providing that if the student serves the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the prescribed period as I have indicated, or if the student is released from the obligation to serve the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the repayment of such loan shall be waived.”

The impression is given that the Minister did nothing. The Minister is to make policy. The Minister is not to go and do the public servants work.

The document went on:

“In the event that student abandons his course or fails to obtain qualification, where such failure is due to the student not applying himself diligently...”—the same slackers—“or fails to accept employment in the public service or the private sector…the student binds himself and agrees that he shall be liable immediately to refund to the Government the total amount of the loan made to him.

Any breach of this agreement or withdrawal from the programme by failure on his part to attain the required performance standards, as established in respect of the specified programme, will deny the student further eligibility for funding by the Government unless approved by the Ministry.

If the student serves the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for only a part of the specified period, he shall be required to refund the Government only such portion of the total sum loaned, together with interest due therein...”

All that is here.
Sen. Hinds: The Minister does not know that.

Sen. P. Beckles: “The terms of this agreement constitute the complete contract between the Government and the student…”

It further goes on to speak about the clearance policy. It talks about the fact that:

“To date, the Ministry has been reimbursed the sum of $2,571,472.67 from students who have not completed programmes that were GATE funded.”

Then it talks about the private institution, and it says what the private institution—I do not want to read anymore because it is going to take up my time.


Sen. P. Beckles: I just want to say that the PNM had the policy in place. This new Minister, it is his duty and his right to change it, to review it and for the Government to do so if they see fit, but do not say that the last Government did not have anything in place. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, there are a couple other things I want to talk about. I want to go into agriculture. This Government is very skilful when they talk about no new taxes. It is very creative to say the budget has no new taxes, when other institutions are implementing taxes. The water and Sewerage Authority, for example—you see, the Minister of Public Utilities, he knows I am coming next so he has left. There is something called “Code 103” by WASA new services, 15 new charges that took effect from July 01, 2011.

Hon. Senator: “Nah, nah. Oh goood!”

Sen. P. Beckles: I would have liked to sit for him to say that what I am saying is not true, but he is not here. It takes effect from 2011, application fee for building development lots. Four to 25, $600—that remains the same; 25-plus, $900, but zero to three, the application fee is $2,500. No new taxes.

Hon. Senator: For what?

Sen. P. Beckles: Application fee for building development lots. That is what you have to pay to WASA, $2,500, but he is not here. [Crosstalk] This is not in the budget. It is not in the budget, so it is not a new tax. That is what you call skilful.

Sen. Deyalsingh: It is probably a misprint.

Sen. Hinds: They do not call it a misprint; they call it a “Reshmi”. [Laughter]

Sen. P. Beckles: There is also a Cabinet Note passed recently in August, for something called a land lease rent, and any Minister here who says that it is not true,
I will take my seat. The Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs came and talked about the fact that they were going to give out 4,000 and something acres of land. But what he did not say, was that the existing farmers who have 40 acres, 30 acres, they now have this novel policy that reduces it to only five acres. You cannot have more than five acres, and on those five acres you cannot put a house. You must only have a chattel. You cannot have permanent crops.

**Hon. Senator:** Tell people what a chattel is.

**Sen. P. Beckles:** Just to make sure that people know, a chattel, as we learn from law, is where the structure and the foundation are not together. You have to be able to move it at any time. Those who have had the opportunity to live in Barbados will know that on an evening they would come with a truck and take up the whole house, move it and put it down somewhere else. Mr. President, you might not have seen. That is what a chattel is.

They have now increased that land rent, because presently if you are on eight acres, you just pay about $16.50. The present increase, I cannot even calculate, but it has increased by hundreds of percentages. The people in Gloria Estate and many of the estates are now saying that they cannot afford to pay that new land lease rent that was approved by this Government in 2010. I will take my seat again, if that is not true. 

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** “Dey pauperizing people.”

**Sen. P. Beckles:** No new taxes, and they talking about farming and agriculture. When the PNM had the policy of Wallerfield and Carlsen Field, they gave people water, electricity, and you were able to construct a house to live there, so that the larceny likely to take place would be reduced. “Now dey saying chattel.”

**Sen. Hinds:** “De man had to poison de zaboca.”

**Sen. P. Beckles:** Mr. President, no pigs, no livestock, only short crops, no permanent crops, five acres. And when they tell you about that 4,000-plus acres of land distributed, more than 75 per cent of that is already occupied, because you have farmers who have been squatting there for years, but they are now telling you, if you were on 40 acres, you are only getting five.

**Hon. Senator:** “Or, I see.”

**Sen. P. Beckles:** This is the same Government, “de same Government” who was talking about, “Listen, de PNM is de worse thing since sliced bread, bulldozing agricultural land to put houses,” but they come today, and in less than a year, “they
bulldozing” agricultural land to put house. [Desk thumping] The Minister said yesterday, what—something about some 4,000 is the largest. We need to go back to the years when people read about the history of Trinidad and Tobago. I would think that as a Minister, he would read about the history of agriculture. I want to thank Mr. Ferdi Ferreira for sending me this book, Inward Hunger: Education of a Prime Minister by Dr. Eric Williams. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: “Yuh raise meh pores.”

Sen. P. Beckles: On page 333, the first part concerns the settlement of new farmers on 20,000—how do they say it, “twenty thousand”—[Laughter]


Sen. P. Beckles:—acres of government land in three types of schemes, 15-acre dairy farms, five-acre pig farms, five-acre food plots.

We had spent $6 million on this programme since 1964, half a million on access roads in food plots. The second part of the programme was assistance to establish farmers, tractor pools, agricultural credit, roads on which we had built 64 miles in the last five years, guaranteed prices...”—and I could go on and on, I do not want to add. [Desk thumping] I have plenty things to say; 20,000. He gave out 4,000; four multiplied by five. “You regularizing, but yuh talking bout yuh distributing”. They need to get the dictionary meaning correct.

Sen. Hinds: “Dey does lie without taste.” [Interruption]

Mr. President: Sen. Hinds, I cannot allow you to make those remarks in this Senate. You will have to withdraw it.

Sen. Hinds: I withdraw that, Mr. President. [Sen. Hinds stands] Let me correct it; they speak untruths without taste.

Mr. President: Thank you; please have a seat.


4.15 p.m.

Sen. P. Beckles: Mr. President, there is a lot more I could say about agriculture. There is an article on October 16 by one—an interview done by Clevon Raphael and he is interviewing Mr. Khan.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Which Khan?


Sen. Hinds: Their good friend.
Sen. P. Beckles: I just want to quote from Mr. Khan, because as you know, he is one of those persons in agriculture and Sen. the Hon. Comrade Abdullah is very familiar—as a matter of fact, Comrade Abdullah, to his credit, was one of those who was arrested, fighting against taxes, you know. He was one of those who stood with the farmers. I wonder what he is saying today.

This is what Mr. Khan said:

“They lied to us and...they have not learnt any lesson coming out of May 24, 2010 election. We know it was an election but you cannot set up people like that.

Khan accuses PP of...criminal betrayal, lies.”

I am not even going to go through the article.


Sen. P. Beckles: Mr. President, I am reading from the article.

You see, the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs—and I have said this in this House, I know he has very good intentions—was one of those. Actually in 2008 he stood in front of a bulldozer. I remember, and I am sure Sen. Abdullah was there. So the farmers expect a lot from him. Unfortunately he is not here to hear my contribution. I just want to say that whilst he has taken a lot of credit and you have increases in imports and so, exports are down—and we all know that he has been very fortunate, in that up until this month we have had good weather; rain regularly. We really have not had the traditional dry season and rainy season, and as a result of that you have had an opportunity to have good agriculture.

I just want to recommend to the hon. Minister that a lot of his programmes are very good, but there are some things that need to happen and we need to understand that the farmers in Trinidad and Tobago do not have it easy. The FAO is saying to us that we are going to have rising food prices. The Minister talked about improved cocoa production. I think that is an excellent idea; improved rice production. There are a number of things he said that I support, but I just want to say to him that it is not an easy road to travel for farming. The farmers who labour very often in the vineyard, they are not the ones who truly benefit; it is the middleman that benefits. Whilst they slave, it is somebody else who is waiting there, who has all the money and purchases their crops and then goes and sells them twice and three times what they have bought from them wholesale.

In their new policy, they are doing a lot of restrictions in terms of, whether you should plant short crops; whether you should plant root crops or whether you
should have certain types of crops. They are putting those restrictions in terms of the new lease arrangements. I am saying that they need to put a whole different mechanism in place where you can set up a system and the system I think already exists, but to improve the system—and that is the National Agricultural Marketing Information System. If that system were in place, the 19,000 farmers that exist would be in a much better place to make better decisions. I think as a country, whilst we talk about 1,000 pounds in this and 1,000 pounds in that, we really do not have the kind of computerized and modernized system to be able to give us real-time data in terms of how much products, and the exact amount of pounds and so, and the variation from month to month.

We need to get that system in place and that is going to help them a lot better. [Desk thumping] We know very well that when they go to the ADB and they go for information, they are sent to Namdevco; when they go to Namdevco, they are sent to the Ministry, and very often the farmers are back and forth and none the wiser. So any support in relation to improving agriculture, I just want to say that this Opposition supports the Government's initiatives, but there are a number of things that they have put in place and that they have represented are not entirely true.

The Minister met with a lot of the farmers and indicated that they would be compensated and when you talk to a lot of the farmers, they are yet to be compensated. He also gave the commitment that they would be compensated for trauma, but they have not been so compensated. Therefore, whilst they have spoken about compensating, there are some people who are still waiting for compensation.

My last information is that the food import bill is some $4 billion. We know that the FAO is saying that the prices of food will go up; we know that countries like Thailand, and so, have now taken a decision not to export rice. We understand recently that New Zealand has had its worst snow for years and, therefore, where we get those products from, meat and other dairy products, we are likely to find ourselves in serious, serious challenges.

I am happy that the Attorney General is here because there are just a couple of issues that I would like to raise with him. I know that there are some issues for which he is making some serious efforts, and I did say to the Attorney General last year that some of those issues are not as simple as it appears, so that I do not expect him to be any magician. I speak, of course, about the courts in San Fernando and in Arima, where efforts are being made to find parcels of land, and it is going to take some time. I notice that they speak specifically of the acquisition of a parcel of land in Arima for the construction of a new court.
I just want to urge the Attorney General, at some point in time, to make an effort to visit the Arima Magistrates’ Court that is now bursting at its seams. On any given day, if you go to the court in Arima—Mr. Attorney General, I am asking and I hope that someday in your busy schedule you can visit Arima, and I was making the point earlier—because you may not have heard me—that it is not a problem that you created; it is a problem that you met, but I am saying that Arima, as you know now has three courts, and the number of cases on any given day is hundreds. So I have a fear that that building—and I am not being extremist now, I am being very genuine—could be a danger because of the number of people that go to court there every day.

I saw where you are making an effort to acquire a new parcel of land to build a new court and I support you, and I said before that it is not a simple matter, because I know that it is not totally in your hands, because The Judiciary has a say now. It is not like before. The Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring has a say. That is why I was making the point to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities who does not understand the complexity sometimes. It is one thing for you to put it here in your medium term or short term, it is another thing for you to find the parcel of land, to do the tendering procedure, to get the contractors and do the design, and before you know it, three years have passed. It is as simple as that. But whatever efforts you make in remedying the problem, I give you 100 per cent support and I think if you are able to do that in San Fernando in your time, even if it is those two courts, I think you would get tremendous credit for that.

There are just two other things in terms of the court system. Now, you will remember that Sen. Hinds had raised the issue of Tunapuna. They may or may not have advised you that Tunapuna is now meeting in Port of Spain. I think you really need to look into it, because they are saying that they are not going to return to Tunapuna until April next year. Now, I remember you saying that the matter probably requires an entire overhaul, so that the Tunapuna court now meets in the evening in Port of Spain, and that tells you that the magistrates could do very little.

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. Hinds]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. President: Before you start, Senator, I do not know if you want me to offer you the option. The intention is to break at 4.30. So we can either break now and go to 5.00 or you could start now for four minutes and we can break again.
Sen. P. Beckles: That will probably disrupt my innings, so I will take my break now.

Mr. President: All right. Senators, the time is now 4.26 p.m. I propose to take the tea break at this point and we will return at 5.00 p.m.

4.26 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, when we took the break for tea Sen. Beckles was on her feet, her time had been extended for a further 15 minutes.

Sen. P. Beckles: Thank you, Mr. President, and I would try to complete what I have to say in 15 minutes.

I wanted to make one point to finish off on my agriculture and that is—you know sometimes you read things and you really do not know how to react and we were talking about it a little while ago. This is the issue of the land owner injecting 2,000 avocados with something called cypro which is an insecticide. They are saying it is not fatal but they said what it does if you ingest it, you would stomach upset, you would get a little headache, runny nose, but I do not know when the person did that if they knew whether it was fatal or if it is not fatal. Let us look at the consequences of what has happened, take for example this lady was taking her hundreds of avocados to Hi Lo and when she got there they said—400 cases actually—we cannot take it. [Interruption]

Think about that, as a farmer that is your livelihood. In the Tunapuna market nobody is buying avocados and as a matter of fact a lot of other groceries and so on are not. They said here their supermarket chain Hi Lo removed avocados from its shelf following the report. There are so many aspects to that particular issue, but I looked at the PSIP, 2012 and at page 41, the Minister said that there is a praedial larceny committee continuing its evaluation of a pilot project implemented between August 2009 and September 2010 in county Caroni. A recommendation was made for the reorganization of the programme which would be rolled out nationwide. Now, I just want to ask that this be implemented with a certain amount of urgency. Now, I am not going to judge the person because you know as a politician you say certain things and it could be taken out of context. Because had this been some other kind of insecticide we understand what could have happened, but what we do know is that the farmers all over the country, it does not matter whether it is Barrackpore whether it is Toco, whether it is Cedros, whether Paramin, whether it
is Blanchisseuse, Wallerfield; people have just been complaining about praedial larceny, and for some reason some people in our society really do not want to work, a lot of them prefer to just benefit from the sweat of others.

As I said I am not getting into judging the farmer, he spoke about just being totally fed up of people just coming every time he is about to reap his crops and stealing all his crops. It reminds me of a time I was asked to appear, what we call amicus in court, to represent a particular person. The court asked me. Mr. President, what had happened is this guy went up an avocado tree and he picked a couple of bags of avocados and when he was about to come down and he looked underneath the tree he saw about three pit bulls. [Interrupt] That was about three o’clock in the morning. Well, the court asked me to help him out and he decided that he did not really want to plead guilty. They normally feel that lawyers are magicians and everybody always feels that your clients tell you exactly what they did and that lawyers are very crafty.

I went to him and said did you so and so, “Yes, but you know I am—ah sure you could get me off”. I said, “Listen, this is not one of those cases”. Ultimately, he agreed to plead guilty, but when you heard the facts, the owner of the house—because this was about three o’clock in the morning—heard his dogs barking and then he did not hear them barking, but he saw them under the tree and he saw someone up on the tree. Well, he simply took off the lights and he went to sleep and called the police about eight o’clock the following morning. The police then came and the dogs were there and he was up in the tree. [Laughter] I do not think I need to say more.

**Sen. George:** So he could not come down at all. [Laughter] and [Desk thumping]

**Sen. P. Beckles:** He spent his night sleeping on the tree.

**Sen. George:** I like that, sleep on the tree. [Laughter]

**Sen. P. Beckles:** Anyway, let me just move on very quickly. But the point I am making is that there are a lot farmers who really have to experience—

**Sen. Hinds:** I reminded you of your days.

**Sen. George:** That was the sentence there already. [Laughter]

**Sen. P. Beckles:**—real trauma about people just stealing their crops. I could understand how painful it is, you do your acres of tomatoes and ochroes, it does not matter what it is, but the point is that just when you are ready to harvest that, somebody feels that your sweat, your hard work and your honesty, that they could
deny you that. We have to probably look seriously at reviewing the praedial larceny laws, maybe making the fines a lot more stiffer [Desk thumping] and I am hoping that it is something that the Government would look at, where I am sure, I mean I have not spoken with the political leader, but I am certain that you would get the support of the PNM to do whatever it is to improve the protection of the farmers. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Chairman, just very quickly I want to say that there are some highlights in the budget that were very positive. I want to say that the issue of dropping the ADB loan rates, the issue of the mortgage—reducing of the mortgage—I think that there were a number of things that were very positive: the issue of scholarships for the underprivileged, the TTMF rates that were reduced, the VAT threshold for companies, the $50,000 construction subsidy. I just wanted to make sure that I mentioned that I think that a number of those things a number of the public were happy about.

But there are certain things that I think we need to look a little closer about, and one very quickly has to do with the Invader’s Bay. That is referred to on page 66 of the *Innovation for Lasting Prosperity*. Very quickly it talks about: “The 70 acre Invader’s Bay Waterfront area, located, about 1.6 kilometres from the Port of Spain City Centre will be one of the most significant urban development projects to be implemented.”

Now, Mr. President, the issue I want to raise here is that we have been reading, within the last couple of weeks, about a number of the contractors and people in the private sector complaining about being unhappy that they are being asked to complete this RFP in a six-week period. Now, you know what is unfortunate sometimes is you have a situation where a particular developer for whatever reason decided to give an interview to the newspaper that clearly has put the Government in a very difficult position. I do not know how many of the Ministers read that interview, but the impression that that developer gave was that he saw 19 Ministers, everybody was happy with his proposal and that clearly has put the Government in a difficult position, because when you read the interview you get the impression that he is conveying that they accepted, basically, what he is proposing. He talked about the cost, he talked about all the different things that he would do. Now that meant, the way he put it across, it appeared to me that several members of the private sector formed a particular view.

When the Government, therefore, says that you have to bring your RFP in a six-week period, clearly it has caused a big outcry in the private sector. All I could suggest is the Government, because this is probably one of the single most important projects that the Government will do, that they need to revisit this
decision that they have taken about only a six-week period for the RFP. As I said, they talked about listening to the people. This seems to be one of the most critical decisions they have taken.

**Hon. Senator:** It closed on October 4.

**Sen. P. Beckles:** It closed on October 4, but the bottom line is that you have a whole set of unhappy contractors. You have contractors that have clearly said this is probably the first project that we are actually seeing where it is going to create employment and we see a whole set of money actually is going to be invested to bring revenue, to turn around the country and to give them a certain measure of comfort that the Government is serious. Not only in terms of the project, but in terms of the issue of procurement.

Over the years that the PNM has been in office, you know that the PNM has been criticized for its supposedly lack of procurement policy. But not only that, the last government was criticized for the fact that we did everything through, what you call, these special purpose companies, whether it be Nidco, whether it be UDeCott, whether it be whatever it is, but, Mr. President, you would have seen that this Government has retained every single special purpose company that was started under the PNM including UDeCott. [Desk thumping] and [Crosstalk]

In the recent Clico matter they have created a further special purpose company which is NEL. [Interruption] But you see, Minister, remember that this is a matter you all criticized us on very heavily and you all have retained every one of those that you criticized. [Interruption] You see, what is even more challenging is the fact that the hon. Minister in a recent speech to the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, seemed to have literally blamed the private sector for the lack of economic growth in the country and I found it very novel, because this is what he said. He said that the private sector was not—he complained—stepping up to the challenge of economic regeneration. It is really an excuse, the fact that we are a risk-averse people and we are prepared to live on the profits of yesterday without attempting to create a new sustainability for tomorrow.

Now, the bottom line is, Mr. President, how many of us really are into taking risks? I sat here and heard people being accused of being greedy when they took risks. Whatever you say about Mr. Duprey, I hold no brief for him, but clearly he took a lot of risks. If it is that this Government is saying that the private sector needs to step up to the plate, when you step up to the plate it means to say that the Government has to give you that confidence, the Government has to do something that tells you listen, this is not a question where you are going to Arima and you are
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gambling, this is not horse racing, this is not a deal; as they say no deal or deal as you see on the television, this is a question where people have to put their hard-earned cash, and in a lot of instances it is millions, and it is sometimes billions of dollars. As a matter of fact this Invader’s Bay is something like?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Land value alone $1 billion.

Sen. P. Beckles: Land value alone $1 billion, so whoever is doing this investment you are talking about billions of dollars. So at the end of the day the hon. Minister of Finance was also talking to the chamber and saying, well, you know, when they were saying, well—I mean, you talked about economic growth, there has been no economic growth, which is what you projected.

You again projected economic growth. You talked about the fact that you have to go back with a deficit, you talked about the fact of inflation, but when you look at the Government’s performance and if you look at the Minister’s budget speech—and I must, at least, compliment the Minister of Public Utilities, because he came and accounted. Whatever little differences we may have, [Desk thumping] the point is, he accounted for his performance and so too did Minister Vasant Bharath. But at the end of the day—

Hon. Senator: And Minister Karim.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yes, and Minister Karim—the Minister of Finance did not account for his performance. He did not account for his performance. One of the things that he told us—well, in my humble view he did not—and he told the Chamber of Commerce is that he is operating with imperfect data.

Now, if as a Minister of Finance you say to the country that you are operating with imperfect data, what is the confidence, what is the message that you are sending to the public, to the private sector and to the foreign investors?

5.15 p.m.

You are saying, “Do not believe the figures”. I heard one of my colleagues talking about the figures being fudged—Sen. Al-Rawi. If you go and you make that kind of statement in the public domain, what is it that the public and private sectors are expected to believe? Some of them are, from my understanding extremely hurt by this.

Mr. President, how many minutes do I have left?

Hon. Senator: Finished!

Sen. P. Beckles: [Laughter]
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Mr. President: You need to wrap up.

Sen. P. Beckles: Okay. As I wind up, I just want to say that one of the shortcomings is the issue of the failure to say how they are going to generate revenue. I just want to make some quick suggestions. I want to suggest that one of the things that the Government should look at very closely is the issue of starting to charge lorry drivers and people who have all these large trucks, some sort of tax for using our roads.

Mr. President, you have travelled, the Minister of Public Utilities, National Security, Minister Verna St. Rose and many others—Comrade Abdullah and so, where you go you see in many countries, Canada and so on, you see the weigh scale there and you pass. If you are over that weight you cannot pass. And you have to pay your taxes. This Government in particular, is spending a lot of money improving the road infrastructure. Mr. President, it is something that I am going to ask them to give consideration to. Now that you are seeing some construction, you are going to see all these lorries, let them pay taxes and let them come and let us ensure that some of those roads that they are fixing do not mash up.

The last thing is the issue of looking very closely at one-stop facilities. Now, it is something that the PNM started in the rural communities, that people should be able to go there and easily get your birth paper, your driver’s licence, all these different kinds of absolute necessities in these areas that people will not have to keep coming into Port of Spain, and that is also a measure of collection. That is something that could be properly done under local government. I have looked through these books and I have not seen anything on local government, maybe I have not read properly, but local government is something I did not get an opportunity to talk about, but it is clearly one for reform.

Mr. President, I just want to close by saying to the Hindu community, Shubh Divali and to also wish them a very successful Divali. I hope we will have good weather so that we will be able see the lights, to see the deyas, and that the way that we have all been, the culture, the way that it is now part of Trinidad and Tobago that we will all be able to enjoy. Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development (Sen. The Hon. Verna St. Rose Greaves): Mr. President, as I stand in your presence, I invoke the spirit of my ancestors and I say the name of my community of Covigne. In so doing, I claim the succour and protection that I need to continue this very important work that I have been asked to do on behalf of the children and people of Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. President, I give thanks for the opportunity to address this Senate, and to address the beloved people of this beloved country. I also want to wish the Hindu community, and all of Trinidad and Tobago Shubh Divali, and may the light shine over the darkness. Through you I offer my sincere congratulations to the Minister of Finance for his work in overseeing the crafting of this important budget document, and I sincerely thank his team. [Desk thumping]

The title of the budget statement for me is instructive; “From steady Foundation to Economic Transformation, Safety-Jobs-Investment.” I have taken from that, that it is our job to invest in the security of this nation and that there is no greater security measure that we can take than investment in the human resource of our country. This is the most important job which takes us beyond economics and into the realms of sociocultural and other areas and aspects of integrative and sustainable development strategies that can assist us as a nation to take responsibility for our destiny as we move forward in fiscal 2012 and beyond.

The hon. Minister of Finance in offering up his budget speech spoke of some of the unfortunate things which mark us: the unsatisfactory levels of productivity, the insensitive customer care, social inequity, the lack of transparency, the recklessness in our financial sector and the harm that it has caused to the vulnerable people. Further, most, if not all, of my parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the Senate in their submissions alluded to, and spoke to and of a number of troubling issues: the complex nature of our problems, the many, many, many years of neglect, the uncertainties, the perceived insufficiencies, the contradictions, the accusations, the disappointment, the need as opposed to the wants and all of this in the middle of the greed. But really, how did we, as a nation get to this place; this place of fight and fear, this place of deep keloids, scars born out of sustained political wounding and decades of neglect; this place that seemingly now requires a budget in excess of $54 billion?

Mr. President, none of us can deny that the current situation in which we find ourselves has long been coming. Over the past several years it has become grim. The journey has been marked by escalating crime and violence and I do not even have to quote statistics because all of us know. There have been all colours of crime: white collar, blue, green, yellow, white, polka dot even. Children killed: Amy, Akiel, Sean, Permanand, Atean, so many of our dreams snuffed out. Bombings in Port of Spain, murders, kidnappings, disappearances like Marina Henry and Leah Lammy. Rape and incest, economic fallout, institutionalized violence, disrespect of our institutions and our office holders, high levels of unemployment, high rates of illiteracy—children who do not attend school or who leave school unable to read or to write—the collapse of services and service
delivery. It is everywhere. It is in health, welfare, water, transport, roads, bridges, sanitation, the environment. There are no safe spaces, not even our places of worship. Our hills, like our psyche, have been denuded, our landscape made ugly.

Mr. President, over the years we have found comfort with so much that it is ugly. We have found comfort that in the midst of our wealth, so many among us can go to bed hungry. Big buildings have taken precedence over maternity hospitals. Our women go into the hospital to have their babies and come out without their babies, or as corpses or some without their uterus. Maternal mortality is high as are neonatal deaths. Premature babies struggle for proper care and survival, as do their caregivers for equipment and equity; cerebral palsy, a transfer and function, not of a lack of oxygen but of a lack of caring. Poverty has escalated. Malnutrition and non-communicable diseases thrive. Thirty-three thousand school children with special needs left unattended over the years. Poor housing, overcrowding fuels family violence and so many are homeless.

Mr. President, we make a spectacle out of injury and tragedy, so that we do not even respect our dead. Our disrespect of dead bodies is equalled only by the way we hold our breath, as we step around our people who live in our city streets. Dead or alive we see and treat them as having no value. Even our architecture rejects them. No eves, no awnings for their shelter. We laugh as they are hounded out of town, run down like dogs because they stain our city streets with their filth and the blood of the passersby they harm.

Over the years we have found comfort with the deliberate destruction of our children by drugs and guns. We found comfort with herding them into large, half-day schools which we are not prepared to manage and in which there were no support systems. Schools where nobody knew or called their names, and they were not missed, even if they did not attend for an entire term. For many years, for so many children school has been a hostile environment, a place of torture, where they are told over and over how stupid they are and where their spirit is beaten down and out of them. Well they decided to fight back and we continue to reap the whirlwind.

It is sister Ella Andall who sang as a forewarning 14 years ago, “There is a missing generation out there. Who cares? Who cares?” Mr. President, we must all care. We as a collective, we as parents, we as teachers, must acknowledge that it is through our collective effort, or lack thereof, by our action or our inaction, that we have lost so many of our children. Some we prematurely deemed failures, others we lost to violence both as victims and as perpetrators. Many have given up the fight against a system which has rendered them invisible, relegating them to the ranks of the neglected, the excluded, the addicted, the imprisoned and the rejected.
We have seen the fallout of an education process which has nothing to do with place and without relationship to community. Even those who see themselves as having made it academically and may be lettered as they might be, lack a sound emotional centre. Some cry out to us through the barrel of their guns, others through their phallus, expressing their hurt and anger by hurting and harming others. Some take their own lives unable to escape from their prison of pain. Fast cars become weapons in their hands as they seek to assert control other something killing and maiming as they go. Others await liberation from the stranglehold of inappropriate love in the family. Mental wellness as a concept and a state of being evades so many of us.

Mr. President, we have found comfort and a hiding place with either saying, “Not my child”, because the problems has not as yet come home to our drive way or denying, “Not my child” even as it is dead on our doorstep. We have found comfort in the presents of racist expressions based on agendas to disenfranchise people whose names do not sound like ours, or who are perceived as not of our political persuasion, or to blame others for our shortcomings. Even more ridiculous, no matter what our ethnicity or party affiliation, the geography may be the deciding factor: Laventille, out; Enterprise, out; Toco, that too far; Covigne by Verna? No way! We have found comfort with the long-term neglect of rural communities, with a degradation of women, and more particularly, women who have sole responsibility for raising their children. The term “single mother” has become a label and an instrument of degradation and disempowerment, our self-righteous scorn masking our own troubled lives.

The print and electronic media, representations of our right to free speech, have used that right to abuse the rights of others. Our discussions, no matter how well intentioned, often degenerate into polarized positions of race or political partisanship. Sensationalism wins out over opportunities to teach and learn. We have found comfort in the insult of calling our offspring “barrel children”, even as breadwinners are forced to leave our shores in order to take care of their families. We have found comfort with rape and incest; befriending, celebrating, honouring and rewarding known and reported...
child molesters. Our children are abused, buggered and killed with impunity, stripping other children of their sense of safety and security.

Mr. President, it is evident that as a nation over the years, our responses have been insufficient. Expensive crime plans, foreign consultants, undercover operations with formidable names, high-rise buildings, and another expressions of uninvited phallic intrusion have not helped us. And if you were moved, anyone, to say that we are now here occupying this building, let me say that it would be spiteful to allow the people’s money to go to waste as the Red House, the President’s House, the Magnificent Seven and so many other things have been allowed to go. Expensive equipment, the cost of which could build and up keep several child care centres; oppressive and draconian laws have not helped us, and they will not save us. It is our investment in our children, it is our investment in our young people, it is our investment in our human capital which will save us. [Desk thumping]

Our despair is poignant and has drastically curtailed people’s ability to be civil; even our language and our interactions, our relationships with each other have become crass and disrespectful at almost every level in our society. The anger is palpable; to be mean is a badge of honour, even in saying good morning so many of us demand to get it back. As beautiful as it is, Trinidad and Tobago is a place where the killing of women is justified, especially if it is thought that she has been unfaithful. The rape of a young girl is justified because “she too hot”, and should dress better than that. Female leadership is devalued and maligned, even as we recite that the “hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” We have found comfort in a place where a young boy could be bullied into taking his own life because his sexual orientation was different. A mother, who is a grandmother, felt comfortable enough to call me on a television programme, to say to me that she would rather that her son be a murderer than to be gay, and that resonated so well with so many people.

Mr. President, although it might sound like it, I am not a prophet of doom and gloom, but I need to paint a picture to push us, to force us, even to look at ourselves. Not as we and them; us and them, not as blaming, but to look at ourselves as a people. There is a perception that this contrived level of comfort positions us as a nation of cowards, we are afraid to do something about what ails us; to get to the root of this long-festered life sore—this “so foot”. We are afraid of change—we are afraid of change, we are afraid to do things that will create change. Fear has gripped us by our bellies and by our balls. We walk in fear of ourselves, our truth and our children; we are afraid of our own power, because we do not understand it or know how to exercise it.
Our professionals for the most part are afraid to use their positions and their learning to diagnose, prescribe and intervene in ways that are fair and just. Money has become our mantra, materialism our god. We are in a place where we look to and for a martyr and a messiah, where ceremony takes precedence over substance, where leadership needs to be pampered and worshipped, rather than be truthfully, honestly and wisely informed. Proverbially, we are afraid to tell the emperor that he has no clothes. Sadly, when our leaders fall their failure is their own, and theirs alone. Collective responsibility goes out the window as we distance from them, denigrate and spit them out. We have living examples.

The Minister of Finance, in his delivery posed the question. “How do we fix the foundation”? It is a question that all of us need to ask and try to answer honestly and objectively. How do we fix the foundation? We fix the foundation by investing in our children; we fix the foundation by investing in our youth; we fix the foundation by investing in our human resource. [Desk thumping]

The Prime Minister, the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, understands this and that is why she has asked me to help the newly created Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, and I have been doing this for the past four months. Mr. President, I consider this appointment for me to be a mission, a mission to assist the Prime Minister in fulfilling the sacred trust—in fulfilling the sacred trust, with which she has been charged. I consider this appointment to be my mission to assist the Prime Minister in fulfilling the sacred trust with which she has been charged. I truly believe and trust—yes, I trust—that all things do work together for the greater good.

Mr. President, this new Ministry represents the Prime Minister’s commitment to gender equality, the rights of the child and youth development. I congratulate her for her foresight and the commitment she has given to ensure that this Ministry is properly resourced and supported in order to execute its mandate. People’s expectations are high even among the Opposition, some of whom have chosen to extricate themselves from the delay in the implementation of the gender policy, the delay in the children’s legislation and the exclusion of young people in charting their own destiny. Sadly, this is the nature of the politics, but I know that that too can change. I am hopeful because I know that they too understand the importance of the work which needs to be done, and the haste with which we need to do it. The work for the promotion of the equitable development and advancement of women and men, boys and girls is a noble task that stands before us as a Ministry, and one that we approach with a strong sense of commitment and determination.
Mr. President, the mandate of the Ministry represents the foundation of the human and social capital of Trinidad and Tobago. The portfolio is recognized and represented in a number of international conventions and agreements. The main ones being the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women—the CEDAW. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Programme of Action for Youth in the year 2000 and Beyond. My personal commitment to bringing the intentions of these conventions home and into the real lives of our people is underlined and driven by my own history.

My work and civic engagement locally, regionally and internationally in human rights, the women’s movement, the labour movement, social work, advocating for the rights of children and young people honours that commitment.

We at the Ministry are at this time actively involved in charting an unprecedented course to securing, for all of our citizens, real access to human development across the life cycle, literally from the womb to the tomb. It is our desire that every citizen would be equipped to attain their fullest potential, that they would be knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities, that they would be healthy, educated and able to form meaningful relationships that will shape the fabric of supportive families and resilient communities.

The word development is a misnomer, if it is not sustainable. Putting people at the centre of development is not simply a matter of balancing dollars and cents. It entails making progress equitable and broad based, enabling people at all levels of society to be active participants in change and ensuring that current achievements are not attained at the expense of future generations. [Desk thumping]

My father, now deceased, may he rest in peace, George Phillip Lynch, would organize our yard in a way that would demonstrate an understanding of sustainable development—sustainability. And it was not just him, it was a generation, people with a certain kind of understanding, that if they took a dasheen out of the ground, they would cut off the head and stick it back in the ground. And they did the same with cassava, and they used their land in ways that would allow for maximum benefit. The washtub would be placed at a place in the yard, so the water would go down both sides of the house, the drains would be unpaved because he needed that to feed the dasheen. One side of the house would be for the roots, the another other side would be for the leaves; because they understood how to organize themselves so that you would have food and you would have the best of what you need by the methods that you used.

We understood in a particular way—and some people might say that is not real, that when you went to cut down a bamboo stool, you never cut everything; or there
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was a ritual that you had to go through, because it expressed a kind of relationship with nature, a kind of respect. I can stand here and tell you that in this country today, we have children who are cutting down entire coconut trees to get the bunch of coconuts, because we did not take the time to teach them how to climb or how to collaborate so that they can get the fruit down. We have children who are cutting down entire balata trees because they want the fruit. And we have to start looking at those things when we are talking sustainability. Sustainability has to mean more than some clichéd words that you read in a report. We have to find real ways of teaching and passing on indigenous knowledge. [Desk thumping]

For us at the Ministry therefore, we see the budget as a process; a tool which if used correctly can help us in the reframing of the values which will brand, not just our Ministry but the many other Ministries and our society. This budget debate therefore, as part of the budget process, for me is an important conversation which we are having now and the first of many which we plan to have after the budget has been adopted and throughout fiscal 2012. This would allow for a proper assessment of how we have used our resources and to assist us in shaping the next phase of our growth path. It is for this reason that we are not perturbed by public perception of what is considered a small share of the budget. For us, it is not a question about the small size of the budget but how to use the allocation to maximum benefit. In shaping this conversation therefore, we need to bring all our parts of ourselves to the fore. To the table we must bring our psyche, our vision, our principles, our language, at the centre of which is the strategic role, which the Ministry has been chosen to play in this new policy framework.

Mr. President, we firmly believe that people must be encouraged to dream again. We need to dream again. And I want to say that I am so pleased with my Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Sandra Jones, and our staff, who have bought into that dream. We are excited; it is infectious. Everybody as they come into the Ministry is getting caught with it. So I want us to be able to help people dream again. As part of this conversation we want to share with the national community, our dream, a philosophy, a collaborative vision in which the Ministry will play its part. While for many this process of budget appears to be a technical exercise, it actually is quite multilayered for us, multifaceted and must be nationally owned.

5.45 p.m.

In its very foundation, it involves who we are as a people, the kind of nation we want to build—and you would have heard from the comments; when you look at where money is being spent and how it is being done, you understand where we want to go as a nation; the kind of citizen we need to shape; the things we need to do and the resources we have, and the need and how to share them. The people must
have a say in how the resources are distributed. You will notice, Mr. President, that I use the word “we”. I use the word “we” to signal the path that “we” must collectively direct to shape our nation and to take our people forward.

The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development has tailored its philosophical framework and strategic approach towards achieving the mechanisms outlined within the seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development in Trinidad and Tobago. This approach stands in accordance with the Government’s commitment to achieve progress for all. The principle of human rights is central to the core values of our Ministry—women’s rights and gender equality, the rights of the child and youth development and empowerment. Human rights are defined as basic rights and freedoms that all women and men, children and young people are entitled to, regardless of their sex, gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, language or other status; they are universal and egalitarian with all people having equal rights by virtue of being human.

A key role for the Ministry is that of being an advocate for the respect of the human rights of all citizens. Implicit in this role is a responsibility to educate the public on critical issues which may threaten their well-being.

Mr. President, it is understandable that we will have to assist the population in finding comfort with the human rights question. You know that when you talk human rights in Trinidad and Tobago, a lot of people seem to think it is a foreign concept and why you are bringing that here, and we let people get away with things about this human rights story.

We will need also to spell out for the society what gender is, and how we see and think about it, and how it needs to be applied. Most often, the perception is that gender, “that is a women thing” or with a long “steups”, “dem women again, what else they want now?” Thrown into the mix will be labels of man-haters; lesbians, women who cannot get a man far less keep one. Mr. President, I know the rhetoric well; been there, got that and then some. Of course, the issues of the marginalization and emasculation of men will arise, interestingly from women, but we will engage everyone around these complexities which can simplify our lives or around simple things that can make our lives complex. We want to aim for win-win situations; we must move away from this thing of “winners” and “losers”, “winner takes all”; that is not healthy for any society.

But, Mr. President, even if gender is indeed a “woman thing”, it is such a dismissive statement. The implication being that because it is a “woman thing”, it is not important. Mr. President, gender has to do with the social relations between
men and women, boys and girls; structural, familial and interpersonal, no matter how family and intimate relationships are organized. I repeat, gender has to do with the social relations between men and women, boys and girls; structural, familial and interpersonal, no matter how the family and intimate relations are organized.

Mr. President, when we look across the society, certain patterns of inequity can be identified where women are over-represented among the unemployed, the poor and in the welfare statistics, which is why, very often, redress is often focused on the provision of services for women. Thirty-two per cent of households are headed by single females; and many of these households are among the poorest in our nation. Fifteen per cent of live births are to teen mothers and many of these girls are not completing their basic education.

Annually, 86 per cent of the clients calling the National Domestic Hotline are women, 12 per cent are children. This amounts to approximately 3,500 clients each year who are in need of safe houses, counselling and other support services to cope with their difficult situation. Nine hundred and forty reports of domestic violence were made to the police in 2010—68.2 per cent of these were for assault by beating. The number of homicides due to domestic violence is second only to gang violence and is ghastly and atrocious. Women are being set on fire; eyes gouged out; they have been hanged, poisoned, chopped, shot. The high levels of the incidence of rape, including gang rape, is indeed horrifying.

Many years ago, I remember, in my capacity as a social worker and a community activist, working with young men and working with people who were victims, and we got to find out that when some of the troubled young men who were going out to commit these dastardly acts—which we condemn—they would recruit, and they would make sure that in that recruitment, there was one person who was infected with the HIV virus. That was the reality and that has been happening for a long time. We threw up the red flags, we did all kinds of things but we were not paying attention. In 2010, police received 215 reports of rape; 22 reports of incest; 158 reports of grievous sexual assaults and 278 reports of sex with minor females—14 years of age. Those are the ones that have been reported; we know that a lot of people do not report.

Men also experience critical gender issues and situations that will require the design, organizing and delivery of special services and programmes for them. A gendered approach must be taken to address or to boost the health-seeking behaviour of men even as they succumb to prostate disease, because homophobia feeds their fear of a medical examination thereby preventing early diagnosis and treatment. Understanding gender will help us to change skewed expressions of masculinity and femininity. So that the many men who do good and who are kind, and responsible, and caring are not seen by their friends or by some of us women as “mama poule men”—to be taken advantage of, to be abused.
Mr. President, men are dying younger than women with the life expectancy of 69 years compared to 74 years for women, and are seven times more likely to die due to homicides and vehicular accidents. Mr. President, our jails, our drug dens, early morning bar population, our street population speaks volumes of the situation of our men. A major concern to the Ministry is the apparent underperformance of boys in education at all levels except in technical/vocational education and training. We have a lot of work to do; and I keep the stress “WE”.

Mr. President, for many among us the budget is about money; for us, I say again, it is about giving value for money and what we plan to do with the money which the citizens of the country have afforded to us. Over the years, the financial needs of Trinidad and Tobago have been more than enough to ensure that our children and our women and all our people were adequately protected and cared for. The reality, however, is that this did not happen; “oil money come and oil money gone and Stalin and Dorothy still waiting.” It stands to reason, therefore, that while a lot more money may be needed, a lot more than money is needed.

Many studies have been done; glossy magazines published; many more international conventions and treaties have been signed. We have hosted summits and we have had “drums”. Many good intentions have been expressed; many a good word spoken; it is in implementation that we have fallen short and woefully so. We have failed when it came to taking action and making things happen. Over the years, the promises to the people have not been fulfilled. People are tired—they are tired of empty promises; they are tired of broken promises. We know that and we understand it; and we will try to keep our promises. We will try not to make promises that we may not be able to keep.

We will keep our promise, that on this land we will help to build a nation, not just a nation, but a just nation; respecting the environment and remembering that we are not the only people here from whatever group we belong. We will build a nation which honours and respects the rights of all citizens. We will build communities comprised of safe, secure and sustainable neighbourhoods where residents can live, work and play, free from fear and experience a better quality of life which honours and respects the rights of all citizens.

We will lay the foundation for gender equality and the nurturing of children and youths to take their rightful place in the global village with confidence, knowing that they are the product of a society where each generation builds on the past to shape the future, and it is underpinned by a value system that honours and protects its citizens. We will work to build citizen Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] We have asked the question of ourselves in the Ministry, what kind of nation do we want to build? What kind of citizen we need to raise to have that kind of society, and therefore, what are the things that we need to do to get that kind of citizen?
Mr. President, I have spoken about the gap between the promise and implementation. It is a gap that needs to be narrowed and it can be narrowed by putting specific structures of redress in place. Structures of redress that are envisioned and implemented at the level of need, not at the level of judgment; we are a very judgmental people. We intend to deliver, to walk the talk, placing our mandate at the centre of the day-to-day functioning of the Ministry. Gender is not the purview of our Ministry alone; it is not a separate phenomenon but affects all aspects of our daily lives. So too, it will be filtered throughout the work of various Ministries while being the particular focus and approach of this Ministry. We have already started preliminary discussions with several Ministries, and I have to say thanks and congratulate my ministerial colleagues for their receptiveness to some of our suggestions. They are willing to listen; they are willing to talk.

I know that Sen. Drayton had some concerns about the LIFE-SUPPORT programme, and I will not say, “Ask Anil”. We will work with the Ministry of Sport, and we will ensure that whatever we do, we will deal with issues of equity, empowerment, fairness, a just appropriation, and all the other things that you have been concerned about because those things concern us too.

6.00 p.m.

We will work with agriculture—because sometimes we do not recognize it, but the number of women who work in agriculture—and how so many poor women can have their economic situation improved, simply by getting involved in an agricultural project that does not take them too far away from home or far away from other things that they have to look after. We have to work with the Ministry of National Security. We have to work with community development. We have to work with housing and the environment.

We want to rationalize programmes. We want to harmonize programmes, because what happens in the public service is very often seven Ministries may be dealing with one family and the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. There is a lot of duplication of effort; a lot of resources that could be used more creatively are squandered because one person is doing it, another person is doing it and a third person is doing it and never will they meet. Part of our work at the Ministry is to find those places where they are already doing some of the things that we are interested in and partnering with them to see how we can do them more effectively.

Our philosophy at the Ministry and one that I would invite the national community to adopt, our approach to the work, is let us take a strengths approach. Let us take a strengths approach to whatever we do. Too often, we look at a
We want to ensure that services are nearer to people. So, we are screaming community, community, community. We have to move away from the city centeredness of what we do. What we will do at the Ministry, we want to be fed by communities so that we can plan and those things can go back to the community for their benefit. People must not have to leave their homes miles away, take four sets of transportation to come to us in Port of Spain. We must understand what it is to go into people’s communities to gain access, to be in place with people, so that they can understand that we are there for their benefit and that we can work with them in ways that are not threatening.

So, I know what a strong community can do, and sometimes people may find fault with me. Whenever I speak, I talk of my own community but it is because I understand what a strong community can do, especially in terms of your sense of self. My own sense of self and my own sense of security is not rooted in money or abuse of power, but in my sense of knowing who I am and being secure in that knowledge; a sense of self which, while it directs humility, rejects the need for me to stoop so that others can appear to be tall. It comes from my base and belonging in a community where I have a sense of ownership, not grounded in denying others, not grounded in beating up on people, but grounded in participating, protecting and maintaining my community.

My sense of security comes from knowing the unconditional love of my family and the support of a critical network of friends. It comes from my relationship to land, to security of shelter. It comes from having a voice and a location that is physical, emotional and spiritual; a loving legacy bequeathed to me by my godmother. [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. [Hon. E. George]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. V. St. Rose Greaves: Thank you, Mr. President. Thanks to the Senators of this honourable Senate for permitting me some more time. As I was saying, it is a loving legacy bequeathed to me by my godmother, Rhoda Daniel. She
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[S. H. O. N. V. ST. ROSE-GREAVES]

taught me about place, possibilities and magic and I am saying all of that to say that these are some of the things that we need to infuse into our communities, into our people, into our children.

Mr. President, I want to go straight to some of the priority areas that we want to treat with and communication, education and public awareness for consciousness-raising has to be at the top of our list. We have to do that urgently and we have already begun. Some of you may have noticed we have some little advertisements on the television, on the radio and in the newspaper asking: “Who is watching our children?,” because we want people to understand that all of us have a role to play. We want to do that, in terms of youth, because we have to get people to understand youth. We blame them. We castigate them. We get angry with them because for so many of us, we do not understand what that period is about in human development. Many of us forget sometimes that we were once young, so we have to do the education and the public awareness and we have to have ongoing conversations about a lot of things.

The question of HIV and AIDS is an area that we must treat with. It is a sexually transmitted infection but we refuse to have comprehensive sex education. We seem afraid of the word. Young people remain at the centre of the HIV epidemic, in terms of infection, vulnerability impact and the potential for change and we have to treat with the issue of HIV and AIDS. I do not believe that it is high enough on the national agenda and I think that we have to strengthen programmes. We have to implement programmes and, again, we have to go back to the communities to ensure that these things do happen.

We want to ensure that cultural and environmental literacy plays a big part in our programme. We have to get people to understand their histories, their communities, where their power lies and how to use those things in ways that can take them forward. Research and data collection is going to be critical to what we do, because we want our work to be driven by knowledge. We want our work to be grounded in the reality of people’s lives. We want to take what we get in academia and merge it with the streets so that we have the science and art of what we do, so that it will benefit all of us.

We need to establish a database of our children so that we know where they are throughout their life cycle. We want to discuss with the Minister of Legal Affairs, the question of having a unique identifier, so that our children can be tracked right through so that we know where they are, what they have been subject to, whether they have had their immunizations, whether they are diagnosed with anything and what treatment needs to be done. We have to get right into the communities and set
up family intervention centres, where we can do parenting support, homework centres and child care facilities nearest to the home.

On that question, we want our Ministry to walk the talk, so we are going to be treating our workers very well. We are going to ensure that our workers have child care facilities and breast feeding spaces. We will talk about flexi-hours for mothers. There might be ways that we can get mothers to work nearer home or to work at home. Those are things that we are looking towards, because as a caregiver I understand the importance of taking care of your carers.

We are talking with the Ministry of Housing, because we want to establish—in every housing settlement, we want to ensure that we have some of the services. We want access to some of the houses and the apartments, wherever they are, because inside there we believe every housing settlement needs to have intervention centres where we can do work, in terms of drug prevention, counselling and whatever else needs to be done.

We have to organize our communities for care. We have to organize people in the communities to care. You hear people saying very casually: “I do not care, I do not care”, but that is not true, people do care. Even when they complain, they complain because it bothers them and they care. We have to deal with that and we also have to ensure that people who are trained—what has been happening over the years is that there have been many programmes offered and for people who take those training, sometimes you have one person who would have had 12 different modules of training but remain unemployed. We want to take people who are trained on the basis of community needs and attach them to the community to do the work that needs to be done, and that needs to be backed up with volunteerism and volunteer projects where we know our youths are going to play a tremendous role in sustaining a vibrant and caring volunteer programme. We recognize the potential of youth and we want to make full use of that.

Our children’s legislation—we are at the cusp of bringing the package of children’s legislation to the Parliament. We are about to begin having consultations around the Marriage Act, but we will not let that stop us from doing what needs to be done. That is an area that I think at a national level, we need to have some discussions on, because there are implications for how we prosecute people, because we prosecute people for having sex with a minor, a girl under 14, or a boy under 16, but our Marriage Act allows for marriage of girls 12 and 14 and 16. I think those are conversations that we need to have as we move forward.

The Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) legislation is coming. We have not started to deal with the real, real problems that we would have with DNA legislation and it is
not just about crime fighting. It is about our cultural ways of living and having children and of so many of our children not really knowing their bloodline and what will happen if we do not treat with those kinds of conversations. We are going to have some very difficult conversations, but they are very necessary.

We want to have a centre for healing because we are wounded; lots of hurt, lots of trauma. The school district in Port of Spain alone has 1,400 students who have actually witnessed violence and have lost somebody close to them, murder, gun violence or whatever it is, and so many other things.

We have to deal with racism. We have to get to the core of this thing. We have to have that conversation. So, we want this centre of healing that would allow us to have those conversations and to treat with some of those old wounds that we carry around that are burdensome to the spirit and saps our positive and beautiful energy.

I want to touch very quickly, before I take my seat, on some of the development programmes, the construction of three safe houses at least to accommodate victims of violence and other gender-based violence. I talked about the establishment of the healing institute. We want to have some respite centres where women and men experiencing distress within families can find emotional, physical and a space just to move away temporarily and to receive some kind of support before they go back, if they decide to go back in.

We want a transitional centre, which we will build for men, especially perpetrators and batterers who, by order of the court, may have to leave their house, based on a protection order. There is the refurbishment of our youth training centres, the refurbishment of our children’s home and the upgrading of our children’s facilities. We have to build a new facility for the Credo House Project. We have to treat with the St. Jude’s Home for Girls and a reception and recreation area at St. Dominic’s Children’s Home. Our children’s homes need some attention. We have had too many reports, too many fallouts, all kinds of commissions of enquiry, but still we have so many problems there.

6.15 p.m.

I know, again, Sen. Drayton was asking about an assessment for a transitional home for children. Well, the assessment is really about how do we design, based on the needs which we have found that the children may need.

So we are paying attention and we are open, we are facilitating a process, we want persons to come to us and tell us what they want, what they do not agree with, we have an open-door policy. This is our country, these are our children, we have
the resources to be a vibrant nation, we have had them for a long time, but what have been our priorities, and we need to prioritize what is important to us and to bring them to the fore. We cannot continue the way that we have been going.

At the Ministry we see ourselves as a catalyst for change, it is our desire that every citizen be equipped to attain their fullest potential; that they would be knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities; that they would be healthy, educated and able to form meaningful relationships which will shape the fabric of supportive families and resilient communities. We have missed too many opportunities; we cannot continue to peddle hate and fear and mistrust. We can destroy as many guns as we want, unless we destroy the bad blood which flows among us and between us, our situation will not change.

In closing, I steal from a document which I received from a friend a few days ago, it says:

We are not separate, the physical from the spiritual, the sacred from the secular, the material from the cosmic, the poetic from the mundane; these are all interconnected in the same way that we are connected to... earth, to land, to sea; these are the same energies that flow through to all living things...”

What has been separated must be brought back together. Each of us must commit to take the first step.

Mr. President, as I rest my voice upon the altar, I invite all of us and the national community to take the first step.

I thank you. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Transport (Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for allowing me the opportunity to join in this very important debate on the budget 2011/2012. Before I begin, there is an old saying that I am sure all of us are familiar with: ingratitude is worse than witchcraft.

Before I begin, I should like to express my gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for appointing me to the Senate of the Republic, and appointing me a Minister of Government. [Desk thumping]

This is a new Ministry, only four months old, and yet we have managed to achieve a number of accomplishments, but I build upon the work done by the previous holder, and I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Jack Warner for the work done. [Desk thumping]
I should also like to commend the hon. Winston Dookeran, the Minister of Finance, for preparing what I think is a most brilliant piece of financial work as revealed in this budget. It is supplemented by the Medium-term Policy Framework document among other documents which really flesh out the budget 2011/2012.

Earlier in this debate, there was a discussion about courtesy by the hon. Sen. Beckles, as she spoke about the staff at the Parliament and the tremendous work which they did. I would like along with others to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Parliament staff, because I came here with Minister Moonilal three weeks before the opening, and I saw a raw, naked state and I did not think, like Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George, that it was possible for this raw state to be transformed, but I was surprised, they did a fantastic job, and they should be commended. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Beckles spoke of courtesy—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emanuel George): Mr. President, I beg to move that this sitting continue until the conclusion of the speeches by the speakers listed to speak after Sen. Devant Maharaj, that is: Sen. Moonan, Sen. Abdulah, Sen. Moheni, and the wind up by Minister Dookeran.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Thank you very much. [Desk thumping] In another debate Sen. Al-Rawi spoke of the fact that we here are exemplars and the nation is looking at us, and I say that in the light of what—as a new Senator to this honourable Senate—I considered very disappointing last night, when Senators I think were very vicious and callous and exhibited callousness of character, mean-spiritedness of the soul, and it did not show courtesy last night. But then, courtesy was not extended to the Speaker of the House when a state of emergency was declared, and that Speaker was put under house arrest; Sen. Beckles was part of that administration, courtesy was not extended at that point in time. Courtesy was not extended, I think it was 18 or 19 months ago when a leader had to be spirited away from Balisier House, while an SUV was being stoned. What can you say?


Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Every time it is mentioned that Parliament had been relocated to this tower, Tower D, the cry from the Opposition was, this
PNM-built edifice, and we are somehow seeking a lodging here, as if there is a Balisier flag planted somewhere, on top or below. What we were not told is that this building, used only for the CHOGM in 2008 or 2009, I believe, was vacant between that period to 2011.

We were not told that Towers D and C cost this country $1.3 billion and $42 million to outfit. We were not told that—I am a resident in this building, the Ministry of Transport is located on floor 23 of Tower D; and for the last two weeks this brand new building, never been used before, the elevators have not been working for the last two weeks; that is what $1.3 billion under PNM management cost this country.

We were not told that in this brand new building, never before used for the last three-quarter years, that on floor 23, where there are still empty desks and chairs, as the Ministry is transitioning, the ceiling is leaking. The ceiling is leaking! So they say with boastful pride about this edifice which they have built and they staked their Balisier [Pounds the desk] flag on it; let us also give them the credit for the elevator which is not working, and the ceiling [Interruption] that is leaking. You know what we have to do? We have to—what the management of this building has to do?—put two security guards in the elevator to push the button for you to go up and down; that is what [Interruption] we are reduced to, to have individuals in that level [Interruption]—that is the result of it.

Sen. Deyalsingh is speaking about—[Interruption] no it is relevant—we should hang a picture of the late Leo Des Vignes here. I agree with him wholeheartedly [Desk thumping] however, the voice of the Opposition for the last 10 years has been calling for a commission of enquiry for 1990. He wants to hang a picture of Leo Des Vignes when the reason why Leo Des Vignes’ picture has to be hung in the first place was ignored by the PNM! Was ignored by the PNM! [Desk thumping] That is hypocrisy—[Crosstalk] [Interruption]—never supported a commission of enquiry into the 1990 but you come in this Parliament to be hypocritical to hang a picture of Leo Des Vignes. [Desk thumping] Let us deal with the reality! Deal with the reality!

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** UNC was in power for seven years, why you did not have it then?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** Mr. President, let me turn to the budget debate. No budget debate can be successful if taken in isolation; the Opposition continues to try and take credit for all the successes this Government has realized. We have heard from speakers on the other side how many things which were completed by this Government were started by the PNM. What we fail to hear from them is how many ills we have inherited as a result of the PNM foundation.
When Sen. Nicole Dyer-Griffith spoke of Kenny Da Silva and what he achieved under NCC they all thumped their desks, and laid claim again with a “next” Balisier flag that Kenny Da Silva was a PNM chairman. When we spoke of Calder Hart, no one desk thumping, nobody claimed Calder Hart. “Why yuh did not claim Calder Hart equally? You only want to claim Kenny Da Silva!” [Desk thumping] [Interruption] [Crosstalk] Your smoke and mirrors have fooled so many people at this point in time—

Sen. Deyalsingh: What about Ish and Ferguson?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—and speaking about the flag that they are planting, Mr. President, I wonder if our national flag—because I am told that they are wearing national colours now, they have abandoned and jettisoned the Balisier tie.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Raise the standard!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I wonder if our national colours have changed, because Sen. Deyalsingh is wearing pink, white and black. I do not know [Desk thumping] is the Balisier, is that—[Desk thumping] [Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Good point; that is solid. Is that what we have come to? Solid stuff.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: What we have had for the last 10 years under the PNM administration was a decade of decadence, a decade of squandermania. Those on the other side are comparing the last nine years of PNM squandermania with one year of this Government’s rule. What you have failed to achieve in nine years you want us to achieve in one year, as they has cited, Sen. Deyalsingh has cited the CSO. He wanted the CSO to be an independent institution. For the last nine years, when they were in office the CSO was part of the Ministry of Planning, it was all right then, now that they are in Opposition they “get bright”. It appears that being in Opposition inspires intelligence, so perhaps they should stay there, because they now have all the solutions.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Dr. Tewarie, are you associating yourself with that?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: You must remember that in addition to driving this country forward we first have to unravel the defective systems which the PNM entrenched in our Ministries and state enterprises. I said systems very consciously there and not people, because both Sen. Hinds and Sen. Beckles alluded to the fact somewhere that the People’s Partnership Government has something against public servants. I think they even alluded to the fact that MP Volney said something or the other during this debate.
But who else targeted public officers than the PNM, who else can deny that? Let me call the names of Feroza Ramjohn; Gangal Persad Kissoon; Marlene Coudray; Carmel Smith and myself. Public officers have been targeted under the PNM, their careers were torpedoed and stymied and they were frustrated into resignation or just beaten down.

6.30 p.m.

Carmel Smith had to go to the Privy Council for judgment. She is now the Senior Secretary to the Minister of Transport—I have hired her. Why was Carmel Smith targeted? I am very familiar with this case. Carmel Smith was targeted because she was a good public officer. Here was a lady who worked under Eric Williams in the Ministry of Finance that is to tell you her lineage in the public service. Why was she targeted? Because when the PNM Board entered National Lotteries Control Board headed by Louis Lee Sing, now Mayor of Port of Spain, they found that she worked too efficiently with the then UNC Board. They looked all around to try to find a reason to get rid of her. They suspended her with full pay. She was on full pay suspension for nearly a decade. And for what? What was the trumped-up charge that they ended up using against her? The board brought a car for her while she was getting maintenance for her own personal car which she took a loan for.

This is the type of victimization and spite that they visited on public officers who, they felt, did not share their world view, and they have the hypocrisy to come here today to say that People’s Partnership Government is targeting public officers. I think it is a ludicrous. An accurate outline of any budget presentation and what it proposes can never engage in seclusion, particularly without reference to the former budget, the budget before that or even the budget before that. This is particularly so since an annual budget is merely a subset of the State’s wider initiatives and holistic tactical plan for governance.

I make this point because the budget projections for 2012 were portrayed in a deceptive manner by the Opposition. It is clear that they have not evaluated the performance of their budgets over the last nine years. I think only upon examination of that they would see the true meaning of the word “deceit”. They have attacked and criticized the Point Fortin Highway, but their cut-and-paste budget for the last 10 years under the PNM had the same Point Fortin Highway. For the last 10 years the PNM had saddled us with “pie in the sky” budgets, full of big words and grand plans to fool the citizens, believing that there was some promised land, trying to reach that dream through a thick glossy document called the 2020 vision.
They think people of Trinidad and Tobago are foolish. One leader in Chaguaramas told the population that Trinidadians cannot handle two elections in one year. This is how simple-minded they think the citizenry is. Sen. The. Hon. Dr. Tewarie indicated he was part of a subcommittee too. I was also invited to be on a subcommittee and after attending two meetings. I realized that those subcommittee meetings were shams to engineer artificial consultations to put up a PNM document. We saw similar artificial consultations with the smelter. They brought down people for consultations and excluded large sections of the population from that consultation.

However, just to share a bit about the Ministry of Transport, what we intend to do; the Ministry of Transport is faced with a number of challenges:

- the vital importance of passenger and freight transport in creating an enabling economic growth and providing access to markets for goods and services;
- the complex challenge of meeting an increasingly educated population’s expectations of high quality transport while taking into account environmental well-being;
- considerable pressures from the financing of transport projects given our present economic climate;
- the additional challenges faced by growing urbanization, demographics as well as an aging population.

In light of these, the Ministry of Transport, based on our budgetary allocations in this fiscal year, plans to approach transport issues taking into consideration the following factors:

**Equity:** by taking into account the needs of those segments in our society whose access to opportunities is limited as a result of income, disability, geographic location, and so on.

**Safety:** by recognizing a number of road accidents in Trinidad and Tobago is woefully unacceptable.

**Security:** by ensuring our ports and access routes are secured.

**Urbanization:** by working with other Ministries so as to ensure different modes of transport are available to cope with the constantly expanding cities and town centres.
Technology: by promoting the best practices in transport and technology so as to improve in reliability, access, safety, environmental performance and connectivity.

Some of those areas that we intend to focus on: development, include but not limited to, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. It is very ironic that Sen. Deyalsingh said that the airport in underutilized. I find it very strange. My reports from the board, the staff at the airport, said that the capacity now at the airport is growing close, we need to expand, but I am not surprised. Under this Government—many projects that were started by the PNM were left in limbo, because they saw that the airport was a UNC airport, so the projects that were started that needed to be completed in order to achieve efficiencies were not attended to as if it was to treat with spite, that edifice, because they alone were allowed to build edifices.

This Government in an effort to develop the airport so that thousands of our citizens are made safe and comfortable we have in the last year refurbished the main car park tollbooth at the Piarco International Airport, and everyone would have seen that. [Desk thumping] We plan to supply, install and commission three enhanced whole baggage scanners at Piarco and one at the ANR Robinson International Airport. [Desk thumping] This project reaffirms this Government’s commitment to securing our borders.

Most recently you would recall that almost $22 million in cocaine was confiscated at Piarco International Airport, and this was a prelude to some $30 million in marijuana which was found at PLIPDECO. So when the Opposition goes around saying that this Government is not interested in securing our borders the facts prove otherwise. There was a faulty electrical system that was left to linger under the PNM for the last 10 years to give the impression that the airport was dysfunctional, and the state of the airport’s electrical system before 2010 was a source of serious concern, with a likelihood of a disaster on the horizon. Right now we have attended to that.

This Government saw the need for recognizing our heroes and, as a result, earlier this year, former Prime Minister/President ANR Robinson was formally recognized with the renaming of the Crown Point International Airport to the ANR Robinson Airport. [Desk thumping] For this fiscal year the Government intends to rehabilitate the ANR Robinson Airport runway and upgrade the perimeter road and fencing. This project is expected to be completed by November this year. When we finish this project an upgraded runway and improved taxiways and new runway edge lights would be seen at that airport.
We intend to continue the installation of the airfield lighting and control monitoring system, approach airfield lighting at Piarco International Airport, continue the development of the airport by embarking upon infrastructural works for the North Aviation Business Park. This park will hold the Meteorological Services Complex at the airport and the Airport Hotel Conference site. Expansion of the works to the ANR Robinson International Airport will also continue further developing and addressing the demands at that international airport. So when the Minister of Finance said outside of the budgetary allocation for Tobago, there are other things in the budget for Tobago, this is what he was talking about. [Desk thumping]

These are ongoing projects and they would be completed some time in 2012. The new projects that we intend to start include the perimeter fence lighting cabling, among others. They said in their analysis of the budget we are borrowing and borrowing, but they never indicated to us, why did we reach at this stage? At the previous debate where we raised the borrowing limit nobody attempted to analyze that we reached the borrowing limit because of the PNM administration’s borrowing practice. So while we were awash with cash, the PNM was borrowing at the same time. So therefore, from October 2009 to September 2010, we saw a contingent liability of $478 million at the Airports Authority. This money was taken as loans under the PNM.

Now if you look at some of the construction projects that went on at the Airports Authority under the PNM administration you would have an appreciation of why these cost overruns were so high. In the construction of the local food court, Belmer Construction Limited ranked fourth in the technical evaluation, yet they won the contracts for the works. No evaluation for the financial proposal can be found up to this day. Quantum Construction had the same score as Belmer in the technical evaluation and a lower tender sum, yet Belmer won the contract. The contract sum was initially in the vicinity of $10 million but Belmer Construction was paid in full, $18 million, for the food court construction. This is an 80 per cent increase from the original price. I am told by those in the construction industry that a variation is normally 10 per cent, not 80 per cent, but that is PNM economics, that is how PNM budgets.

Some money was spent to purchase a foreign-used inverted umbrella canopy used previously by the Millennium Dome in the UK to cover the food court. It cost the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago an additional half a million dollars for the doubles vendors. I am sure if you go to Penal, the famous Goocharan Trace and you give them half a million dollars “they could buy umbrella from Debe to Penal to Siparia and still have change”, but PNM spent half a million dollars for
three doubles vendors at the airport. The foreign-used umbrella canopy that they purchased from the UK “leaking up to now” and, of course, they would blame the UNC for this.

The construction of the food court was scheduled to be completed in six months. “You know how long it took?” Three years! Three years it took but $18 million, an 80 per cent variation, why not? As Sen. Hinds is wont to say “All ah we ha to eat ah food.” Who was eating? No contract for the design and supervision of the local food court has yet been found, yet the amount of $0.8 million was paid to Reynolds Associates. No contract could be found between Belmer Construction and the Authority. Reynolds Associates rings a bell, Mr. President? Somebody sending emails to the Chairman of UDeCott. One can only imagine what happened in the office of the Airports Authority on May 25, why these contracts could not be found.

In fact, in a letter dated May 14, 2007, Foster Inniss (Trinidad) Mechanical Services Engineering Consultant wrote the Airports Authority concerning the bids for the local food court construction and pointed out and I quote directly:

However it occurred to us that three other bids seem abnormally close to each other. We see something wrong here with the system and I hope that in future you will do whatever you can to correct this leakage of information.

What is implied in this? That somebody inside the airport was telling friends and family outside that “these are the figures to bid at; come in at that.” And then they would come and tell the “fella”: “I make you win the contract so handle meh a little bit”. This is why we are in the condition we are in. That might have to land up in the Integrity Commission.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. President, I would like to turn your attention now to another area of transport that falls under the Ministry, the water taxi, and this really is a rape on the Treasury.

In 2008, the PNM government bought the HC Katia, the HC Milancia, the HC Olivia at a cost of approximately US $5.5 million and the Su at cost of €2.678 million.

Sen. Karim: We will sue the Su.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: The Su never sailed a day. It cost us close to TT $26 million without sailing a day; the four other boats are parked up somewhere in Chaguaramas; I think they are trying to sell them but nobody wants them.
After that Nidco purchased four new 41-metre water taxi vessels at a cost of $281 million from Austal Shipbuilders.

**Sen. Karim:** --An American academy cudda be here.” That is UTT or what?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** This, after Austal was also awarded a contract to design and build six vessels for the coast guard. When you look at the Austal website it is very clear that Austal had never designed or built these types of interceptors which they sold the coast guard, yet they got the contract to build those coast guard vessels. This is the same company that Nidco contracted for the water taxis.

After that NIDCO signed a contract with Hornblower Marine Services to operate the water taxies at a cost of US $45,000 per month—US $45,000 per month—

**Hon. Senator:** The water taxi.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:**—and this does not include the cost of managers’ salaries, apartment rentals, travel cost per diem for external hires, and to summarize the cost associated, $70 million for the cost of the water taxis—

**Sen. Karim:** That is the QE2; that is not the water taxi.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** The Hornblower Marine Services $10 million, the first four water taxis, $57 million, the second set of water taxis $281 million, but when you add all up it is close to half a billion dollars for the water taxi service, and what is our operating expenditure added on to that sum cost? $48 million per annum.

Our revenue, based on how many persons use the water taxis up and down, is $5 million per annum. So, we are spending $48 million to operate it, but getting $5 million in return.

The subsidy for passenger is $115 one way. The subsidy from Trinidad to Tobago on Caribbean Airlines is $50, so the subsidy is cheaper—we should probably open an airport in south, the subsidy would be cheaper.

**Sen. Karim:** We should use seaplane now then.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** I turn now to VMCOTT. In this fiscal year we plan to continue to upgrade facilities at Beetham, San Fernando and Tobago, possibly expanding the services of VMCOTT to the wider public because they could probably address fleets of large companies because there are specialties in there. But what was VMCOTT being used for under PNM?
Sen. Karim: Spy equipment from Israel.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: One hundred and thirty million in spy equipment”

Sen. Karim: Take them to the Integrity Commission man.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: They were supposed to be fixing engines with diesel and gas, they buying spy equipment.

Sen. Karim: Israel, a holy place.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, I could go on but I would like to turn to another issue that is fairly recent, coming up in this debate that I think really is an assault on the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago. It was raised here by the Attorney General earlier, and mention was made on the opposite side, regarding the scholarships, the PNM slush fund, which is on today’s front page of the Express, “$15 million missing”. It is an attack on our democracy because this issue of this slush fund—I refuse to call it a scholarship—was raised in the Senate in the last session by then Sen. Wade Mark, he was denied an answer by the PNM government and they have the audacity to say in this debate that we do not answer questions.

And having heard Sen. Mark’s appeal to get the information and having heard the vicious manner in which it was shot down, I decided at that point in time to file the same Freedom of Information request to stop it outside in the public. I got it in December 2009, and I read from the Hansard here of Tuesday, December 1, 2009. I am quoting Sen. Mark:

“…I raised a question in this Parliament on scholarships and nobody could have supplied me with answers. It was a secret. Lo and behold, I saw in the newspaper today a full exposé, and I got today, one fat file …but I get a fat file—with almost 200 pages of all the names of the people this government refused to give…, but you know what? The same Freedom of Information Act that was quoted by the hon. Minister at that time to justify the lack of disclosure is the same Act …used to give Devant Maharaj all the information.”

Sen. Mark went on to lament—and I could still read the pain to use the parliamentary term—that a stranger to the Parliament could have gotten the information that the parliamentarian did not get using the same Act that was used to deny him.

Sen. Karim: Keep it quiet “eh”.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: It is quiet. But the Opposition in their usual smoke and mirrors style has attempted to besmirch this report, and I read from the cover of the Equal Opportunity Commission’s response to me, and it says in a letter dated October 7, 2011:
I refer to your Freedom of Information application dated October 4, please find an attached original copy of the report of the Equal Opportunity Commission dated July 19, 2011 pursuant to your complaint lodged with the Commission.

It says “report”, it does not “draft report”, “preliminary report”, “penultimate report”, this is the “report.”

Under the Freedom of Information Act, section 34, if I am not mistaken, if you lodge a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission and it is without merit, without basis, they dismiss it; they write you and tell you it was baseless and they dismiss it. If they do not, it goes to the next stage, conciliation.

So, once it goes to conciliation it is implied, it is inferred that there is basis that some degree of discrimination has taken place, and that is the stage where this is at now, it is at conciliation but there is the suggestion that this is a report that is pending an active investigation, and therefore somehow has to be altered. This report is not to be altered the conciliation is to work out how they will redress my aggrieved rights which were trampled upon by the PNM, and in their wont to try to infuse discussions on race, they attempted to ascribe that the hon. Prime Minister suggested that there was a 7 per cent of East Indians that got the scholarship. The Prime Minister did not say that, the Prime Minister quoted directly—and I wish to repeat that—directly for the Equal Opportunity Commission report, and I quote directly here. They said in paragraph 73:

“Applying firstly the “but for” test…”

And that is a test in law—

“the information obtained by the commission reflects that approximately 7% (about 47 persons) receiving scholarship grants were of East Indian descent.”

The Prime Minister did not say that, but this issue of race with regard to this is a distraction by the PNM. There has never been any attempt by myself when it was first revealed to introduce that, because it is an affront to every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, not only one ethnic group. [Desk thumping] This was an affront to every single citizen because none of us knew about it, none of us knew about it, even those in the PNM who were not friends with the leadership at that point in time did not know about it.

Sen. Karim: “Please keep it quiet.”

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Sen. Deyalsingh was not even in the 7 per cent that got, he was not even in the 7 per cent. [Laughter] You had to belong to a
particular clique in the PNM. Sen. Beckles at that point in time, I do not know, you were not in the clique.

**Sen. Karim:** There was a cabal there.

**Sen. Beckles:** You are sure?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** “Well I doh know, I am seeing some people from Arima get it.”

**Hon. Senator:** A cabal.

**Sen. Beckles:** Not me.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** But let us hear some of the names because this thing was politically inspired. I have here names receiving some of the scholarships that I picked out. You have then Sen. Laurel Lezama—Lee Sing getting over $400,000 or $500,000 in scholarship money—when the cap was $25,000 “eh”—to study law.

**Hon. Senator:** “Who is she father-in-law?”

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** Her father-in-law is Louis Lee Sing, the mayor whom they appointed, and she did not even graduate. You get half a million dollars and you cannot produce a law degree.

**Sen. Karim:** Which university is that?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** University of Westminster in the UK, and that is the person whom they put up over Sen. Beckles to go up in Arima, no wonder she lost. *[Laughter]* No wonder she lost.

**Sen. Karim:** “You sure is the University of Westminster or the Abbey?”

**Hon. Senator:** Or where?

**Sen. Karim:** The Westminster Abbey.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** Some of the others who got—and look how they infiltrated the media, they attempted to buy them off—Curtis Williams, Executive Producer at State-owned CNMG—$81,000!

**Sen. Karim:** To study what?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** Jerome Lewis on their mouth-piece 1.95, he got a scholarship to pursue journalism. Odeka O’Neil another 1.95 announcer got a scholarship. “Lee Sing handled he people good—daughter-in-law, friend, family, everybody get”. Joel Primus, PNM candidate for Fyzabad.
Hon. Senator: Serious?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Former Senator, he got too; he was in clique, not you.

Sen. Karim: “All yuh go down cabal boy.”


Sen. Karim: No relative of mine.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: These people, if they had any sense of decency, especially Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing, should pay back the money! Nobody has ever asked the question up to now, what is the Ministry of Culture giving out scholarships for? I thought it was tertiary education and public administration, but that is what they did.

Sen. Karim: They signed any agreement?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Sen. Beckles talked about what they had in GATE, that Minister Karim was being less than truthful.

Hon. Senator: No, no, we would never say that, none of us said that.

Sen. Beckles: No. [Inaudible] I said I gave the policy.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: She gave the policy but you know what, Mr. President, this slush fund had a policy too. This slush fund had a policy which they ignored, so I do not know that they would have ignored a policy on this side here and adhered to a policy on that side there; I do not trust them. The PNM is not to be trusted. By their own actions here we have signed memos from the then Prime Minister—“assist this one, handle this one quietly, keep it down.”

Hon. Senator: They discriminated against their own PNM people? [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: There is rise to another thing with this. [Inaudible] [Laughter] Mr. President, there has long been a suspicion in this country that under the PNM, SAUTT had some sort of suspicious relationship, that was the call. Here we have something that may give us an idea, an Adana Joseph wants to study, BA in Public Relations Education at Mount St. Vincent University.

Sen. Beckles: The father said no, you know.

Sen. Deyalsingh: The father said no.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I have a document signed here by the Ministry where it indicates very clearly that Adana Joseph of Macqueripe, Chaguaramas—[Interruption]
Sen. Al-Rawi: “Say it outside so at least he could sue and get a little money nah, please.”

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—right, and who has a father indicated as Brigadier Joseph, four brothers—one employed, one going to TTP—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Just step outside the door.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Two going to school. And there is a signed note from then Prime Minister saying, “Please assist”.

Sen. Beckles: Yes, but did she get it?

Sen. Deyalsingh: But she got it?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: There is a cheque for $25,600—

Hon. Senator: Okay!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—$25,000; so unless there is a massive conspiracy between officials—the same public servants you are praising up—the Ministries of Community Development and for gender affairs are conspiring with the political directorate to forge documentation—then we will have to assume that the documentation that we find there is truthful; unless that is what you bought the Israeli spy equipment via VMCTT for, to forge documents.


7.00 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: This implies that there was some sort of suspicious relationship between the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) and the political directorate.

Mr. President, it is approaching seven o’clock and I know that we still have a number of speakers to go. In the interest of time, for the budget debate to continue in a timely manner, I thank you for allowing me to contribute.

Mr. President: Before you start, Sen. Moonan, I am told Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj made his maiden speech here tonight and I would like to congratulate him.

Hon. Senator: And also, Sen. The Hon. St. Rose Greaves.

Mr. President: Sorry about that omission, Sen. St. Rose Greaves.

Sen. Beckles: In this term; but still. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Rabindra Moonan: Thank you very much, Mr. President.
Hon. Senator: “And don’t call men name again eh.” [Laughter]

Sen. R. Moonan: I take this opportunity to join in this 2012 budget debate. I congratulate, first of all, my Naparima College colleague, Winston Dookeran. I deliberately say Naparima College colleague because for the entire afternoon we have been hearing about Presentation College. The manner in which they spoke here, you would realize that not all of them got their first choice at Common Entrance. [Laughter]

Let me be gracious, Mr. President. This year at the CAPE examination, Naparima College got 33 Island Scholarships and our brother rivals in San Fernando, although barely getting nine scholarships, got the President’s Medal. We congratulate Presentation College in Chaguanas. It tells you that the brightest schools are in the south and central.

Sen. Beckles: The brightest people come from south.

Sen. R. Moonan: Be that as it may—and Sen. Beckles is from south—I, too, in the interest of time, would want to cut my contribution to as close to 30 minutes as is possible.

This year’s budget presentation has heralded a major shift from traditional budgets because for the last number of years we have been accustomed to an arithmetic budget and that is why tonight we heard from Opposition Senators only speaking about arithmetic because that is what they were accustomed to: expenditure, revenue and how you tax people to get the revenue to spend.

This budget has gone into a new philosophy, a philosophy of growth and of people’s participation. We spoke of a People’s Partnership and this is a real People’s Partnership where we engage every sector of the society in planning the way forward for Trinidad and Tobago.

It was said earlier that the budget is a process and we do not take this year’s budget in isolation, as we seem to have heard from a number of the speakers here this afternoon on the other side. They look at it in isolation. We started last year. We continue this year and next year we will tweak those things that need tweaking for the development of this country.

I say that to tell you the effect of this budget. The morning after the budget, the headline screamed, from the TTMA, from the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, from a number of people throughout the country; they screamed on the morning after that it was a great budget; and the morning after the
budget, the PNM was in mourning because they realized that this Minister of Finance has presented a new dimension to cause people to think and to participate. That is why we laud this budget.

We want to tell you, Mr. President, that it has been a balanced Minister of Finance and it is because of his nature that we have had little ill effects of what has happened in the world economy.

I remember earlier this afternoon—I want to put on record here—Sen. Al-Rawi, my dear friend, who told me not to mention that he bowls lollipop delivery, so I would not mention it, read from the KPMG Report, very selectively, as he normally does to try to defend the PNM. I want to put this on the record with your permission, Mr. President, some views from KPMG. I think it is quite instructive.

“Budget 2012: Securing the Present; Sowing for the Future.

When the Honourable Minister of Finance opened his budget presentation with a quote from the Prime Minister’s contribution…in support of the State of Emergency, many feared he was going to declare a ‘Financial State of Emergency’ for the country’s economy.”

That is what Sen. Al-Rawi read. I will read further.

“Though he proposed several measures to rationalize and streamline the tax collection framework by bringing it into the 21st century, there were no new tax measures proposed and low income earner heaved a sigh of relief that he was spared the burden of a tax-filled budget in their recessionary environment.”

Sen. Al-Rawi did not read that. I read it.

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** Time did not permit.

**Sen. R. Moonan:** But you wasted an hour.

“The overall thrust of the budget seemed to be to improve compliance and increase collection, instead of imposing or increasing taxes. If this strategy works,”—because nothing is certain; it depends on how we do it—“Minister Dookeran would have pulled off an incredible feat—that of not levying any new taxes or increasing old ones in a recessionary time when revenues are low and expenditures are increasing.

The context of the State of Emergency set the tone for this budget—tackling crime was rightly identified as the number one priority of the government (9.3% of the proposed budgeted expenditure) even as job creation through infrastructure development (13%) was top of the agenda.”
I will just skip a little part.

“By proposing a kinder and gentler budget at a time when it is badly needed, Minister Dookeran might have won many hearts, but will the goodwill generated be enough to turn the economy around from a contraction of 1.4% to an expansion of 1.7%, as he proposes to achieve in 2012?”

That is a valid question.

“Trinidad and Tobago is an economy with some reliance, its entrepreneurs are dynamic and energetic who survived past recessions and it’s a time for us to do so again, partnering with the government as the Minister stated in his 2011 budget and emphasised again in his 2012 proposals.

Mr. President, this last paragraph:

“For a man who pulled this country from the brink of a coup, pulling the country from the brink of economic collapse may seem like child’s play. But the country has to wait and see if his fortitude can help turn the ‘ship’ around.”

I want to give the assurance, Mr. President, that Minister Dookeran and the People’s Partnership will succeed in turning the economy around.

When we heard the contributions of the Senators here this afternoon, yesterday and the day before, I wondered how the Opposition could have gotten up to respond to that. Sen. Cudjoe said that there was need for more public education about the measures in the budget. She said that because she too was taken aback at how progressive it was, but being on the PNM side she had to find some way to defend.

“Well, you know it is good, but tell us more nah.” Did you want to hear more when you heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Kevin Ramnarine speak? That reminded me of when I was at university and you got a good tutorial from Lloyd Best. That was how Kevin Ramnarine sounded.

I do not know how Sen. Cudjoe could not understand that tutorial and, to make it even better, when the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs spoke, it grew on you. [Desk thumping] What more do you want? I remain flabbergasted that they could not understand. Do you know why? Because they were concentrating on arithmetic; they were concentrating on sums. If they did not get the base correct, they could not get the conclusion correct.

So Sen. Al-Rawi went along with a number of figures, but he never looked at the philosophy. This is a man who comes here week after week, month after month, and he will quote Shakespeare and all kinds of philosophy conveniently, but when he is presented with good philosophy, he feigns ignorance. Or is it real? I do not
know; I just ask. Did you feign ignorance or is it real? I just ask. I think you feigned because you are a bright boy, notwithstanding you are in the PNM.

I want to concentrate on a couple of small points here this afternoon. When we speak about past budgets, the PNM, as we heard them say, speak about all the growth they had from 2001 and 2008. I think in 2009 there was a dip. They spoke about how GDP grew. I was looking at a definition for GDP and it said that GDP is private consumption, plus gross investment, plus government spending, plus exports minus imports. There is the formula: GDP = G+I+G+X-M.

7.15 p.m.

So a major component of the GDP in this country is Government spending, and the last Government boasted how they spent billions of dollars. But I want to put to this honourable House, that money spent and accounted for does not really tell you the value of the product that you got. So, this Government, in the last decade, spent billions of dollars. It has been bandied, that they spent $300 billion. I ask, Mr. President, what portion, what percentage of that spending had to do with corrupt practices? What portion, what percentage had to do with cost overruns? When we go back to the Uff Commission, we will see billions and billions of dollars in cost overrun/corruption. So they have come now to the novel way of taking corruption and cost overruns and putting them as part of GDP and part of growth. Now, if there is some way to isolate that, then we will see that that growth was not as big as they said. The only growth they really had was growth in corruption and cost overrun. I could tell you, Mr. President, about some of the cost overrun/corruption.

A couple of weeks ago, I visited the Chancery Lane Complex, which this Government has proposed to turn into a hospital. [Desk thumping] I say “turn into”, because we have to take usage from the past Government and turn it into something productive. What struck me is that there were ramps from one floor to another floor, but the only person who could have driven on those ramps to get from one floor to the other floor would have been Mr. Bean from that show, with a little Morris Mini. An ordinary car could not go up there. If it went up it had to make a three-point turn to get to the next floor. Thank the Lord I learnt driving with Dass Driving School in San Fernando in the 1960s, [Desk thumping] but billions of dollars was spent on that, but that went to GDP.

NAPA, SAPA, TAPA, whatever, and this building where I stand, right now, what was the cost overrun? What was the level of corruption? Minister Maharaj spoke about it. I had the unfortunate invitation yesterday to visit his office. I was scared when we “was” going up the elevator. He told me it does not work, but billions of
dollars were spent on this building. Do you know what? They come today and they are talking about Tower D, and it is PNM, but we should not be here today after $88 million was spent on the Red House eight years ago. [Desk thumping] Eight years ago it started and it is $88 million. I have the breakdown here, but because of time, I would not go into it. Do you know what we have? We have a tarpaulin, some scaffolding and a roof over the roof, and they moved the dragon, but they used part of that as GDP. Now, we should have been in the Red House today not here. [Desk thumping]

This place, if my memory serves me right, was supposed to be the International Financial Centre building. There is nothing here, no IFC. It is this Government really, that had to virtually spin straw into gold. [Desk thumping] It is we who must come now to save the taxpayers. We are still struggling to find a use for the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba. [Interruption] Some Brown Package which was supposed to be for cricket, and we did not get anything. Now, if we had a cricket field there, I am sure Sen. Al-Rawi would have improved his bowling. [Desk thumping] So wastage and squandermania have been the hallmark of the last Government, and here it is we have a Minister of Finance coming in and saying, “Listen, enough is enough, we must change the development strategies.” That is why he is a world renowned economist. [Desk thumping] That is why people look up to him; but the best that we could get here to respond to him was, my friend, Dr. Lester Henry; the very affable Dr. Lester Henry who is not here today.

I want to tell you that on Wednesday when I heard his response, I thought that when they were giving out speeches that he took the wrong one, because it just did not sound as the Dr. Lester Henry I knew. [Desk thumping] He is a renowned lecturer at the university. When he came here and told us that his strongest point is “Jello”. I say, “Nah, he take up the wrong speech boy.” [Desk thumping] But it did not end there. It looks like a ll of them “take” up the wrong speech [Desk thumping] because there was absolutely no substance.

Sen. Al-Rawi: This is a comedy—

Sen. R. Moonan: They could not respond to the budget, but do you know what, Mr. President?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Get back on the Bill.

Sen. R. Moonan: This is all part of it. But you, too, need a tutorial. [Interruption] You see, Mr. President, one of the problems that the country faces—and the Minister of Finance mentioned it—is the Clico and HCU problem; a problem which the last Government misdiagnosed and misprescribed. Once the diagnosis is wrong, the prescription will be wrong.
I just want to read two parts of a book known as Corporate Psychopaths as Organisational Destroyers written by Clive R. Boddy. I want to read it, because I think it is quite instructive what happened to Clico. It says:

“When large corporations are destroyed by the actions of their senior directors, employees lose their jobs and sometimes their livelihoods, shareholders lose their investments and sometimes their life savings, and societies lose key parts of their economic infrastructure. Capitalism also loses some of its credibility. These corporate collapses have gathered pace in recent years, especially in the western world, and have culminated in the global financial crisis that we are now in…”

They speak about the directors:

“They present themselves as glibly unbothered by the chaos around them, unconcerned about those who have lost their jobs, savings and investments, and lacking any regrets about what they have done. They cheerfully lie about their involvement in events, are very persuasive in blaming others for what has happened and have no doubts about their own continued worth and value. They are happy to walk away from the economic disaster that they have managed to bring about, with huge payoffs....”

This sounds familiar, Mr. President.

There is another book Uncontrolled Risk by Mark T. Williams, and it speaks about the Post-Lehman Financial Landscape—lessons on Lehman Brothers and how systemic risk can bring down the world financial system. It goes on to outline some prescriptions. I want to tell you, Mr. President, it is because this Government has taken hard decisions that this financial system is now a stable financial system. The Minister of Finance took flak for the last 16 months, but together with the People’s Partnership Cabinet and the Government, today we have a stable financial system. [Desk thumping]

What did the last Government do? If we read Corporate Psychopaths as Organisational Destroyers we will see that they did not do anything for the people of this country. You see, this past Government pride themselves on small people; they look after the small people, but recently they had a three-car raffle, no Cortina, you know.

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** So why the small man cannot drive a BMW?

**Sen. R. Moonan:** I am glad you talk about that, because there is where I am going. They sold a ticket for $100. How many “small man” could by a ticket for $100?
Sen. Beckles: Let us assume, Mr. President, that a small man bought a ticket for $100 and he was fortunate to win a BMW, do you know what is the insurance on that? It is about $70,000 a year.

Sen. Al-Rawi: But how much he could sell the car for, boy?

Sen. Beckles: He could sell it! He could sell it!

Sen. R. Moonan: But that is the small-man party. That is the same small man party—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Go back to the budget, you were going good.

Sen. R. Moonan: Mr. President, in the other place—I always have a problem with this other place. I suspect, and I could be wrong, that when we were in the Red House there was really the other place, because there were two Chambers, but they only had one, so they had to say the other place physically. But on October 18 at the other place, this small-man party voted against the budget, and when they did that, they voted against an increase in NIS pension to $3,000; this small-man party. They voted against the $1,000 allowance for all state security officers. They voted against more disability grants.

They voted against lower home mortgage rates which are currently at 6 per cent to 8 per cent and will be reduced to 5 per cent to 7 per cent. They voted against a measure which would have benefited 130,000 people; a small-man party. They voted against housing starts of over 60,000 houses next year, the small-man party. They voted against persons being eligible to access home purchase, a construction subsidy which we will now move up to a minimum of $50,000 per eligible household for homes costing $200,000 in Trinidad and $220,000 in Tobago; small-man party.

They voted against disability grants which were substantially widened with the introduction of grants for single people who are caregivers of a special child, and where a household income is inadequate to support the family. They voted against disabled individuals who will automatically qualify for food support under the Food Card Programme. They voted against persons with disability who will now access free transport on PTSC buses, which will have specially designed buses for the differently abled. They voted against that. They voted against disabled persons who will be entitled to a $5,000 scholarship under the Rise-Up Training Programme. “I think when dey hear ‘rise up’ dey get little frightened.”

7.30 p.m.

They voted against public shares in First Citizens Bank, where small people would have been able to own part of the assets of this country’s best bank. They
voted against a public share offering in Plipdeco. They voted against more port security, where millions of dollars of drugs are coming into this country, which we are now discovering. They voted against an increase of the deposit insurance coverage from $75,000 to $125,000, which would give stability to the financial sector and confidence to depositors. They voted against that. They voted against the waiver of NIB penalties on unpaid premiums. They voted against the tax discount for smaller business.

They voted against budgetary measures which would—let me read this again, because this is important—when they voted against the budget, they showed that they were not interested in lowering the fuel subsidy, because of measures which we would take to protect illegal diesel sales. So without increasing prices, we will save this country $1.5 billion per year. They voted against that. They voted against the introduction of CNG buses and many other things. That is what our budget did for the small people of this country. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, my half an hour is up, but I will ask my leader for three more minutes, because there is something I want to address—Sen. Hinds, because if I do not call his name I will not be complete. [Laughter]

Last night Sen. Hinds stood there and said that there was a Senator looking at him, who had six CEPEP contracts. It occurred to me that this man was suffering from hallucinations. Who on this side is a Senator with six contracts? Obviously he was hallucinating. I asked myself what could cause him to hallucinate. If ever I meet that CEPEP contractor, I would ask him to go to Sen. Hinds’ and clean the place of all the grass and weeds around, because something is affecting him. But when somebody starts to hallucinate, it is dangerous to even those who are close to him—[Interruption]

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** You know you are bordering on a Standing Order.

**Sen. R. Moonan:**—because he could do something to them. I just wanted to put the record straight.

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** On a point of order, Mr. President. Surely I cannot accept that Sen. Hinds was hallucinating from anything, and that the hon. Senator could pretend to offer a diagnosis as to the Senator’s mental health or otherwise. Surely I cannot accept that, so on a point of privilege and order I ask that you guide him please.

**Mr. President:** Senator, you will not be able to refer to Sen. Hinds in terms which are derogatory.
Sen. R. Moonan: I am guided, Mr. President. Let me say that Sen. Hinds should not be bothered if he assumed that somebody was looking at him. He should not be bothered. Am I on course, Mr. President?

[Mr. President nods]

I just wanted to set the record straight with Sen. Hinds, because he has been making some wild accusations and he seems to have mastered the art of using elastic on facts, because he stretches them all over, but then again I did not expect much more.

I again want to thank the Minister of Finance. I want to congratulate all who spoke here in this budget debate, and to give the country the assurance that this People’s Partnership, with Captain Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Winston Dookeran at the head of the financial ship, we shall bring it into safe waters. With that, I thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Embau Moheni: Mr. President, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to make my contribution to the 2011/2012 budget. In so doing, I must first commend very highly the work of the Finance Minister, Mr. Winston Dookeran, and his team, for that genuine piece of work which is going to set the tone to guide this nation to a safer and stronger financial and economic future. In the sense that the challenges and difficulties that our Finance Minister would have been faced with, in trying to grapple with the financial morass that this country was placed in by the squandermania of the past regime, it is really sad that he should have had to accept that kind of situation and not have had a more fortunate position, given the wealth and resources of the Trinidad and Tobago, this nation of ours.

We today are faced with a situation where, once again, we are experiencing deficit financing. That has been spoken to a lot by those on the other side, but what they have failed to tell the national community is that we are faced with a deficit budget because of the years of wastage, the lack of prudence and the lack of diligent, economic and financial management that has left this country in the position it is in right now. So I commend the Finance Minister and his team, but in the same vein I would like to quote from a statement made by the hon. Prime Minister, just a week after the general election of 2010, when she stated, and I quote:

“The Ministry of Arts and Culture will be redesigned to become the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism in order to give greater voice to the diverse
cultural expressions of our common desires for individual and national identity.”

I speak to the wisdom, vision and commitment of our Prime Minister, in recognizing the diversity of our population, in recognizing the validity of the various cultural traditions that exist in Trinidad and Tobago and having that commitment and determination to seek to redesign and recreate the Ministry of which I am now a Minister in the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, recognizing that we are a plural society, multifaceted in our cultural background. [Desk thumping] What she did was to open the gateway to infinite possibilities, like the ripples of an ever-expanding circle, in order to harness the diverse human resource, so we could talk about unity in diversity.

Mr. President, I am proud to be able to serve in this Ministry, which has such an important role to play, to give each and every individual of Trinidad and Tobago that feeling of comfort, in recognizing that the society through the People’s Partnership Government, is determined, not only to seek to portray the cultural variance of our society, but to strive to develop a sense of respect for each person’s culture, so there could be a strengthening of the role, responsibility and achievement of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] I applaud the vision, the wisdom and the determination of our Prime Minister in the pursuit of these ideals.

This Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism has an important role to play in our society. It is historical in its context, in the sense that when you speak of culture, you are speaking about a way of life of a people, how they interpret the world, how they express that interpretation in language, in food, in song, in dance.

Culture is not something that is invented. It is transmitted from one generation to the next. It is not like the building of a new house, it is merely an extension. So each generation builds and extends on what they would have inherited, that legacy that would have been passed on to us from our fore parents. So it is historical in its context. This Ministry, therefore, through our various departments and divisions, has that responsibility through our archiving, through the museum, through NALIS, through our various arms, to ensure and strive, to strengthen our expression, to strengthen our appreciation of our own expression and the expression of all the cultural forms, to strengthen our memory and to preserve our rich heritage.

I have only been in this Ministry approximately four months, but I can tell you that we have achieved in the past year and we are going to continue to achieve in the year to come. You take, for instance, our national instrument, the steel pan,
which we recognize as having added value to our society. It is the only musical instrument of the 20th Century. This is an instrument of national pride.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** The Maha Sabha does not think so.

**Sen. E. Moheni:** Our Ministry has instituted a roving exhibition, in order to bring the value, the history, an understanding and appreciation of national instrument to the wider community. This exhibition seeks to present to the public the story of the development of our national musical instrument, in a way that evokes a sense of pride for this achievement, as well as to educate the public on an important aspect of our history.

The objectives of the exhibition are to capture a full snapshot of a very important part of our history, the preservation of the national treasure, that is the history of the evolution of the steel pan, and to give the citizens an opportunity to come face to face with the genius that was and still is ours.

**7.45 p.m.**

Today the exhibition has been displayed at the Niherst Sci-TechKnoFest, 2011, as well as at the exhibit at the NAPA in September, the “Remember When” exhibit. The exhibition will go on tour of local communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago in 2012.

I go to the question of the funding of the arts through the National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers, where we are seeking to provide the opportunity for our artistes to be better able to source funds from our private sector through tax rebates, that will afford our artistes greater opportunity to face the challenges of funding that they need in order to develop.

I come to the question of Carnival 2011, which was identified as the first vehicle available to the Government to demonstrate its commitment to change and to signal its recognition of Carnival as a national festival, and as we all know, in 2011 we took Carnival back to the Savannah. [Desk thumping]

Not only that, our Ministry has sought to add value to the Savannah itself, whereby we have established the Carnival Village that affords young artistes, artisans, craftsmen/women, our entrepreneurs and other Carnival stakeholders the opportunity to interact with the local population and visitors and to sensitize them to a greater understanding of, and exposure to, the arts and culture. So that outside of the Carnival season, we are seeking to add value to the Savannah stage.

I just want to move quickly into the role that our Ministry is playing as far as seeking to provide enlightenment for lives through the establishment of our library services, whereby the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism will be pursuing very
vigorously, the establishment of libraries in our primary schools in order to encourage that pursuit of knowledge among our very young. We are also seeking to play a role in the rehabilitation process through the establishment of proper library services to be made accessible in our various prisons because in our research we have found that there is a very strong relationship between illiteracy and crime.

So in the limited time I have left—my time is fast running—I would just like to deal, very briefly, with some of our projections for fiscal year 2012. Some of the projects we have outlined for 2012 would include music schools in the pan yards, which would be launched in March 2012, where we seek to transform the pan yards in relationship with the various pan sides and various exponents of the art of the steel pan, to utilize these pan theatres to provide an avenue and a channel through which there could be an opportunity for young persons to go and be engaged in uplifting activity, as well as in the development of our arts.

The National Arts Festival 2012, will be held in August 2012 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of Trinidad and Tobago. Then we have the Tassa camps which will be held in October. The Museum City: this project seeks to turn buildings-for-sale in the capital into informative displays of our heritage. This colourful information display will become a sight of interest for nationals and students alike.

In the area of Carnival, the following will be pursued:

- completion of the Grand Stand, including construction of administrative offices;
- enhancement of programmes provided for regional communities;
- generation of greater community stakeholders and corporate business participation in the Carnival Village;
- redevelopment of linkages with Trinidad and Tobago-style Carnivals abroad; and
- the creation of new associations, which in themselves have provided an avenue for our artistes, in particular our calypsonians, to go abroad and earn additional revenue;
- review of systems and procedures to continue refining the management and organization of the Carnival product.

By December 2011, the museum lobby and shop are carded to be opened and ready for use by the public. By the end of October 2011, the virtual museum will go live at www.nmag.gov.tt where you would be able to go on line and experience
the virtual museum. The La Brea Community Museum is due to be open to the public by February 2012. Restoration works begin at the Sevilla House by December 2011, towards the establishment of the Sugar Museum.

The main building on Nelson Island will be restored as a heritage site by the third quarter of 2012. The National Trust will commence the installation of interpretive signage at the top fifty heritage sites around the country.

In addition to this, we have already taken a decision to establish libraries in Mayaro, Rio Claro, and in 2012 we will be pursuing the process to expand the work of our national archives to include newspaper collections, starting with the *Port of Spain Gazette*, 1821—1956, records of enslaved Africans and indentured Indian and Chinese labourers, and these would be digitized so that they could be transmitted to the population to assist those who are interested in such research.

Before I wind up, however, I would just like to make a few comments with regard to Tobago, because it grieves my heart when I look at where Tobago is today, after so much money has passed through the coffers of the Tobago House of Assembly. I have heard much talk about how much money should be allocated and what percentage Tobago is receiving; that the People’s Partnership Government allocated 4.03 per cent of the national budget to Tobago, and it was felt that that was not enough. The question is not just the percentage but the quantum, and while we all are quite aware that Tobago needs more than 2.1, plus the .5 and the .5, we also recognize that the lack of development, in particular where infrastructure is concerned, is due to the failings of the last regime.

As a matter of fact, we have been cut on both sides of the sword, because if you study, or you research the allocations to Tobago under the PNM, when the PNM Government was in office, you would see that it was usually 1 point something per cent, and the same PNM is saying that 4.03 is not enough. We are not saying it is enough, but what we are saying is that when the PNM was there it used to be 1 point something per cent—1.6,1.7. As a matter of fact, the highest allocation that Tobago ever received under the PNM Government was 2.2 per cent, prior to the Dispute Resolution’s decision.

Not only that. The PNM-controlled THA, over the past 10 years, has had over $1 billion in unexpended funds. So while they are saying it is not enough, over $1 billion of unexpended funds have accumulated over the years. But not only that, the question is: what are they doing with this $1 billion? Or what are they doing with these unexpended funds? The procedure is, funds that are not spent in a fiscal year should go towards capital development in the following year—capital development; not current expenditure but capital development.
What have they been doing? They have been putting it in what they call, a contingency fund, which is illegal. That contingency fund has expanded to accumulate a fund of over $1.5 billion in the past 10 years. That contingency fund is utilized for all types of expenditure which we need to be accounted for and which the PNM-controlled THA has to account for.

Not only that. Let us go back and see what is happening in capital development, because it is stated quite clearly that that money should be going to capital development. We look back to the library which was started on May 24, 2004, to be completed by 2006. This is 2011 and it is yet to be completed, and we are all at a guess as to when it will be. We go to the financial complex which was started in October 2004, and which was described by the report of the Uff Commission as a failed project. When Prof. Uff visited Tobago after $15 million was spent, he asked, “Well, look, where is the site?” There was nothing to show.

8.00 p.m.

As matter of fact, that project was to cost taxpayers $29 million, after $20 million was spent they had to dig up the foundation and start all over again, a waste of our people’s money. Today, in 2011, it is incomplete, with over $100 million taxpayers’ money spent on it already. You go to the cultural complex at Shaw Park which was to be completed four years ago to date, not completed; you go to the hospital which was to be completed in 2005, today in 2011 it is still incomplete. So that while we have been suffering in our capital development, funds that should have gone in that direction were misappropriated and placed in what they call a contingency fund that just kept swelling by the tens of millions of dollars from year to year. What contingencies? This is what they would have to come and tell the population.

Not only this, a simple playing field in Moriah which was started in 2001 and which was to be completed since 2003, with a pavilion, a playing field and a swimming pool, none of this completed. As a matter of fact, the only pool you have there is when the river overflows at the back of the field. And this is 2011; children have gone to school, left school, gone abroad and have not had the opportunity, the benefit of this playing field.

So, Mr. President, it hurts me when I hear talk about respecting the Tobago House of Assembly. The Tobago House of Assembly is merely an institution that was established to serve the people of Tobago and if this is the service that we are receiving with millions of dollars of the people’s money, it is not here a question of respecting the Tobago House of Assembly but the persons who occupy that Tobago House of Assembly respecting the people of Tobago—[Desk thumping]—not only
Appropriation Bill, 2011  
[SEN. E. MOHENI]

respecting the people of Tobago, but utilizing our money in such a way that we could enjoy what any civil society would enjoy in terms of a proper hospital, a library. It is since 1997, when there was the little earthquake in Tobago that destroyed our library, that Tobago has been without a library, over 14 years, and yet you have those on the other side coming and bold and brave enough to talk about “Tobago is not getting enough”, after we have before suffocated for so many years.

But I promised to try to keep within half an hour, so I would just want to wind up at this point and, Mr. President, to recommit the Ministry of Tobago Development—sorry, to recommit the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism towards the pursuit of the ideals as enunciated by our Prime Minister, in ensuring that this country of Trinidad and Tobago could enjoy, in the years to come, a sense of unity and diversity, a greater development of the human spirit, and a society that is more enlightened, more unified and has a sense of nationhood through an appreciation of each and everyone.

Thank you very much.

Sen. David Abdulah: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Colleagues, as we draw fairly quickly to a close in this budget debate, let me say, first of all, that I thought that the last three days while being long, certainly have been very interesting and the general level of debate in this Senate, hopefully, would have educated and informed the national community quite apart from assisting one another in the Senate to have a better and deeper appreciation of the issues.

Let me congratulate the Minister of Finance for his budget statement theme, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I think the choice of theme of this budget statement is very important and I am going to speak to that just for a minute or two, but before that let me also thank him for having a very extensive meeting with myself wearing one of my other hats as the President of FITUN. We had a very good discussion, a very rich dialogue on, not just the 2011/2012 budget, but more particularly on fundamental economic issues that affect both Trinidad and Tobago and the global economy. That process of dialogue and engagement is going to be very important in Trinidad and Tobago as we seek to find the right solutions for the problems we have.

Mr. President, we are all very familiar with the fact that our economy like so many other Caribbean economies is and has been essentially a mono-commodity economy, that is one that is overly dependent on one commodity or one sector. In our case, of course, it is the hydrocarbon industry which drives our economy in terms of Government revenue, in terms of foreign exchange, in terms of contribution to the national economic pie. One of the consequences of this as we all
know is that we are extremely vulnerable to external shocks, whether those shocks are up and down, and we often only talk about external shocks in the negative, when prices fall or when demand declines for whatever we may be producing at the particular point in time. As we are well aware, there are also positive shocks in the sense that there are moments in time when our income rises very rapidly and significantly as a result of higher prices and/or greater demand for what we may be producing.

So, we have always therefore, as a country talked about diversification or transformation as we seek to ensure that we have a platform, a range of economic activity in our country, which range of economic activity would ensure that we are protected from cyclical shocks of our hydrocarbon sector. But while we have talked about it over very many years and other colleagues in the Senate have referred to that economic dialogue which has taken place over very many years, we have never done it, and this therefore, means that the theme of our budget statement “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” becomes all the more relevant, because, unless we transform we will continue to be victims of the vagaries of the international marketplace and be buffeted by the various storms that pass by from time to time.

Let me just say that there were two golden periods, literally golden periods, of huge windfall in the last 35 years or so. The oil boom ’73—’80—and one cannot ignore the irony of it that it was actually Colonel Gaddafi, who was killed yesterday, that initiated that action of moving OPEC to raise prices for oil, and therefore, Trinidad and Tobago was a beneficiary of that action as OPEC took control over what they produced as oil and got a better and better price for it, moving the price of oil from less than $3 a barrel in 1973 to $40-plus in 1980. So that period of 1973—1980 was the first oil boom and then of course that long period which ended in 2008 which began, certainly in terms of exponential windfall from 2001—2002.

So the Government that happened to be in power at the time of those two oil booms was the PNM Government, and therefore, one cannot but say that those two golden opportunities, those two moments of wealth and windfall were squandered, because those were the best opportunities to transform the economy, because you had at that time the resources to deal with, at the same time—simultaneously—the social problems, to deal with investing for diversification and so on, simultaneously, and those two opportunities went a-begging. Though one must admit that in the ’70s, the period of boom, there was, coming out of it, Pt. Lisas and the gas industry, but the gas industry, the gas sector, really was diversification
within the hydrocarbon sector rather than a fundamental diversification of the economy. So we added to the hydrocarbon sector, but we did not diversify the entire economy.

Let me just say, Mr. President, in paying tribute myself to the late Sen. Barry Barnes, that there was an important Green Paper that was produced by his Ministry during that period when he was Minister from 1991—1995, which Green Paper was never actually implemented. Let me also say that the work that was done in Vision 2020, while that was an important piece of work that was done, really got hijacked by the energy subcommittee of Cabinet at the time for the period between 2002 and 2010, that energy subcommittee which had Prof. Julien, Malcolm Jones and other key people chaired by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, that really diverted the work that had been developed in Vision 2020 and so on to something else, so it was hijacked.

So we blew the opportunities of those two booms, and in particular when we look at that last period that ended in 2008, we ended up with an economy that had no new real productive capacity, we had little in supporting infrastructure being created and we had a massive deterioration in the social sector and I really want to express my own congratulations Sen. Verna St. Rose Greaves, for putting us face to face with our reality in terms of our social sector. Sen. St. Rose Greaves, it was a very important statement and I congratulate you for that. [Desk thumping]

Let me also say that where the Government is now, the People’s Partnership Government is to perhaps turn adversity into opportunity, that whereas the last Government had the opportunity of transformation with the benefit of tremendous resources, this Government now has the challenge of doing it in a time of difficulty, in a time of adversity. Perhaps this society of Trinidad and Tobago is a society which only in a moment of adversity could rise to the challenge of bringing about some kind of fundamental change. Perhaps, when it is too easy, when money is flowing like water, when money is no problem, we do not face the reality and we blow it and so on, so perhaps this is our moment. There was that moment in the mid ’80s and that did not happen, because, essentially, the burden of adjustment was not shared equitably, it was inequitably shared and so that moment was lost.

The Medium-Term Policy Framework—and let me congratulate the Minister of Planning and the Economy for the Medium-Term Policy Framework—is an important first step therefore in identifying those challenges in this moment of adversity seeking to transform our economy. I want to say that in my view it is perhaps our last opportunity as a nation so to do, because if we fail to transform our social relations, the nature of our economy and our political system and culture
now, then really what we are saying is that we are going to be 20 times worse 25 years from now. Most of us in this Chamber remember what it was 25, 30 years ago and the damage that has been done cumulatively over that period—and we all have to accept responsibility for that—25, 30 years, if we imagine another 25 or 30 years of deterioration we really would be in a state of utter and complete barbarism, and so it is our last opportunity and we must seize this opportunity at this moment.

I want to say, Mr. President, that, certainly, the issue of agriculture and food production is very, very important and in that regard I heard what Sen. Beckles said, she does not have to ask the question as to where I stand, I think everyone knows where I stand, not only where I stand, where my head is, where my heart is, and so on. I also know that the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs is a person who listens, who takes on board all of the issues, who empathizes with the nation’s farmers and will do whatever is within his power to take action to address the concerns of the farmers of this country, and under his stewardship that Ministry is going to be key in the process of transformation.

8.15 p.m.

With respect to the Medium-Term Policing Framework, an important element of that of course, is the creative imagination and innovation. And in that regard, Mr. President, let me record my own thanks and, hopefully, congratulations—and I am sure that the other Senators will join me in this—to our young Trinidadian woman, Anya Ayoung Chee, who has captured the imagination of the entire country on that fashion programme, Project Runway, and demonstrated what is possible through the creative imagination in terms of taking the world by storm. [Desk thumping] And we wish her the very best in the last few challenges.

The issue of course is how do we move from our ability to create—that is create in terms of the imagination and innovation to the point of production. Sen. Prescott S.C who is not here at the moment, spoke about the difficulty of his—the person who sells pomme cythere juice in Toco from whom he buys and is doing a small-scale production and so on. And how do you move that into a world market? That really is one of the crucial challenges that we face.

Let me just give an anecdotal story about another lady who used to sell mauby in the oilfields in Barrackpore many years ago in the canteen. And all of the oil workers, men as they were at the time, used to buy this mauby in large quantities and so successful was she in selling mauby that eventually she accumulated enough savings to move on in life and so on and I think she also migrated and that kind of thing. The men never knew why the mauby was so good. They always boasted
about this mauby being an excellent beverage. This is long before Viagra came on
the market, Mr. President. [Laughter] Not knowing that what this mauby lady did
was to actually just add something—another bark, a little “bois bande” bark to the
mauby bark and really had a unique product which apparently worked wonders for
the oil workers in Barrackpore. The point I want to make is that that was creative
imagination, that was innovation and could have produced a product which would
have had a huge market. And therefore, the key is for us to understand and
appreciate that creativity and innovation is not so much about systems and all of
that, it is really about people. It is really about people and their ideas and the
capacity that each and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago possesses in their own
respective way. And I will come back to that in a moment.

Let me say a few words about the energy sector, particularly because Sen.
Al-Rawi spoke to that issue earlier this evening. Mr. President, let me say first of all
that he made the point that Petrotrin has difficulties of efficiency. One of the main
reasons quite frankly why Petrotrin has difficulties with its efficiency, is that of the
structure that the last Government left in Petrotrin. It was top heavy, it was putting
the wrong people in positions of management, and so on. It was an absolutely foul
strategy of focusing on a refinery upgrade project and other speakers have already
addressed; the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs addressed that very clearly
with respect to the World GTL project and what that has done to damage Petrotrin’s
balance sheet, because there is a debt overhang of that—a very significant debt
overhang. So the principal problem of Petrotrin that Sen. Al-Rawi was suggesting
is that there was a labour issue. The problem is not labour. The problem is with
management. The problem is how the management is organized at that particular
state enterprise. Let me say, Mr. President—and I want to thank the Minister of
Energy and Energy Affairs for sharing his graph with me and thank you, Mr.
President, for allowing me to bring it out once again to this honourable Chamber.
[Sen. Abdulah raises the chart]

Let me just say that when one looks at what happened with crude production in
Trinmar, which was in 2005 at a level of about 35,000 barrels of oil a day, and
within five years it fell to just about 20,000 barrels of oil a day. That was a drop of
some 15,000 barrels a day in a five-year period. That is not a natural decline of your
oilfields. Sen. Ali I am sure will agree with me that that is not a natural decline.
That was a manmade disaster that took place in Trinmar. And that manmade
disaster in Trinmar was the disaster of the Malcolm Jones-led Board of Petrotrin.
We say that without any fear of contradiction, and of course, Mr. Jones was a
member of that energy subcommittee of Cabinet and was the close friend and
colleague of the then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning. So we want to attribute this huge decline, manmade disaster in Trinmar, and put that responsibility squarely on the People’s National Movement. That is what happened in Trinmar, because when you calculate what that would mean in terms of revenue, in terms of foreign exchange, it is very huge.

Mr. President, let me just say, if I could borrow Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon, I hope I am not doing tremendous damage to mathematical formulae, but there seems to be an inverse relationship between the fall in oil production and the construction of tall buildings. So as we built tall buildings, oil production fell. [Desk thumping] Yes, I think that will be a fair mathematical equation, Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon.

Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon: It puts me in a spot.

Sen. D. Abdullah: Sorry? It put you in a spot. I know as a good scientist you want to have all the evidence before you. But that is what the situation is. And therefore, let me also say that there has been a bit of an upswing in oil production over the last few months. I want to say that upswing in oil production is really the result of the proposals made by the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU) and the Trinmar workers with respect to how the Trinmar fields could be resuscitated to get production up. And therefore, the union I want to say, has contributed to the well-being of Petrotrin and the oil workers have contributed, as they have always done, to the well-being of every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, when we speak about the issue of moving the country forward with innovation and creativity we have to take into cognizance the contribution of ordinary workers wherever they work and their ability to point solutions and so on. Often in our society we believe that it is only the technocrats and those with initials after their names and so on, or people who have positions of authority and responsibility, who have all the ideas and we ignore the fact that it is ordinary people who can and have created all of our major cultural products and our innovation in the society over the years. [Interruption] The Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring is saying that is what the innovation facilities are going to enable and so on.

Let me just say as well with respect to the diesel racket and it is something that is close to my own heart because I was the first one publicly to speak about this issue on August 18 of this year at a pre-budget forum. [Desk thumping] I raised it publicly because—and the reason why I raised it publicly was because there were commentators in the media and elsewhere who were saying, what has to be done is to move the fuel subsidy completely. Of course that would have had a deleterious
impact, a very negative impact on the cost of living and the cost of living would have shot up and ordinary folk would have had to pay more for goods and services and transport and the like. And so I raised it because I wanted to counter the argument as an alternative to reducing the fuel subsidy—we can reduce our expenditure on the fuel subsidy by stopping the theft and dealing with the corruption. And that was why I raised the issue and since that happened we have seen all of the evidence coming out in support of what I said.

Let me make the point, because the point has to made, as uncomfortable as some people may be. The diesel racket did not start yesterday, it started when the price of oil started to get significantly higher in 2002, 2003, 2004 and so on, when the price of oil went up to US $140 barrels in mid-2008, the diesel racket was running rife at that time, because the opportunity for thieves to generate a profit was very, very high indeed. And the question one has to ask is, why did the Government do absolutely nothing about that diesel racket when they had responsibility for it? Why did you not do anything? Who were you protecting? You cannot—jump high, jump low, if you know something is wrong and you allow it to continue then you are protecting the wrongdoer. What we have sought to do in this budget is to stop the racket and therefore stop protecting the wrongdoer, go after the wrongdoer to protect on the other hand the ordinary citizen who needs the benefit of that fuel subsidy.

I now want to move very quickly and I want to support Sen. Ali and the others about the highway to Point Fortin. Those who live and work in the deep south will know the horrendous traffic jams that come up from the deep south, in the mornings and evenings. It is both ways, both ways now. There is no peak traffic in one direction. It is peak traffic in both directions. You know when people say there should not be a highway to Point, it reminds me of the famous saying by the late Dr. Williams, that Trinidad stops or ends in Point Fortin that kind of disregard for sections of the national community we really cannot accept. And if we are talking about equity and so on, if we are talking about opening up other growth poles then the highway to Point Fortin is an important one.

I just want to congratulate the Minister of Finance with respect to his revenue collection improvements, the Board of Inland Revenue and so on without the Revenue Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, without the RATT. The other side, the last Government thought the only way to do it was by way of the RATT, the Revenue Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. And they have come back and they have repeated that in this budget debate here. But really and truly, the objective was not simply improved revenue collection. There was also another objective which was to further whittle away the public service.
The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs made the point about having to re-professionalize the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. The Ministry of Energy was gutted as a Ministry. Many other Ministries have been de-professionalized and gutted. The RATT was another mechanism to gut the public service which therefore weakens really the capacity of the country to transform. And not only to gut the public service, but in the process of course, gutting the trade unions. And in that regard you know one cannot help but remark that it is interesting that Sen. Beckles—she just slipped out the room—quoted from *Inward Hunger*, in support of the issue of agricultural lands distributed to farmers and so on at a particular point in time when Dr. Williams was Prime Minister.

But in his book, *Inward Hunger*, Dr. Williams also said that, his greatest parliamentary achievement in the 1961—66 term of office was the passage of the Industrial Stabilization Act, which was passed incidentally during a state of emergency when CLR James was under house arrest. That Industrial Stabilization Act of course removed the right of strike for all workers. And he also said it was to keep oil and sugar apart. The inference of keeping oil and sugar apart was to keep largely at the time African oil workers away from largely Indian sugar workers, as part of the whole divide and rule approach of the PNM. So, when you read *Inward Hunger*, Sen. Hinds, I hope you read that part and understand the philosophy of Dr. Williams at that time which has persisted in your party up to this day. Just thought I would say that.

Let me also say that I certainly agree with Sen. Prescott S.C about the need to achieve transformation and economic growth for there to be a climate of industrial relations where there is no conflict or conflict is minimized, because if workers are unhappy—and he is right, if workers are unhappy then productivity will be affected. If productivity is affected then growth will be affected. There is absolutely no doubt about that. So one certainly hopes that those matters will be resolved in a way that is in the interest of the workers themselves and via collective bargaining, in the free collective process, as Sen. Drayton pointed out is the way in which it is supposed to be done. I, of course, disagree with Sen. Drayton and I said that to her privately about the tools of the trade union movement and so on, because today there was a general strike in Italy, and earlier this week there was a two-day strike in Greece.

**8.30 p.m.**

So in those countries which are two of the PIIGS—Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain—those European countries which are in the greatest economic difficulties and having problems with their sovereign debt and so on, the trade unions are in fact going on general strike and taking militant action. When you look for example, at what is happening with the United States now, with the Occupy
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[SEN. ABDULAH]

Wall Street movement, something is taking place throughout the world—and you are correct on that one—where ordinary people are saying that they have to be part of the decision making process, and that yes there may be burdens of adjustment, but those burdens of adjustment must be shared in an equitable and fair manner, and it cannot be a situation where the rich simply get richer and the poor get poorer and get pushed off the cliff of decent human existence.

I wanted to say that. There are many more things that I want to say but I know that the Minister of Finance and Acting Prime Minister is here and ready to close the debate with his comments. I know he will deal with the arithmetic problems that Sen. Al-Rawi was having. Of course, Sen. Al-Rawi is a lawyer and therefore, perhaps it took him a little while; he was struggling for about 20 minutes. He was struggling in his contribution to work out the arithmetic and the economics of it, but I am sure the Minister of Finance will set him right in that regard.

Let me also say to Sen. Beckles, that, yes, there were problems in the Santa Rosa community with respect to that facility that was constructed there. But Ministers went into the community and had meetings with the community: the Member of Parliament for the area, Hon. Rodger Samuel, went in, the Minister of National Security himself went in and met with the community. Through that process of dialogue, understanding was arrived at, and agreements were arrived at with respect to how to address those particular concerns, and those particular issues. And that really has to be our style of governance all the way through. Ideally, yes, the consultation, if it had happened before, would have obviated some of the concerns and the angst or and the anxiety that took place; but it was not ignored—it was not ignored—it was addressed. And certainly the People’s Partnership Government is committed to addressing the concerns of our communities when they have concerns.

I heard and I agree with Sen. Beckles’ comments about our very hard-working parliamentary staff. And let me also record, Mr. President, my own thanks and appreciation to all the members of the parliamentary staff who really have gone above and beyond the call of duty with respect to the service that they provide to all Members of Parliament, including the very long hours of work. They are to be thanked and to be congratulated. And yes, I agree—it is something I am aware of—I too agree that their terms and conditions of work need to be addressed. I simply say that in that way, that certainly the value of their work is not reflected in the remuneration which they receive, and I concur with that point. I cannot but concur as a good trade unionist in that regard. [Desk thumping]
I am glad that Sen. Beckles suggested that the solution is multipartite, that the House Committee should address those things, which is where it should be done. We should not make those issues political issues, those issues should be multipartite in that way. Therefore, as I end my contribution, I want to come back again to make the point that we have to seize this opportunity that is presented to us at this moment to build our nation. I think that Sen. St. Rose Greaves said it far better, more eloquently and more powerfully from the heart than I could ever say it.

Now we have to build this nation, and that building of this nation has nothing to do with race or religion or geography or party affiliation, it really has to do with what is in the best interest of the people, who have no real voice in the society: those who are not in Parliament, those who are not organized, those who are just there struggling to survive, to provide for themselves and for their families a better existence. It is the sum total of what happens with those individuals and those families that then make up our communities, and the sum total of our communities make up our nation, and if any one of those links is either missing or weak then our entire nation is in crisis.

Therefore, we have to be very responsible as we go about this whole process, and not seek by either what we do or what we say to divide our society, along whatever fault lines, real or imagined, may exist, because if we do pursue that road of dividing our society along the fault lines then what we will have really is the whirlwind of barbarism in 10 or 15 or 20 or 25 years. And we will not be forgiven for that, Sen. Hinds. Take it on board yourself, Sen. Hinds, in all that you say and do as well in this Senate and outside. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Hinds:** Why me?

**Sen. D. Abdulah:** I said all of us—all of us have a responsibility at this time.

**Sen. Hinds:** “I do not talk no race talk.”

**Sen. D. Abdulah:** Sen. Hinds, we all have a responsibility and by what you say and by what you do, by talking about people who you cannot trust and people who are vicious and all of that, all of those things help to widen the fault lines in this society. And if you continue along those lines—[Interruption], Mr. President, through you—.

**Mr. President:** Sen. Hinds, could you please allow him to continue his speech.

**Sen. D. Abdulah:** If people continue along those fault lines on whichever side it falls—it could fall on any side. So I am saying we all have a responsibility at this time and if we fail in our responsibility then what we will be doing is further sowing
the seeds, and rather we would be putting fertilizers on the seeds that already exist in terms of creating a barbaric society in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me just say in closing, since Sen. Hinds has kind of provoked me into saying it, I was not going to end that way, but let me just that in the trade union movement we normally end our speeches and addresses with the slogan “Forward ever and backward never”. In this case it therefore must imply that going back to the PNM would be going backward and therefore, that is not an option. What we have to do is build a new society that is transformed. Hopefully, this budget statement together, with the Medium Term Policy Framework has laid a basis, a foundation for the kind of dialogue that this society now needs to engage in, all of us together, to build Trinidad and Tobago as a just and equitable society in which all of us can live in peace and harmony and achieve our fullest human potential. Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran):** Mr. President, the last words of Sen. Abdulah in a way reflected the tone of this entire debate. I myself feel very privileged to have participated, as this debate has risen to heights that we can all be proud about. I may not have been here physically but with the facilities that the Clerk of the House had been able to make possible, I was listening to almost everyone while doing my work in the Ministry of Finance. So, I am very privileged to have heard everyone speak here and speak in ways which I believe, the coming together, the synthesis of conflicts and ideas, prescriptions and options; we may not always agree on everything but there is that sense of coming together.

Mr. President, a budget statement—and indeed a budget debate—is not only about arithmetic. Indeed arithmetic is a part of it. It is also about an inspiration that we provide to our citizens. It is always and also about a determination that we offer to our nation and it is also about perspiration to which we commit ourselves for the future. And that is how I have sensed the contributions during these three days: some raising to heights of inspiration, some being able to design the determination that we want to move forward with and all ending up with a call and commitment to perspire in the process of building our country. And in that sense I believe that the debate in this Upper House has been able to rise to that occasion by many, if not all, of our contributors.

Of course, there is picong and, of course, there are those who take jabs at each other; and of course, there are jokes that come in between, but without that we cannot really have a serious conversation and dialogue in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] So at the end of it there is the common purpose and the common
purpose is best described by the Bill before us, which says “an Appropriation Bill for the purposes of the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago” and that is what we are to do and to subscribe to.

In order to be able to do that, given our public duty and responsibility here in this House, we must of course deal with some of the issues that arose during this debate. I will not be able to deal with all but I will certainly attempt to clarify some of the issues that I thought important to clarify. I know my colleagues over the course of the evening and days have already clarified many of the issues of the Government’s programme for the next fiscal year, but I would like to start with a bit of the arithmetic, since Sen. Faris Al-Rawi spent 20 struggling minutes on it. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Al-Rawi: I will take that.

Hon. W. Dookeran: But I did tell him it did reflect a different view from the past during the tea break.

I think there were two or three issues of arithmetic that need to be clarified for yet another time. This started in the Lower House—in the other place—and to some extent it was echoed here too. There were some doubts being raised with respect to the issue of our revenue projections and more specifically with respect to our VAT revenue. Figures were brought to the attention of Hon. Members, that we had projected $6.5 billion in 2012, when the out-turn was only $4.7 billion in 2011. What could have explained that? Very simple; without incorporating the 1.7 per cent increase in growth that we had assumed or the inflationary impact during the course of this year, which we have put for accounting purpose to be 7 per cent, during the course of the last year we were able to meet VAT refunds to the order of $5 billion, when the normal VAT refunds for any one year was in the order of $3 billion, which led me to conclude that since we have cleaned up the arrears in the past we will be able to keep more of the VAT intake than we had done in previous years. And therefore, the figure was based on that assumption. I just wanted to clear that issue. I believe it was Sen. Deyalsingh who raised that issue.

8.45 p.m.

I should also point out, since I am speaking about Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh’s contribution—I do not know whether it was in this debate or the debate previously—but a very interesting proposition had been put forward by him about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and the suggestion that we should try and separate it for the purposes of stabilisation and heritage. I thought that was a good suggestion and since then I have had some discussions with the Central Bank on the issue, and hopefully, in the New Year 2012, there will be a public forum organized
by the Central Bank. In accordance with the requirements of the law, we have to review the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund every five years and 2012 will be the fifth year. So, I look forward to a detailed submission at that time. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, Sen. Baptiste-McKnight in her usual philosophical way raised some concerns about the Children’s Life Fund and wondered why it was drying up. The fact is, really, it is certainly not drying up, because $13 million was placed in the fund in September 2011, and there is a further allocation in the Appropriation Bill for a further $30 million to be placed in that fund. The Children’s Life Fund is, indeed, a life fund. It now has the resources, in addition to the resources that others have put into it; it shall be one of the pillars that has been put into place by the inspiration of the Prime Minister to deal with the children first. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I believe, perhaps, one of the issues that needs a little explanation—although the accountants who have worked on this budget, could not see why we cannot understand it. I myself had some difficulty in getting them to say it in layman’s terms. The total expenditure in this budget was $54.6 billion for 2012. And I say that again, because there was some suggestion in the other place repeated here, that that may not be correct. I say it categorically, that the total expenditure was indeed $54.6 billion. The total recurrent expenditure was $47 billion with a capital expenditure of $7.68 billion. Of course, the revenue was in the order of $47 billion, resulting in the deficit of $7.6 billion.

There are two points that I want to make: one is on arithmetic and one is on deficit financing. What was clearly being interpreted here is that there is an item called capital repayments and sinking funds. That item is for the purposes of paying off any previous principals on loans that we have had, and putting into place funds for that purpose. It is a cash flow item. It is like establishing a special account each year, where the capital repayments—some of which will be due to borrowing, and the sinking fund is replenished so that we meet our capital repayments. They do not constitute, in accounting terms, an expenditure, because we bring that into account as a cash flow item and we keep it in the account to meet these commitments. In a way it is based on the understanding that capital repayments and repayments of loans take the first priority in Government’s expenditure, but it is a cash flow item. It is a financing item and it is not seen, from the accounting point of view, as an accounting expenditure item. I believe this had created some concern in the other place and Sen. Al-Rawi seems to have kept that concern alive here, but I hope we can clarify this, because from the general population, I did receive some queries about that from those who were speaking on the radio. I just want to put the record straight that our revenue is what we have outlined and this financing item is no cause for concern or should create any doubt whatsoever on the figures.
Mr. President, I think those are the two or three key areas. There is one other issue that was raised, nothing to do with financing, but it has to do with the development of the Loran-Manatee fields between Venezuela and ourselves. I am advised that the negotiations are groundbreaking and taking place, and at this time the result of those negotiations are not quite clear. Hence, the Senator who raised that should be assured that the matter is being aggressively pursued in bringing these fields into production, which is what was raised.

Mr. President, during the course of this debate, we said that our budget statement is a projection as to what is likely to happen over the next year, and like all projections, they are subject to actual developments. Even what is happening today in Libya is a geopolitical phenomenon. The impact of that, we are still to try and ascertain and, therefore, as we approve this statement in this Senate, we are already subject to some new geopolitical considerations. As a democracy of our own, in which we have been anchored, we hope that that development, which is the response to a new appetite in North Africa and elsewhere for instilling strong democratic traditions will be able to create that democratic dialogue, and in so doing, will be able to bring a sense of stability in a part of the world where the geopolitics can always work either for or against us; not only there, but there are other places. So, when we talk about our projections, we always have to bear in mind that this, indeed, is based on a certain acceptance of what are the events ahead of us. And it is in this context that, I believe, the issue of deficit financing emerged.

I was pleased to hear the Senators of the Opposition. I believe Sen. Dr. Henry, who really cannot escape from being a professor, said that he had no real problem with deficit financing as a principle. On the one hand, he argued that as Minister of Finance, I was pursuing a kind of what he called supply side economics and monetary economics, and on the other side he was arguing that I was pursuing a kind of Keynesian economics. The truth is I am pursuing neither. I am pursuing the economics that is relevant to Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]


Hon. W. Dookeran: The issue is that deficit financing is necessary at certain times, and at this time we could not recoil into our revenue base and contract the economy further. We had to expand into a new level of expenditure, so that the economy’s prospect of growth will remain alive; it is as simple as that. We can afford to do it because our fiscal space, as I pointed out, was maintained and the two yardsticks that I have used to do that were the level of a deficit as a percentage of our gross domestic product and the upper limit to which central government debt must be maintained.
So, you had the space. You had the chance. You could not, therefore, not pursue that. At this point, it would have been a recoiling to the benefit of the entire country, including cuts in expenditure in all our social programmes, which I do not think anyone would have wanted to hope for at this stage.

So, there is a choice to be made. If you do not wish to have deficit financing you have to cut your expenditure, and if you are going to cut your expenditure, you cut it on those things that you can cut, and we have said that we have maintained our expenditure on our social programmes to a level, I believe, of about 18 per cent of our GDP. Because while we try, over time, to make them more efficient, more focused and more results oriented, we must maintain that level of support, because we did not believe that we should inflict the pain, as was implied by the Senators opposite, onto the working people of our country. And it is in that context, I could not understand the suggestion which came up more than once, about deficit financing.

I believe it was Sen. Helen Drayton who said, okay, but then you must have a plan when to stop. I agree that one cannot continue with deficit financing indefinitely, but whether one could put a figure, in terms of 2012, 2013 or 2014, it would be making a projection when you do not know what the reality is. The concept of ensuring that that is not going to be indefinite is to ensure that we never put ourselves in the position that countries like Greece and other countries have done, which went beyond the limits and, therefore had to face the reality, and the most you can do, really, is to make sure that you maintain those limits that I spoke about, and then provide the stimulus for expenditure in the country. I do not know what kind of economics that is.

I spoke about the financing gap. So, I would not go further on the issue of the arithmetic; I think the two key issues I have been able to at least put for the public’s attention to recognize. I know that there was the feeling to create doubts about the budget, because if you create doubts about the budget you would then be able to get a sense of support that they do not know what they are doing, and therefore, the lack of confidence will take place, according to the Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring. I know that was the underlying theme but, really and truly, that kind of thing does not work in this electorate anymore in Trinidad and Tobago.

9.00 p.m.

Mr. President, I want to just go through a few of the proposals that were made in the budget statement that, perhaps, require a little bit of amplification in light of what I heard before. I want to just outline our programme with respect to the building of an international ship repair facility. These ideas were not ideas out of
thin air, they were based on certain work that was done, some of which was done prior to this Government coming into office. As I said earlier, we looked at that work, and there are essentially three basic actions that have already been put into place or preparation to do it has started. In order to build an international ship repair facility, based on the work that was done on this issue, we start where it ought to matter, in the development of a comprehensive training programme.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has been adopting a flexible approach to training in response to the demands of the economy. I heard him say that the days of labour market information have gone and, perhaps, we should bring it back. That is what he meant that there should be a flexibility of approach. If you want to broaden the economic base, you have to provide the training first, so that when you get there, you do have some skills available. Certified technicians, master machinists, journeymen machinists, riggers, welders, master pipeworks, quality assurance inspectors, dock masters; these are the technical names of the basis of the kind of training that will now be put into place because it takes some time. There is lag between having the trained people and the actual thing. That is being looked at.

The second aspect is that we are looking at the heliport in Chaguaramas and looking at the potential of Waterloo, two areas that lend themselves to a ship repairing activity. We are told that there is a certain capacity right now, which we will build upon in the Chaguaramas area in particular, so that they would be able to meet the demands of small vessels 200 tonnes and under, and also to upgrade the facilities, I believe, the CL Marine facility, so that it can work with large vessels in excess of 200 tonnes. We have the basic infrastructure which we will upgrade and we plan to do that. This also involves looking at Waterloo, because ship repair would be for small and larger vessels and may come from different places, and by the natural forces of the market, Waterloo is developing as one such area, perhaps for very small vessels, but it has the basis for further development.

The third area is to now look at strategic investors who can use these investment opportunities that would emerge, both for infrastructure development and for operations to provide this facility. And this is but one of the examples of what we call private/public sector partnership of which I spoke in the budget. I thought I should explain that so that we can see exactly where we are coming from. Whether it happens or not, really is a matter of how well we are prepared in the infrastructure and in the investors’ world, to make it happen. Sen. Dr. Henry, where he works, he does not have to bother whether it happens or not. Where I work, I have to make sure it happens.
The other one, I want to just give a brief description on, and I think it is important because of the proposal to diversify, to open new spaces, particularly with respect to the renewable energy sector. We did indicate that a new financing facility is being worked out by the Ministry of Planning. This is an agreement to establish a renewable energy research centre. It is also a decision that was made in April 2010, by the then Government. But, we have moved further by ensuring that the memorandum of undertaking is being worked out between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Department of Energy in the USA, and we have amended the arrangement to ensure that the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago will be the repositories, the institutions where such a facility will in fact be located. I am sure Sen. Prof. Ramkissoon, who has and continues to make strong calls for research, will be happy.

During the course of the last fiscal year, we changed the memorandum of undertaking to reflect that. And the focus of the centre will be clean energy technology, recourse to policy analysis and identification of investment and financing opportunities. What we are doing now in many of our research endeavours is including financing and investment opportunities as one of the remits. They themselves may not do it, but they will have the responsibility to make it happen, because too much of our research remains in the cupboards of our country and that is the kind of change that we are trying to promote; to convert that research into opportunities.

I believe it was Sen. Beckles who did say that she was quite happy with some of the measures on homeownership and I appreciate her candid comments. Another time she said I was organizing without data, but I would let that one pass. That is one of the picons. I thought I should put on the record that there are seven different measures for homeownership in this budget. We consider this important because it satisfies a social need, which we know is large, it sets the impetus for the construction industry to get a start, and it allows our young generation to get a feeling of security that they too can hopefully own a home in Trinidad and Tobago. I said, hopefully, because we cannot deal with it overnight, but we can set in motion what is required to ensure that process takes place.

Last year we introduced, and I want to put it on the record of the Senate, a tax allowance of $18,000 for first-time owners, and during the course of this fiscal year, we did increase access to the subsidized interest rate of 2 per cent. So, not only the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Company can get access to it, but all financial institutions can get access to that subsidized rate. When the banks say they do not have investment opportunities, I am trying to de-risk the opportunities for them, so that in so doing they will have a subsidized rate. They too must start to promote it, because now you have the product to promote subsidized by the
Government and interest rate. That is the point I was making when you said I was chiding the private sector. That is one example.

Thirdly, we said that we shall now introduce in the continuing programme—unfortunately, the world is in such a state that low interest rate environments are possible, at least for now and hopefully for some time—reduce the interest rates in Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company from 6—8 per cent, to 5—7 per cent. This should bring a new set of demands, because we are saying that the State will provide, I believe, 4,500 houses, but we must now focus on the private sector to increase housing production.

Fourthly—and this happened during the last fiscal year—we improved home improvement subsidy from $10,000 to $20,000 for home repairs, but we added a new one, which is a subsidy for home purchase construction up to the amount of $50,000. Of course, this will not be something that we can supply to everyone, but that is something that the HDC will work out.

Fifthly, we had signed an agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank for what we call a neighbouring upgrading programme, which will involve the regularization of the tenure in squatter settlements. We are saying that the inertia, the paralysis that had developed over the period of the last regime in dealing with this problem should no longer be so. We will find ways to regularize the tenure in accordance with the current laws of the country and we will facilitate title regularization for those who remain unregulated.

I remember one of the most pressing problems in the constituency that I represented before the one I represent. In St. Augustine, there were major areas in that constituency waiting for say 10, 15 and 20 years to get their leases and their titles regularized. I tried then to do it in Opposition, but now that the country has given us the opportunity to do it, we have now set up a new programme which will help them and help many others in the country who have not been able to get the right titles for leases that rightfully belong to them. That means a lot, because it gives them the potential to borrow funds to build themselves and the security that this will not be taken away and, therefore, it will add a new sense of entrepreneurship. One has to view these measures, not in their own right, but in the changing of the thinking and the behaviour of our people in trying to bring about the development for themselves and the State must be a catalyst in this regard.

Sen. Beckles: That is like pulling teeth. [Interruption]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Finally, on home ownership—well, it depends on your vision and belief that we cannot to do anything, as opposed to us on this side who
believe that we can do everything. [Desk thumping] I do not blame you for having that vision, because the performance on your part has shown that is the vision that informed your performance.

The last part of that programme is now being worked out and that is the land for the landless programme. I would not be able to say too much on it until we get the details of that programme, but there are seven different pillars on which we are dealing with homeownership, which we have looked at. And we are also in the process of looking at the Home Mortgage Finance Bank and seeing how we can issue shares to the public in that respect. This is reflecting what I consider to be a well-thought-out programme.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. President, I want to explain a bit further the regional capital market, and in addition to what I announced in the budget statement about the establishment of an SME tier, in the local stock market which will now open up the possibilities to small and medium sized enterprises. We have begun to consider—and I must say Sen. Ramkhelawan and Sen. Drayton really confirmed in my mind during the lunch hour that this is an idea worthy of consideration. It was in my mind, but I have to listen to them.

I did say we wanted to find a new integration formula with the mineral economies in the Caribbean; mineral economies in the Caribbean of Belize in the north, Guyana in the south, Suriname and Jamaica in the north, and that we wanted to create a new leverage for integration. In that respect I talked about a regional capital market and the suggestion is that there are many enterprises in these countries which are either ready, or can be made ready, to list in a regional stock market. They would include the mineral economies which produce gold, which produce bauxite, et cetera, and, therefore, we will explore, and I have already started discussions with the relevant people certainly with respect to Suriname on how to develop this capital market.

So we are no longer going to view our economy as being bordered by our shores, and we will try a new impetus to the integration movement, by allowing us to integrate through the capital stock market, that kind of activity. In due course and in years to come we believe we also need to go beyond those borders into perhaps Brazil and Central America, for which we are discussing right now the question of a double taxation treaty with Panama.

So these companies can be so listed and provide what I believe Sen. Ramkhelawan spoke about—I am sorry he is not here—that we must move from a
close architecture in the capital market to an open architecture, and fortunately we will be having a discussion on Monday on that issue being organized by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

We will also review the conversation which had taken place some time ago with the global companies operating in Trinidad and Tobago, to facilitate the stocks being made available to citizens of this country, on terms and transactions which are easier. I know that this was a discussion which was ongoing for some time and there are problems which have arisen in terms of why it cannot work, but I did discuss with the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, who is meeting with these global companies, to place that back on the agenda and see how he can make it happen.

Once again the whole capital market development is aimed at ensuring that the people of this country get the benefits and we can share the wealth. We can share the wealth in the energy sector, we can share the wealth in terms of listings of the companies we have identified. So it is not only from the point of view of production, it is also from the point of view of having a more equitable distribution of the wealth in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie: [Points to the Opposition] That is your answer to what kind of economics?

Hon. Sen.: Egalitarian economics.

Sen. Dr. B. Tewarie: The question of the economics of participation and inclusion. [Crosstalk]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Yes. Thank you, Senator. So let me just summarize what I believe are the real objectives of the budget formula and statement for 2012. In the first place we were influenced by the need to expand consumer purchasing power and we have—that is one of the reasons why we did not impose, although that is not the only reason, additional taxation. Within recent times, we have worked out the mechanics to pay out the Clico policyholders [Desk thumping] and during the course of this year that process would start. This honourable Chamber took a very positive decision to give me as Minister of Finance the authority to proceed, the legal framework within I can proceed.

Sen. Ramlogan: “Doh forget de AG help yuh.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: I also want to point out that not only are dealing with the policyholders, but all the trade unions and credit union members who got themselves caught in that web, will be given 100 per cent support [Desk thumping] by our programme.
The Central Bank has informed me that they are ready to start that process now, that the legislation is all in place; and that will add new purchasing power to a large number of people. We do not know how many will access it during 2012, but we have a potential of $5 billion being injected in the economy [Inaudible] [Desk thumping]

The wage settlement—and I think this is one of the arguments on the revenue, because the wage settlement had higher wages to it, there was a higher tax intake, which also affected the revenue figures, and most if not all—well, but not all certainly—have been settled and back-pays have been paid. So we have injected new purchasing power in the economy.

We have, according to the estimates of the Contractors Association themselves, paid out 55 per cent; that is their figure, so I use it, because we never really know how much we owe them until we verify it, but that is a significant amount. In so doing, we are injecting purchasing power and that is one of the fundamental premises on which the economic strategy is based—[Interruption]

Sen. Ramlogan: Stimulating the economy.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—giving the economy a sense of purchasing power which they can utilize. Now, we could not have done that last year, because we were all owing them that money, now we are paying them that money. [Desk thumping] That is the difference between last year and this year, I was owing them, Government was owing them, this year we are paying them.

Sen. Ramlogan: “We inherited problems. All we inherited from all yuh is problems.”

Sen. Dr. Henry: Are you committed to paying more than 5 per cent next year?

Sen. Ramlogan: “All yuh eh even getting 3 per cent.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: The second pillar of the economic strategy beyond consumer spending power, has to do with increase in production—

Mr. President: The speaking time of the hon. Minister of Finance has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Minister’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. Brig. J. Sandy]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Mr. President, having this Motion moved by Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy is indeed a privilege, he only stands when he has to be counted [Desk thumping] and he is to be counted in Trinidad and Tobago today.
Mr. President, I was talking about the other pillar which is outlined in the medium-term framework, but we have put actual measures to do that, increased production in the energy sector and in the agricultural sector, in particular. I know when the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs spoke, he outlined that in great detail, and when the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs spoke, he also outlined the investment plan, so I would not go into details, but that is one of the other—so we increased purchasing power, we increased production in two key areas during the course of this year.

We also intend to pursue measures which will increase the competitiveness of the economy at the same time, and one such measure was to zero-rate the importation of vessels and rigs for the energy sector which will now improve their competitiveness further, and more exploration should likely come out as a result of that.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs spoke about the number of bids and the number studies which are being done, but this would encourage them further in that regard. It is significant to the energy companies, it does not really cost the Government very much except the fact that we would have had to refund this VAT and by law we have to do that.

This is one of the cases where you do not really have any cost, but you have a lot of benefits. I think this was what the Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring was talking about. I think sometimes persons cannot figure how it can happen.

The second area in competitiveness is to improve the tax administration; I have spoken about that at length. The third area: we have done two things on the waiver of taxes and penalties, one is with respect to the late filings of annual returns by companies, the other is with respect to the non-payment of contributions to the NIS. Now, the theory behind that is that these two sets of activities are not taking place, persons were not filing their returns, some of them were actually closing down their companies and opening new ones, and then they do not file their returns and it is a cycle. I think somebody talked about the cycle of repetition—Sen. Al-Rawi, I love that phrase, the cycle of repetition. Either you have the cycle of repetition in failure, in which you unfortunately have found yourself, [Desk thumping] or in the cycle of success which is where we are today.

Hon. Senator: “Shot sah!”

Sen. Brig. Sandy: “You shooting from the hips!”
Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yuh cutting tonight!”

Hon. W. Dookeran: But we decided to waive the taxes and to waive the penalties, in the case of the NIS, on condition that they pay up the arrears. So it is an incentive in a way to get them to pay off the arrears and hopefully that would provide more funds for the NIS. The same thing would apply with respect to late returns. So that is on the question of competitiveness and I think we spoke about the single electronic window.

The fourth pillar of the economic strategy is to protect the incomes of the less advantaged by providing more opportunities for self-development. I would not go in the details. That is outlined in the proposals with respect to the disability grants, with respect to the redirecting of the GATE programme and a number of other such measures, but at all times we wanted to ensure that the pains of the people will be at a minimum in this period as we move from a steady foundation to economic transformation.

I will just quickly go through some of the issues on the regulatory oversight which is required in the financial sector. We have paid—the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago—a heavy price for what has happened, and true, some of that has been due to the external factors, but most of it has been due to our own internal domestic negligence, and we can set up the regulatory framework to ensure that these occurrences do not happen to the same extent in the future.

The Insurance Act would come to this Parliament shortly—revised—to protect those loopholes. The Credit Union Act, someone raised it here, I believe it was Sen. Drayton or Sen. McKnight, someone raised it, and I took a note, on the Credit Union Act, it was revised and ready to come here. The parliamentary agenda, Mr. AG, would require you to have more than one day Parliament a week if we are to discharge our duty. I do not know how you would handle that, because we also have to work.

Sen. Ramlogan: Make them work man, make them work!

Hon. W. Dookeran: The Securities and Exchange Commission’s Act is being reviewed and I do not have a final draft. The Procurement Act I mentioned. The FIU is strengthened both in terms of its legislative authority and in terms of its administrative capacity.
9.30 p.m.

We have had some challenges on that because of the system of government in which we operate, where a government has to now be at the whims and fancies of independent bodies in order to discharge public policy in the name of the people, and that has delayed a little of that process. The Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs talked about the new National Statistical Institute to deal with the problems that Sen. Beckles spoke about earlier on about data. The two final pillars on which we have built this programme—increasing investment opportunities. I spoke about the capital market, the public offerings programme, the question of private sector opportunities, two of which we mentioned specifically, one was the Invader’s Bay and the other one has to do with the regional ferry. And in that context, we are creating new investments, we are setting the conditions for new investments to take place and all of this is being done as we speak.

The final pillar—and this one is perhaps the one that interests me most—is the financing of development. I believe that one of the restrictions to development taking place today has been the limited scope for financing development. What are the institutions for financing development? There are some public institutions relatively small, like the Development Finance Corporation, which are not really totally Government but significantly so, and the Business Development Company, and we need to give them a fair amount of new life.

In addition to that, the Export-Import Bank, which I mentioned in the budget, is in requirement of recapitalization to discharge its function to increase our exports. We cannot be pursuing a policy to export into other parts of the world and not have the financing capacity to make it happen. It is words without action: where you come from, words; where we are is an action. [Desk thumping] That is why we are putting the financing mechanisms in place and throughout this budget you would see new financing mechanisms being outlined. In particular, we talk about Tobago and we have developed a programme which I shall be speaking about with the Tobago Chamber on Monday in terms of the finding ways of guaranteeing certain financial interventions on their part with the view of reviving the Tobago economy. But here again is another programme of guaranteeing. We are doing that mindful of the risks so associated.

I raise the issue of financing the Infrastructure Development Bank and we would certainly come back to this House on that new and different idea. The important point I want to make here is that financing has been one of our biggest
constraints in development, and the banking sector will now have to get on with more innovation, more ability to attract the investors and to utilize that excess liquidity which they keep taking about. And in so doing I would be looking very closely at the spread of the interest rates in the Central Bank. [Desk thumping]

I just want to put at rest some issues on the national insurance, and it was pointed out whether the actuaries had done the work. I wish to point out, based on information I have from the National Insurance Board, that they have in fact, actuaries who have been working on the proposals which I have put forth to you. They are continuing the work but they have in fact put into place—[Crosstalk]—I will explain it to you now.

The National Insurance Board, based on their review—the preliminary review—is conducting an assessment to assess the feasibility and the Centre for the International Promotion of Québec Public Expertise was contracted to do the exercise and based on their review, they have said that this is financially possible. [Desk thumping] They are doing other things, they are reviewing the maternity leave which they said is also possible, and they are reviewing other things as we proceed. We will in fact provide that information at the appropriate time in details. What I am reading for you here is essentially information that the National Insurance Board provided, because we had long discussions with them and we asked the same question.

Finally, I want to raise what I think is the question in most people’s minds. Everywhere I go and I talk about what we have done, I am not hearing any fundamental disagreement as to the programmes and policies, although there is sometimes need for refinement here and there. The question that this country is asking is: “Will it happen?” That is the big question. And will it happen, depends on our execution plan both for the public sector—and here I can correct one of the points that was raised by Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, that growth is not dependent only on government expenditure and revenue. Growth is dependent on the national expenditure—expenditure and revenue. [Desk thumping] So when you were implying that you had X per cent growth with so much deficit, how could you expect more growth with the same deficit, I just smiled but I said—

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is not what I said.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Okay. Well fine, I take it but maybe I interpreted it wrongly. The execution plan—we have already begun to work on the execution plan and we are now developing a detailed matrix on every measure that was announced in this budget and those in the last budget, and they have developed a matrix for implementation. So in terms of the public sector we will do our part to make sure we achieve these goals. [Desk thumping] There will be need, Mr.
President, to go beyond that into the other partners in the development. And here we search for the partnership in civil society, here we search for the partnership in the labour movement, here we search for the partnership in the business sector, and here we search for the partnership in the household sector, because collectively, it is really whether we can make this budget into something that can be realized.

So I end by saying that the old models of development for small states have not worked. Development cannot be imported nor can it be achieved through insular economic nationalism. Countries such as Trinidad and Tobago must begin by drilling down for development. This concept underpins the new growth framework outlined in this budget. This begins on the international level where a greater voice must be found for small states in the International Financial Forum of which I spoke, driven by greater regional integration and a multitrack diplomacy for small states. This must represent the unfolding out of the development of a thoroughly innovative and entrepreneurial economy. All we are doing at this stage is laying the foundation. We are not, and I conclude by saying, arguing that there will be transformation overnight, and certainly not even in a short time frame.

**Sen. Ramlogan:** “Doh worry we are here for a long time, we have time.”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** And the people shall cast their verdict after the beginnings of this foundation, whether they want us to build the homes for which we are building this new ownership. [Desk thumping] Mr. President, I thank you for this opportunity and I beg to move. [Desk thumping]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 63, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George):** Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday next, October 25, 2011 at 11.00 a.m. It will be Private Members’ Day, and the Motion that would be up for debate would be a Motion proposed by Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds—[Desk thumping]—which reads as follows: “Be it resolved that this honourable Senate take note of the strengths and deficiencies of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and its impact and potential in the fight against crime.” Thank you.
Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before putting the question, I would like to express my real pleasure in listening to the contributions during this debate. It has been a marathon series over three days, although in fact I heard a number of Senators say that they were having so much fun, they did not realize time had passed. I am certain that all the honourable Senators, and by extension the national community, are wiser for the dynamics of this debate and of course I would like to thank you for the honour and privilege of serving as your Presiding Officer and this is my maiden budget debate. [Desk thumping]

I would like to take the opportunity as well to thank all the staff that have served us well over the period of these three days. We know how difficult that has been and we know how hard they have worked and what they have contributed to this debate. I would also like to take the opportunity to tell them—the staff here at the Parliament—thank you for arranging to have us here ready to open in the House on October 10, 2011, which was a major feat I understand. I have no doubt they burnt the midnight oil in order that we might have this facility ready for that time, and therefore we owe a debt of gratitude to the staff. In particular, I would like to thank the Clerk of the Senate and the Clerk of the House who would have played major parts in making sure that transition happened speedily and well.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.45 p.m.