SENATE

Wednesday, September 25, 2013

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair]

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

(APPOINTMENT TO)

The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh):

Mr. President, I beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that this Senate agree to the following appointment:

On the Joint Select Committee established to enquire into and report to Parliament on Ministries, (Group 2), and on Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises falling under their purview, Mr. David Small in lieu of Dr. James Armstrong.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014)

BILL, 2013

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 20, 2013]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. President: The debate on the following Bill which was in progress when the Senate adjourned on Monday, September 23, 2013, will be resumed.

Those who spoke on the last occasions—Friday, September 20: Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, mover of the Motion; Sen. Dr. Lester Henry; Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan; Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath, Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment and Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy; Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh; Sen. Helen Drayton; Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, Minister of Planning and
Appropriation Bill, 2013

Sustainable Development; Sen. Dr. Victor Wheeler; Sen. The Hon. Embau Moheni, Minister of State in the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration; and Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir.


Senators wishing to join the debate at this time may do so now.

The Minister of Food Production (Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj): Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me the pleasure to contribute to this debate for the budget 2013/2014. It is my pleasure to account to the national community for the stewardship of the Ministry of Food Production over the last year.

How I wish at this point in time, Mr. President, that we had a reason to call for a division this morning [Desk thumping] when I look at the sparse numbers on the other side, but we on this side have adhered to the [Crosstalk] timeliness of the Parliament being called at 10.00 a.m. and we are all here ready to contribute [Desk thumping] and already I am being heckled by the Leader of the Opposition [Crosstalk] I am very disappointed—[Interrupt]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Mr. President must be very disappointed too.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—that in the contributions so far [Crosstalk] that with the exception of the hon. Independent Senator, Subhas Ramkhelawan, not a single mention was made, substantially, to the role of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago. That Members did not see it fit to include in their deliberations and their contributions to this honourable Senate, the importance of agriculture to our economy, to our country and the role it plays in making Trinidad and Tobago secure.

Hon. Senator: Very important.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: That is not to say, of course, that the contributions made thus far were deficient in any way or manner, but I recall last year in our budget contributions as well, the only significant contribution came from Sen. Ramkhelawan, and in the winding-up, in the Opposition, from the hon. Sen. Pennelope Beckles, when she took issues with some of the matters I raised in my contribution, but at least we got the Opposition to make a contribution to the very important topic of agriculture, but their ignoring of agriculture is historical.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Their neglect of agriculture is historical, so I am not surprised, not perturbed too much by their ignorance of it in their contribution. [Desk thumping] Their focus has always been lopsided, and that is why in the contribution of Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh there was heavy emphasis, there was weathering of the energy sector to a large extent, and it appears that his forefathers did not know anything about agriculture at all. They seemed to be preoccupied with energy. [Crosstalk]

So, Mr. President, I would like [Crosstalk] to, as I enter into my contribution, commend and compliment and congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy—[Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Yes. Yes.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for what has to be considered a sterling contribution to national community for enunciating a coherent framework of effective policies for sustaining growth and securing prosperity in Trinidad and Tobago.

This was a budget that many felt, with an impending local government election, and what was then anticipated that maybe a by-election in which we may soon lose our friend, Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh, [Laughter] in the electoral fray.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Why you picking on me this morning?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: There are so few of you all to pick on [Crosstalk] that we may lose him to a next place, either in the political dustbin or in the Lower House, “yuh doh know.” [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: You are aggravating his cough.

Sen. Deyalsingh: “Yuh making me cough.”

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I did not mean to make “yuh” cough. [Crosstalk] But we showed on this side that we would not be goaded into giving out goodies just for goodies sake—[ Interruption]

Sen. George: Give him medicine.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—and not offering a budget because it was an election. What we did is exercise fiscal prudency—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Oh yes!
Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—and we showed [Desk thumping] and Senators on this side in their contributions to the debate showed that while you all talked when you were in office, we delivered while we are in office. [Desk thumping] This, Minister after Minister, showed you an action-oriented Ministry [Crosstalk] on the ground. I wanted to make you feel comfortable. [Laughter] I wanted you to be comforted in my contribution at least with what I wear because you would not be with what I say. [Laughter] I know that for sure. [Crosstalk]

But before I go into the substance of my contribution, Mr. President, some of the issues raised by Senator—[Crosstalk] green is the colour of agriculture, so it will not be stolen by others who are practising the art of thievery. [Crosstalk] The issue—[Interrupt]

Hon. Senator: “Wow.”

Sen. Beckles: “Yuh on a roll.”

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—raised by Sen. Deyalsingh needs to be addressed because it has been said outside of these Chambers, as well as inside this place and the other place, about the lands that are available for agriculture.

Now, interestingly, it was not raised by the Opposition, and I do not want to ascribe that because they do not appreciate agriculture, but I think in this instance they actually understand what was done. And I would like to repeat, for the ease of reference of Senators on both sides, how the lands were distributed and allocated, post-August 2003. So this was being distributed by the administration of which Sen. Beckles was a part.

Commercial and residential tenants, squatters and long leases, 2,258 acres; infrastructure, roads, playgrounds, cemeteries and so on, 1,965; built-up development company dwellings/offices, 166; commercial/residential built-up development, 2,640; other lands for non-commercial and non-agricultural activities to Ministries and state enterprises, 2,400; proposed usage for industrial and commercial activities which include e TecK, EMBD and so on, 5,200; proposed for housing, HDC/LSA, 1,900; housing for former Caroni employees via VSEP, 1,300; proposed housing for the national community, 2,500; contingency for board-approved leases, 1,200; Ministry of Sport, 65; for existing proposed agriculture, agricultural squatters, 4,200; citrus, 2,900; rice, 4,000; livestock and pasture, 3,700; free crops 340; aquaculture, 25; lands for agriculture for employees via VSEP, 20,319; existing agricultural tenants, 11,861; four 100 parcels for agriculture for model farms, 400 and PCS Nitrogen, 25.
Mr. President, it is a misunderstanding to believe that these lands are idle and fallow when you see them as you drive by going to south or in the countryside, so to speak. These lands have not only been allocated, as I have spelt out here, but in particular, Sen. Ramkhelawan spoke—because I gave him this document prior to his contribution—about the 20,000 acres and the squatters, 4,200. For these lands leases were actually executed. They have legal entitlement for these lands. These lands are not state lands at this point in time. They are leased to the Caroni (1975) Limited workers, primarily. The fact that they remain fallow is the subject of another argument.

You would recall the Justice Deyalsingh judgment where Caroni (1975) Limited had to take the State to court because the [Crosstalk] supporting—I do not know if they are related to Terrence Deyalsingh, Senator. Justice Deyalsingh ruled that they needed to put in the required infrastructure in order for these Caroni (1975) Limited workers to have access to their lands, and after that judgment over $2 billion was spent in that area of agricultural infrastructure, and there is nothing to show for it.

When we came into office in 2010, in another debate, I pointed out that what we found was PVC pipe simply stuck into the ground without the attendant infrastructure for a facility such as water and electricity and so on.

So these lands we cannot just simply take them away from the leaseholders. To do so would encourage litigation, and litigation that would be long, drawn out and would take the State down a road which we do not think would be beneficial for the country. We have seen the result of litigation. Right now we have people squatting on state lands. We have taken them to court and it is taking an undue amount of time. If we are to embark upon that course of action as suggested, it would result in us doing nothing as we have in the last 10 years.

For example, I do not know—for those of you who live in the east, as you come along the highway after Bescrete, opposite the Maloney area there; there are persons there who have occupied acres of state lands. They have engaged now—[Crosstalk]

**Sen. Beckles:** Pineapples.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:**—yeah. They have engaged now in dividing up State land and selling it. They have found some creative way to engage some attorneys-at-law to draft a document which will allow them to sell this land to somebody else.
They do not have legal entitlement to that land. They have no right to it, but they have gotten somebody to get this agreement for them and they are selling it. There are ads in the newspaper that tell you, for $4 million you could get this amount of acreage because it is on prime real estate land, on the highway frontage, and they are selling it for other activities other than agriculture. The State has initiated legal action. But that process is a long drawn-out process. Recently, we resuscitated and revived the Bamboo Fingerling Project to encourage the rearing of tilapia. And behind that pond, which is the one separated by the road on the other side of the masjid, a gentleman has a dwelling structure there.

Again, the Commissioner of State Lands has issued the requisite notices for him to vacate the premises and so on, but he has refused, he has appealed to his Member of Parliament and others I am sure, so that he would continue to occupy that residence which he has no entitlement to, but again the State cannot break the law. We cannot break the law in order to satisfy the law because in that case, the end does not justify the means. So we are compelled and confined to go through the process, and as a result of that, we are not minded to engage into the grabbing-back of Caroni land. And these were the allocations that were done by the last administration and negotiated by them. The way in which we are doing it, I would get into my contribution a little later on. So that addresses the contribution by—the comments, questions raised by Sen. Ramkhelawan.

The other one is by Sen. Hinds where he made specific reference to Danny’s Enterprises in getting 100 acres of land, and he alleges that Danny’s Enterprises has no agricultural experience and so on, and I would like to put on the record at this point in time that there is no lease in the Ministry of Food Production or elsewhere [Desk thumping] given to Danny’s Enterprises. There is no lease, so I do not know—[Interruption]


Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: —the source of Senator—[Interruption]

Sen. Hinds: While there may be no lease, and given the fact that state leases could take 20 years in some cases, is the Minister in a position to say that the Government has engaged in no such negotiation and has offered no such plot to Danny’s Enterprises?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Are you prepared to apologize for saying there was a lease?

Sen. Ramlogan SC: No, no, you should apologize.

Sen. Hinds: Let the Minister answer. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: The Senator made a very unequivocal statement here in this Chamber that Danny’s Enterprises had received 100 acres of land.

Sen. Hinds: Had received.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Received.

Sen. Hinds: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And I am telling you here today and now that Danny’s Enterprises has not received a single—[Desk thumping]

Sen. Hinds: [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I am not giving way, you had your turn. I am not giving way.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “You is a fraud, man.”

Sen. Lambert: He wants to bring it in “ah” debate.


Mr. President: Can we listen in silence. Senator—[Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Danny’s Enterprises has no lease. The Ministry is engaged in no activity to activate via a Cabinet approval, a lease for Danny’s Enterprises.

Hon. Senator: It good, it good.

Sen. George: [Inaudible]

Sen. Hinds: Very good. At least we know—[Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, the proposals for these large farms were established by the People’s National Movement. The establishment of a committee was done by the People’s National Movement, a committee which we continued. We did not cast it out. The proposals of persons interested in participating in the large farms were submitted, and evaluated by a multidisciplinary team of professionals from the ADB, Pricewaterhouse, University of West Indies Agri-Economics, the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Food Production, Planning Division. The committee was chaired by a former PS and the regional head of ICA, that is the Inter-American Corporation for Agriculture. The proposals were evaluated last year and successful offers to firms were sent out to various individuals.
Appropriation Bill, 2013

[SEN. THE HON. D. MAHARAJ]

But, Mr. President, is it that persons who may be aligned to this administration by way of relationship have no right to apply for anything that the State offers, lest they be vilified in this Chamber by persons on the other side and in the other place?

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** PNM discriminated against them?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** We are to discriminate against our supporters because they are our supporters.

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Yeah.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** That you are not entitled to apply to the State and go through the fair process, being scrutinized by the University of the West Indies, the Chamber of Commerce, Pricewaterhouse. These people who are independent and have no relationship with the Government evaluate a supporter and say, okay, you qualify but here they will be vilified, because they happen to be a supporter. Is only a PNM person must get through and say okay, that is fair. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Yeah.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** The only result that will be fair, that will be accepted by Sen. Hinds is if it is somebody else. But I ask Sen. Hinds, and I cast no aspersions on the following, when Dominic Hadeed got 100 acres in Macoya of prime agricultural land to establish Blue Waters Water Manufacturing, was he a friend of the PNM? The proposal that was given there was—did he have any agricultural experience? Did he separate Blue Waters to say coconut water and now growing some coconut plants on that 100 acres? That 100 acres of agricultural land is now lost, primarily for a water treatment plant for bottling of water in Trinidad and Tobago. And he has grown a few heads of coconut, and coconut is a very serious industry in Trinidad. We have lost it out due to the neglect of the PNM.

Most, if not all of the coconut water that we drink in Trinidad comes from Guyana at this point in time. The red ring disease and the red palm mite decimated the coconut industry in Trinidad under the watch of the PNM. They paid no attention and no mind to it at all. My predecessor, Vasant Bharath, at least engaged experts in the area. We brought down an expert from India as a result of our mission to India who has now introduced biological respondents to those pests, and we are now finding a way to treat with it. But in the meantime we have to depend on the Co-operative Republic of Guyana to get coconut water for here. When we celebrate during Carnival and other activities and we have to drink coconut water, remember that we are already importing coconut water from Guyana.
So, I have been called upon by people in the agricultural sector to examine how this hundred acres was given out for Blue Waters. But again, a lease was given out, and the gentleman and the firm have committed a significant amount of investment in there, and the Government does not feel that it will be prudent to revisit and try to engage in some sort of political spite as the manner in which our friends across may want us to engage in.

Mr. President, a lot has also been said about the allocation given to the Ministry of Food Production. It has been said by some that we got no more than last year and that was an insignificant amount, but what did we do with it last year? What did we achieve with our allocations?

**Hon. Senator:** Shiraz Khan.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** And they should ask that question. We got food inflation down to a single digit last year for the first time. [Desk thumping] We got growth in the agricultural sector for the first time in over 50 years and we got that with the same allocation. We got this year $1.338 billion of which $1.233.9 billion goes towards recurrent expenditure. So this is why I was extremely baffled, confused, bewildered, befuddled when Sen. Al-Rawi said that recurrent expenditure only accounts for 30 per cent. Al-Rawi said 30 per cent of your allocation goes towards recurrent expenditure. I am not seeing it in my Ministry. My Ministry sees close to 90 per cent of it going towards recurrent expenditure.

I am left for development, $105,150,000 towards development programmes. As I did last year, and we achieved what was thought an impossible achievement: Growth in the sector, food inflations to single digit, and this year we will continue the trend. How does that compare, Mr. President?

In 2008/2009, the PNM got $1.7 billion for agriculture, in which they included allocations to EMBD which is no longer with us; Forestry Division which is no longer with us; Land Division which is no longer with us. So when you hive off those divisions you get a substantially lower figure than $1.3 billion. So they have given in their administration less to agriculture and expect us to believe they have delivered more. But we deliver, they talk.

**Hon. Senator:** Oh, yes.

**Sen. Singh:** Yeah, man. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** Mr. President, in the review of agriculture, it is inescapable for any person active in the sector not to arrive at the plagues that orbit the agricultural sector which has long been neglected in Trinidad, and the
five critical areas of agriculture that affect and plague them are the areas of infrastructure, predial larceny, labour, land tenure and marketing support. I will attempt to go into how we treated with these areas under last year.

In the area of infrastructure, we are speaking primarily about access roads, irrigation, agricultural production and productivity, and some of the key initiatives and achievements in the sector during this period under review included the construction of 23.3 kilometres of new roads; rehabilitation of 70 kilometres of access roads. And this 70 kilometres of access roads represent a 636 per cent increase from the 11 kilometres rehabilitated during the period of the PNM 2008/2009. Let me repeat that, when they were in office they rehabilitated 11 kilometres of road with the same funds, same allocation we did 70. For the fiscal year 2012/2013, we at the Ministry of Food Production maintained 149 kilometres of access roads. This represents again a 310 per cent increase from the 48 kilometres maintained by the PNM in 2008. [Desk thumping]

Under the Institutional Development Fund, Mr. President, we have the Food Basket Programme. This programme, the Ministry rehabilitates access roads and allows farmers to have ease of access to their farms and so on, 69 food basket areas have been identified in Trinidad, an investment of $40 million was spent for activities in 2013, and approximately 38 kilometres of roads were being rehabilitated. And where were they being rehabilitated? The Mayaro network, Mapar Approach Road in Plum Mitan, Ecclesville, Connector Road, Tableland, Hobal network, New Bolt network in Tabaquite, Penal Extension, Banwarie Extension, Mamoral network, La Horquetta network, Carapo network, Jackson network—these are some of the areas, and you notice, some of these areas in the past fell under the PNM. The La Horquetta area, the Maloney area were all—Tunapuna—were all in the past, constituencies held by the PNM which, that particular sector operating in their own constituency was neglected.

In the area of water management and flood control, in 2013, $15 million was spent for the implementation of water management and flood control programmes which we utilized the entire amount. Some of the activities include: the establishment of communal pond storage, water harvesting system as well as reservoir storage in Ortoire and North Oropouche River catchment; the desilting of some 233 water channels in areas such as Caroni, Waterloo, Felicity, Exchange, Edinburgh, Carapo, the Caroni Rice areas, Jerningham, Cushe and La Gloria.

There was installation of irrigation systems on 22 sites which included: Timital, Macaulay, Cedros, Jerningham, Guaya, Union, Aranguez, Golden Grove, to name a few. Seventeen cylinder crossings were established in the Jerningham area. Mr. President, did you notice for this year and last year during the heavy rains which affected some parts of Trinidad that farmers were not complaining that their crops
were destroyed due to flooding? For the first time, you are not hearing the cries of farmers that they have been flooded out, their crops had been adversely—[Desk thumping] that is because of this work, the work of desilting and irrigation.

10.30 a.m.

We have managed to maintain a certain level of production during the dry season because of the ponds. We have invested now in creating ponds on farms so that during the dry season farmers still have access to water. We are not violating any of the WASA procedures by trying to tap into a river in the dead “ah” night to water fields and so on; we are working within the system, working within the law, and the farming community is responding in a very positive manner.

In the past you would recall, Mr. President, that the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, split up the URP projects among the Ministry of the People, the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Agriculture, and in the past the Ministry of Agriculture was used primarily just for training. We have now ramped up the activities in the infrastructural development part of it. So the URP component now is being utilized in the area of infrastructural development, and this year, over a three-month period, some 278 URP agriculture infrastructure projects were done in Trinidad.

These included areas in Caroni Central, Chaguanas West, Caroni East, Cumuto/Manzanilla, Toco/Sangre Grande, La Horquetta/Talparo, St. Joseph, Tabaquite, Arouca/Maloney, Oropouche. Excavation was done for earthen drains, accounting for some 888 metres of drains; excavations of earthen drain at 10,400 metres; excavation of a main drain, 2,700 metres; excavation of a river, 1,000 metres. We desilted and cleared drains, 17,000 metres; cleaned and cleared main drains, 37,000 metres; cleaned and cleared connecting drains, 500 metres; cleaned and cleared rivers, 32,000 metres; over 49,000 cubic metres for ponds were developed; access roadways, 12,500 metres.

And for many persons outside of the agricultural community this may not mean much, but for the farmer, having clean watercourses, access ponds, desilting of rivers, have a direct impact on their livelihood, and we saw it with the reduction of so many commodities in the market, and I will go into some of those price reductions during the course of my contribution.

Mr. President, rice was a focus of our last 12 months in the Ministry of Food Production. We know in Trinidad that approximately 34,000 tonnes of rice are consumed in Trinidad and Tobago. However, less than 5 per cent of that consumption is produced locally. A total of some 31,000 tonnes of rice are imported to Trinidad and Tobago, and that has a dollar value of $96 million. So that is what the cost is to the country for not growing its own rice—$36 [sic] million.
That is why I took particular offence at the reference to “lagoon” and “alligator” by Sen. Hinds, the derisive way in which he made that statement, which is reminiscent of his political forefathers, talking about people coming out of the “jeel”. And I know there are many among us in our community that—

[Interruption]

Sen. Hinds: Mr. President—

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—the farming community that—[Interruption]


Mr. President: I did not see any reason to require 35(5)—[Crosstalk] You will have to sit down. I saw no reason to call upon 35(5) as being—[Interruption]

Sen. Hinds: Can I seek to justify?

Hon. Senators: No! No! No!

Mr. President: I see no reason why it should be called—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “It doh work so!”

Sen. Hinds: Mr. President, my understanding, with humility is, having offered you a view on 35(5) the Senator should be given an opportunity to make a—[Crosstalk] Just a moment! Could you allow me? And then you can make a determination. Mr. President, I heard the words of the Senator and I wanted to suggest that he was imputing improper motives, if you would permit me.

Mr. President: Please have a seat. I did not see any question of improper motives being imputed. Yes, there are occasions when I will ask a Senator to clarify his position. To me, it was obvious that there were no improper motives imputed and, therefore, I did not call upon you to express a point of view. Thank you.

Sen. Hinds: I will be guided.

Sen. Singh: You said that there were no alligators—

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: His intervention, like his contribution, was without merit here. Your intervention, like your contribution, is without merit. [Crosstalk]

But the rice industry and the rice community have contributed. I know a DMO right now who has come out of the rice—his family grew rice in Cedros and right now that family has about five doctors. His father was in the “jeel”, and they produced doctors and lawyers. [Desk thumping] That is the heap of scorn that they have to be afforded at this point in time.
But the Government, however, is mindful of the importance of the rice industry and those associated with it, and we are committed to working with the private sector to increase our local production. [Desk thumping] We have targeted that at least 10,000 acres are required—or 4,000 hectares of land—be devoted solely for the production of rice, and that productivity per acre be increased from three tonnes to four tonnes per hectare.

Mr. President, the achievements for 2013 include:

- the establishment of the Rice Development and Coordinating Committee comprising of major stakeholders in the rice sector, primarily coming from the private sector because we want to involve the private sector in a significant manner in the resuscitation of the rice sector;
- increasing the lands under rice production from 500 acres to 4,750 acres before the end of next year;
- a projected rice production of 17,000 kilograms of paddy by the end of 2013, and this figure would account for some 50 per cent of local rice consumption;
- we want to continue the facilitation of importation of commercial certified seeds from Guyana. And Guyana is a success in rice. In fact, speaking with the Minister of Agriculture in Guyana last week, they have now produced so much rice in Guyana that they have now to export well beyond what they are producing. So that is a model. They have achieved food security in terms of rice, and as I have said before, rice is a staple on the plate of most persons in Trinidad and Tobago;
- we have established pumping stations in the Caroni areas to assist farmers in accessing the water during the low rainfall periods;
- at a cost of $8.7 million implemented a water infrastructure of rice land project on 533 hectares;
- under the IDF programme, repaired 48 kilometres of road for rice;
- desilting of 25 kilometres of channels for Caroni rice area;
- a public sector/private investment of two new rice mills with a value of some $200 million.

We have also an investment of 12 new harvesters valued at $18 million invested by the private sector in this initiative, and we created in this sector, Mr.
President, 1,500 new jobs. [Desk thumping] The aim, really, is to move away from a public sector-driven industry to a private sector-driven industry.

How do we compare to our predecessors, Mr. President? How do we compare with those who aspire to the corridors of power? In 1990, the Seed Certification Programme was drawn up by the last administration, never enacted; the 2002 draft rice policy was developed, never ratified; in 2008 another draft rice policy was developed, but it never moved forward. So they talk but they do not act. [Desk thumping] If you want to be serious about agriculture you have to act in the agriculture sector. It is not like other Ministries where you could get up and bluff your way through. [Interruption] What is that? Who?

Hon. Senator: Dhanoo.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I will deal with Dhanoo in a little while. Right? “You doh worry about Dhanoo. Take care she comin by you.”

In the fisheries subsector—[Interruption]

Sen. Beckles: “You eat this morning, boy?”


Under the Fisheries Development Programme, a number of achievements were accomplished during the last year: development of fishing centres and related facilities with infrastructural work being completed at 27 sites throughout Trinidad; upgrading of facilities which included electrical upgrade, repair to the roof of the Port of Spain wholesale fish market, as well as overall upgrades to the Orange Valley and southern wholesale fish market to HACCP standards; we continue to do research and testing, and construction continues at 10 fishing facilities in Trinidad and five fishing vessels repair facilities.

In the area of aquaculture, as we continue the thrust to develop tilapia farming as an alternative industry, 234 persons were trained in commercial aquaculture; 43 sites visited; seven aquaculture incentives were processed; eight new commercial aquaculture farms have been registered and five new hatcheries have commenced production of tilapia fingerlings; and the tilapia hatchery facility at the Sugar Cane Feed Centre in Longdenville has been expanded so as to ensure a ready supply of fingerlings for these emerging aquaculture farms that are coming on the horizon.

Mr. President, I made reference to the revitalization of the Bamboo Aquaculture Demonstration Centre, and those of you driving on the highway from east to west on a morning, before the Grand Bazaar turnoff, obliquely opposite the Nestlé compound, for years you would have noticed on either side of the road going into Bamboo—the place
with the car parts and so on—overrun with bush was this area there—and many people wanted to find out who that land—because it is prime commercial land. People wanted to buy it to set up and expand their car parts business and so on.

But that is an example of how PNM runs agriculture: neglect; overrun with bush. When we came into office I realized that facility was leased to a person under the last administration. The lease lapsed and nobody attended to it. Squatters had moved in. A squatter is still there, and now we are finding it immensely difficult to remove him, and we have now engaged the process.

That site had been overrun. But if you would have passed there within the last month, you would have seen the place cleared down. In fact, people have attributed the cleaning and clearing of the site to the highway expansion, but it was just coincidental that the highway was being expanded in that area at the same time. But that site has now been earmarked to be reactivated into a tilapia fingerling project, as well as a demonstration centre, and more activities will be in that general area as we continue to invest in it. You would have seen a big sign going up: “The Ministry of Food Production Fingerling Project.” And we expect, as tilapia farming becomes, hopefully, more popular, that its relevance would become deeper to our society.

NIPDEC, we have also engaged, along with the Ministry of Food Production, for the process flow for the Tilapia Processing Plant because we need to process the tilapia. We could just grab it out of the pond and have it for sale but the consumer finds that unattractive—the naked fish like that for sale. They prefer it filleted and nicely done and prepared and you shrink-wrap it and put it in the fridge and “yuh say, right. Yuh add a few more dollars and dey prepared tuh pay for dat.”

Most of the tilapia we get on the shelves in Trinidad actually comes from China. [Interruption] They have it prepared. So we have invested in going forward with a Tilapia Processing Plant, and we have facilitated, so far, the expansion of five new private hatcheries, and we are also engaging in the availability of feed.

Now, one of the highest inputs in cost of production for tilapia is the price of feed. The feed amounts to 60 to 65 per cent of the cost of production. So, therefore, we need to find a way to bring down the cost of feed to make tilapia competitive with the large economies of scale which the Chinese producers enjoy. So, locating a cheap supplier of feed but still maintaining the quality of the feed was achieved by the SIDC with a firm in Ecuador.
We are now importing feed from Ecuador via the Seafood Industry Development Company (SIDC), and they are selling it at cost. Once they recover the cost of their investment to bring down the feed and they buy it in bulk, they pass it on to the tilapia farmer. So the tilapia farmer now can enjoy a relatively cheaper price of tilapia feed and be able to bring down their cost of production, make the final consumer price much more attractive, and thereby carry the thing further in terms of deepening the industry in Trinidad and Tobago. We have also begun collaboration with the National Flour Mills to initiate our own type of feed and formulations here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Also, as a fillip to this thrust to deepening the sale of tilapia, the growing of tilapia locally, we have expanded the role of the Sugarcane Feeds Centre in Longdenville. They have been growing tilapia, albeit on a small scale, and during the month of Lent this year I asked them if they could start advertising that they have tilapia for sale—and their prices are very, very competitive, even lower than what you get on the shelves of supermarkets and the response was phenomenal. They sold about close to three tonnes of tilapia. [Desk thumping] As a result of that response, every month now, once a week, they have this sale at the Sugarcane Feeds Centre in Longdenville, and for those of you who live close by, I will encourage you all to go down there and support them because they—[Interruption]

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Where? The main road?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** It is off the main road. But they sell more than tilapia. They sell goat and sheep and beef and pork. The prices are very competitive. But what they have done by that sale is that they have realized that they can supply based on what they grow themselves. Their grow-out is not enough. So they have started to buy from tilapia farmers in the industry to sell to the consumer. So that pull from the different sectors by the Sugarcane Feeds Centre is adding a further stimulant now to the whole sector. We have reactivated the tilapia management committee and they are now actively getting involved in trying to continue the push to get tilapia off the ground.

Mr. President, the Sugarcane Feeds Centre also is engaged in the—I think what I have to consider, the saving of cascado and conchs in this country. Now, Minister Singh—I am sure he will be speaking much more on this—recently announced a two-year moratorium on hunting in Trinidad. He must be commended for that. [Desk thumping] I think the reports—today there was an article in the Newsday commending him for the moratorium on hunting, but we stand a risk in this country of eating out everything that walking, breathing on this land.
In Tobago—I think Tobago was a good example. How much fauna you still have existing that they have not slaughtered and land up in a bar-b-que pit somewhere or in a pot?

**Sen. Singh**: Red brocket deer no longer in Tobago.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj**: In Trinidad—[**Interuption**]

**Sen. Deyalsingh**: What?


**Sen. Singh**: Red brocket deer, gone.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj**: In Trinidad, we are not too far behind. How many of you could recall in days gone by, you could get crawfish? Now, you cannot—[**Interuption**]

**Sen. Singh**: Crayfish.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj**: Crayfish. Crayfish. Crayfish—[**Interuption**]

**Sen. Singh**: Excess of the craw—[**Inaudible**] [**Laughter**]

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj**: Crayfish, you cannot find it now. You cannot locate crayfish in Trinidad right now. It has virtually disappeared. It disappeared. Similarly, the size of the cascadoo that you are seeing being sold on the highway is getting smaller and smaller and smaller. Every time you pass in your car, it shrinks an inch, it shrinks an inch, and that is because we are eating it out. So the Ministry, we had to make an intervention on this.

So we have the Sugarcane Feeds Centre; they are rearing cascadoo and conch—black river conch—where we will restock in strategic places and so on. But you know, even in the restocking exercise, we have to be very careful. We had an exercise recently to release up in Kernahan in Manzanilla, people from the village and so on saw what was going on, and by Sunday everybody plate full of cascadoo.

**Mr. President**: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Food Production has expired.

**Motion made**: That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes.

[**Sen. T. Deyalsingh**]

**Question put and agreed to**.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj**: I thank Members for extending my time. So we have been faced with a situation where some of our indigenous species—because we boast about eating the cascadoo, you always return to Trinidad and so on, we
have to protect it. So in addition to rearing cascadoo with the Sugarcane Feeds Centre—and conch and releasing—we have to keep the release now a secret because if we make an announcement, it will be on the plates by the Sunday following.

**Hon. Senator:** But you just do it.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:** I know, we doing— So in addition to that restocking exercise, we are now bringing cascadoo, in particular, from Guyana as well. Rearing them here, we have to bring at least 12,000. We need at least 100,000 to release back in order to ensure that we have a constant supply, and it also adds genetic variety to what we have in stock here already. So it ensures that the species remain vibrant.

We have also engaged in aquaponics which we have targeted and working alongside the Ministry of National Security so as to introduce it in at-risk communities. That is where we use tilapia rearing in small tanks, that the water fertilizes lettuce and other types of stuff like that. We have partnered with NGOs such as the Rotary Club and the response for that has been tremendous. I will not go too much in details about that.

Marper farms, we continue to develop that, and as I mentioned last year, it was in a state of neglect like so many aspects of the sector, but we are utilizing that primarily for the propagation of citrus. As you know, there is a serious citrus shortage in Trinidad. Limes, oranges, grapefruit and so on are very expensive.

In the school feeding programme, it is cheaper to buy apples than to buy an orange, and that is because of some of the neglect that it had. When Caroni was devastated, it resulted in closure of the Todds Road orchard. Leases were placed that made it unprofitable. As a result of that, we had to revisit the lease fees to make it attractive for the farmers to start producing oranges and other varieties of citrus.

In the area of livestock, we have done a lot. In Trinidad and Tobago we only have about 2,250 head of livestock that produce dairy milk and so on, and our production is inefficient. We produce nine litres per head, in Costa Rica, it is 18 litres and Israel it is close to 35 litres. [Interruption] Well, inefficiencies; we believe we could just “leh go ah cow” in the pasture and it will make milk. There has to be a much more scientific approach to that. So as a result of that, we are importing 60 cattle from the United States to add to genetic material in Trinidad. We have also partnered for the first time with Nestlé, whereby we are bringing in over 75 dairy cows from Jamaica, the Hope breed, which will ramp up our dairy
production. For the first time, we have seen a positive trend in terms of milk; milk production has increased to 7 per cent. You will see it in your documents in a Review of the Economy, and in order to support that, we have to—[ Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: To 7 per cent or by 7 per cent?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: To 7 per cent. But in order to support this thrust, gone are the days where man cutting, with a little sickle, bush at the side of the road.

Sen. Singh: Grass knife.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: A grass knife. You cannot do that if you want to have a serious dairy industry. So we have established forage banks in Mon Jaloux, in La Gloria, in order to ensure that the farmers have access to their feed stock. We have sold already in Mon Jaloux 50 tonnes of grass and once La Gloria comes on stream, that will surpass that.

We have imported 147 sheep and goat to add to our existing herd, both genetic material as well as meat. As you know, one of the main areas of import in our food import bill is meat, primarily sheep and goat. So we intend to address that and we are seeing a positive response from the private sector. Nestlé now, on a litre of milk, commits a dollar towards the purchase of a dairy cow [Desk thumping] and that is because of their partnership with the Ministry of Food Production.

In stimulating the milk sector, we have given an expanded milk rebate. In the past, there was a protocol in which a national subsidy was only being beneficial to an international conglomerate. So the subsidy given by Trinidad and Tobago for the milk production of 150 per litre, per kilogram of milk, was only being utilized by Nestlé, an international company based in Trinidad.

We revisited those protocols, so now every single producer of milk products, and so on, could access this subsidy so we could have the Ramsarans and other people who produce milk and ice cream and so on, access it, and that would be based on clear standards that have been given and distributed by the Ministry of Food Production and that would add as a further fillip to the sector.

Under NAMDEVCO, we will be expanding the area of packinghouses. Again, packinghouses are nothing new. In my research for the budget contribution on packinghouses as a whole, Karen Nunez-Tesheira in her budget presentation in 2009 indicated the Government’s commitment to packinghouses, but again, commitment was talk, no delivery. Construction has started for the Brechin Castle packinghouse and another site has been developed and we will continue. So, you talk, we deliver. [Desk thumping]
Barbados and St. Lucia have emerged once again receptive to the produce of Trinidad and Tobago. Those were areas—under Caroni, when Caroni was in operation—importing Trinidad produce. But with the closure of Caroni, this was another of the unplanned effects of Caroni closure and those markets dried up. We have now reactivated those markets and they are taking in pawpaw, pineapple—pineapple is mister pineapple in Barbados. The Caroni two-acre plots—just going through quickly—we have delivered in 2013—6,973 leases have been offered by the Commissioner of State Lands; 4,808 leases have been received by the Chief State Solicitor office; 4,584 have been prepared; 2,951 leases have been registered; and 1,569 leases were distributed. The distribution of leases included areas: Caroni, Edinburgh, Felicity, Felicity II, Jerningham Junction, La Fortune, La Gloria, Orange Grove, Reform, Waterloo, Cedar Hill, Petit Morne and Reform.

Mr. President, the EU funding: the EU had made itself available with the closure of Caroni, funding to Trinidad and Tobago, and for years after that closure, you would hear the solitary voice of Seukeran Tambie on the radio and read him in the papers lamenting that the PNM failed to live up to its commitment of sorting out the EU funding—and I see Sen. Beckles smiling because she knows it is true.

Sen. Beckles: Do not worry, I will deal with that.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Tambie was lamenting up and down the country. I know you will deal with it. But for the first time, after a decade of neglect, we attended to the cane producers association. [Desk thumping] We signed a memorandum of understanding with Mr. Tambie for $1 million in which to move forward, in which the European Union is on board.

The Caroni Green Initiative is another area I want to get into. Those unutilized other areas of Caroni land—[ Interruption] I will not be distracted. We have varied the head lease because the lease that existed at that point in time meant that the persons having access to the Caroni lands could not sublet it out. So you have people who are probably clerks and so on in the VSEP package not interested in farming, but they could not rent it out. We varied that head lease and we married leaseholders who were not interested in farming with farmers who had no land, and we brought them together and for a nominal fee, managed and operated by Caroni at that point in time, they were able to activate within a short space of time, over 600 acres of land and we are seeing that production coming on stream, and it goes hand in hand with other initiatives of the Ministry such as farmer outreach programme.
I recognized early that a lot of the farmers do not have time to come to an extension office. They do not have the time to come to the Ministry to ask a question. So, once a week the Ministry of Food Production sends out a team comprising of people from the planning division, the land division, from the ADB, and they go to various communities, and they bring the services to them.

11.00 a.m.

The first one of that was done at the Solomon Temple in Wallerfield and at that first exercise, which I attended, a young man came up to me and he said, “Listen, I want to occupy a piece of land in Wallerfield but it is hard to get and I want to squat” and I urged him, do not do like the PNM and encourage squatters and so on by making them candidates in an election but try and engage in proper procedures [Desk thumping] and I put him to the Caroni Green Initiative. At the first harvest, which I attended in Orange Valley, of pak choi about nine or 1,000 head of pak choi, the farmer said, “You cah remember me?” I said, “No”. He said, “I was the guy you told me in Wallerfield to go to Caroni and get—”

In fact, they are institutionalizing it in the Ministry. They wanted that every one of these initiatives that the Minister attend, I say, you know, if we do that, we politicize it to an extent that it would not become effective in my mind and as a result, let us institutionalize it, and the Minister only make strategic intervention and it is working. It is working. We are seeing responses, people with simple problems that require minor attention being solved.

Mr. President, this morning on the front page of the Express, we have “Dhano vs Devant”, you know, the big showdown here, and I think it needs and it begs some attention, that how we in this administration treat with issues of financial irregularities, once it comes to our attention. Under the PNM’s watch, allegations were made about Calder Hart, [Crosstalk] against Uthara Rao—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Call a commission of enquiry.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—and up to today, you have the Leader of the Opposition making favourable statements about Calder Hart.

Sen. Al-Rawi: You do not understand sarcasm?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Well I—[Interruption]

Sen. Singh: [Inaudible]
Sen. Al-Rawi: Lost on you!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: They embrace persons that complaints are made against. They are embraced!

Sen. Al-Rawi: Lost on you! Entirely lost on you.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: When a complaint was made against Miss Sookoo by members of the Board—


Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—the agricultural society Board [Crosstalk] against her regarding financial irregularity, this Government acted. We immediately commenced an audit of the ASTT. We immediately engaged the Ministry of Finance and the Economy when we were told that she paid herself fees in excess of thousands of dollars well beyond, and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy responded by classifying the Board. We do not embrace people which you have allegations of impropriety, like our friends on the other side. We distance ourselves and then we treat with them. But there are serious matters now which are presently engaging the police, the fraud squad with regard to Miss Sookoo and her running of the organization, and this is a piece of legislation—the ASTT, as you know, it is an elected Board, it is not an appointed Board, that requires changing.

It is one of the many pieces of legislation in the agricultural sector which is close to 100 years old. This Act goes back to, I think, the 1920s. [Crosstalk] The Fisheries Act is 1916 but the PNM never was interested in agriculture so they ignored those.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Legislative agenda!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: They never attended to agricultural issues, they ignored it. So as a result of the latitude provided in that Act, anything could go on.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Put it on your legislative agenda!

Mr. President: Senator, you have to wind up.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Yeah. So in my closing words, I think the agricultural sector has performed. We have seen food inflation go down to single figures, single digits: 9 per cent. When we came into office it was 29 per cent. Growth in the agricultural sector, it is positive 2.3 per cent. [Desk thumping] When we came into office, it was negative 32 per cent so I think with our allocation last year and our allocation this year, we will continue to see the positive trending of agriculture. I thank you. [Desk thumping]
Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. President, thank you colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute in this debate on the Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year 2014/2015—no, 2013/2014. Allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy on delivering what was his second budget speech.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “He in disbelief there, boy!”


Sen. Al-Rawi: “He in disbelief!”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So I want to congratulate him on his second budget delivery. I am excited about this, not because it is his second, but it is this Government’s second-to-last budget.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeaaaaah!” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe: We are getting closer and closer to “last lap”.

Sen. Al-Rawi: To the end! To the end!

Sen. Deyalsingh: “Ahhhh!”

Sen. Al-Rawi: The end is nigh!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: And if you think you have not seen bacchanal yet—[Interuption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: Close to that.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—it is more to come.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah, man!” Very close to!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, I want to focus my entire contribution on Tobago because Tobago has not been covered much throughout the whole debate and I just wanted to focus my contribution on Tobago.

Sen. Al-Rawi: And they fired Christlyn so there is nobody over there to talk.

Sen. Deyalsingh: To talk.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Oh yes, they sure did fire my dear friend—[Interuption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—former Senator, Christlyn Moore.

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible] [Continuous crosstalk]
Sen. S. Cudjoe: She used to make some excellent contributions here in the Senate.

Sen. Deyalsingh: But Moheni did not talk about Tobago.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, she used to sit in the front row rubbing nose and rubbing forehead with the Attorney General—[ Interruption ]

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah!”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: —and he did not speak up for her when they kicked her to the curb like the proverbial, mangy dog.

Hon. Senators: “Oooooh!”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So, Mr. President, so long, farewell to her, I wish her all the best. [ Crosstalk ]

Mr. President, this year, Tobago was allocated 4.03 per cent of the budget, exactly $2.458 billion of the fiscal package. This year’s budget, the total budget was $61 billion—the largest budget ever in the history of this nation. We received 4.03 per cent as is required—the very minimum as is required by the Dispute Resolution Commission. Now, Mr. President, not an extra dollar, not an extra cent, not even an extra percentage point—-[ Interruption ]

Sen. Al-Rawi: But they claimed though!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: —4.03 per cent flat. So I was a little bit taken aback when the Minister of Finance and the Economy, he boasted and he said, “And this year, Tobago would receive 5.3 per cent of the national pie”. That is $3.3 billion—5.3 per cent of the national pie, more than is required by the Dispute Resolution Commission ruling, and the Government thumped on their little desks and I cringed. As I sat in the public gallery area, I cringed because I do not know what upsets me most: a Government that is slippery with the truth or a Government that believes the electorate is stupid enough to believe the diabolic untruth!

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Hmmm!”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Now, with that said, I want to publicly condemn the Government for its lack of respect for the integrity—[ Interruption ]

Sen. Al-Rawi: And intelligence!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—intelligence and the political maturity of the electorate. [ Desk thumping ] For the fourth consecutive year—I did this in 2010, 2011, 2012—[ Interruption ]
Sen. Al-Rawi: Nobody covered it!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and I am now going to do this in 2013. Year after year, I have to take time out of my contribution, not even the Members of the TOP in the Lower House would take the time out to explain this to their colleagues and to the population.

Sen. Beckles: Did any of them speak?


Sen. S. Cudjoe: Or Sen. Mohe— to explain this to their colleagues, but I would take the time out for the fourth time.

Now, Mr. President, I will read to you what the Tobago House of Assembly Act says about this Dispute Resolution Commission ruling. Mr. President, in 2002, the DRC recommended that the Tobago House of Assembly receive a percentage—in the range of 4.03 per cent as the lower limit to 6.9 per cent as the upper limit—of the national budget to cover recurrent and development allocation for each financial year.

Now, the Dispute Resolution Commission ruling speaks specifically to the Tobago House of Assembly, and the Tobago House of Assembly alone, to cover our responsibilities in the Fifth Schedule. So I find it pitiful, disingenuous and distasteful that in this day and age of access to information and the Internet where the population is more educated and more curious and they can easily find out that this information is incorrect, that the Minister or the Government would pull that “kind ah stunt” on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

What the Minister had done, in fact, is add all the figures, all the funding that is going to be spent by other Ministries in Tobago, he added that to the Tobago House of Assembly allocation—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Shameless!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and then tell us “5.3 per cent”—

Sen. Al-Rawi: For the THA!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—“5.3 per cent for Tobago; I have done well; we love Tobago”. Mr. President, that is not love; that is basic legality—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Deception!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—because we got 4.03 per cent.
Now, the $800 million that was added, this figure spreads far and wide among the Ministry of Tobago Development doing whatever it is they do in Tobago. We are still trying to figure it out, they are still trying to figure it out too. This $800 million is spread across the Ministry of National Security to take care of the police, the army, the fire service and so on; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, civil aviation, meteorology, immigration, legal affairs, the Judiciary, the Attorney General, the Ombudsman, the service commission, and that is only under the Sixth Schedule.

If we are talking about the Seventh Schedule, Mr. President, this same $800 million is to cover the Supreme Court, service commissions, the Ombudsman, Treasury, Comptroller of Accounts, pension division, Government Printery, Registrar General, probate registry, Director of Public Prosecutions, telecommunications authority, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, National Training Board, the Ministry responsible for industry and trade, the Ministry responsible for agriculture in respect to granting of licences, CARIRI and the list goes on and on—Standards, NLCB.

Mr. President, I do not want to take up my time but there are over 29 other areas that this $800 million is supposed to cover but the People’s Partnership Government saw it fit—[ Interruption ]

Sen. Al-Rawi: To misrepresent!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to lump it all with the Tobago House of Assembly allocation and misrepresent what was actually given to the Tobago House of Assembly—[ Interruption ]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Again!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—again for a fourth consecutive year. I do not know who they think they are fooling, Mr. President, but they are very slippery with the truth.

Now, Mr. President, and the thing is, you think the People’s Partnership does not know this, you think the Minister does not know this? But it is another attempt to fool and mamaguy the people of Tobago and to mamaguy the electorate so that we could think that this Government loves us. Since they came into power, they told us they love us. Love? Love has nothing to do with that, this is your basic minimum.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Crocodile love!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: This is legality, this is your legal obligation; [ Interruption ] this has nothing to do with love. You have no choice but to follow the law or else we would both be in the court house in court house clothes and we both have that. Do we not? [ Desk thumping ]
Now, further to the basic 4.03 per cent, the legislation in section 43 speaks to some other aspects that need to be considered. I will quote section 43:

“In considering the estimates as submitted by the Chief Secretary, Cabinet shall give due consideration to the financial and developmental needs of Tobago in the context of Trinidad and Tobago and shall allocate financial resources to Tobago as fairly as is practicable, and in determining what is fair and practicable, the following considerations, among others, shall apply:

(a) physical separation of Tobago by sea from Trinidad and Tobago’s distinct identity;
(b) isolation from the principal national growth centres;
(c) absence of the multiplier effect of expenditures and investments...made in Trinidad;
(d) restricted opportunities for employment and career fulfilment;
(e) the impracticability of participation by residents of Tobago in the major educational, cultural and sporting facilities located in Trinidad.”

Were any of these things considered in the Tobago allocation? No, absolutely not, certainly not!

Mr. President, nothing in this legislation, nothing in the Tobago House of Assembly Act, nothing anywhere in the Constitution, nothing in all our legal framework prevents the Government from going above 4.03 per cent which is the basic minimum. You can go to 4.1, 4.2, 5 per cent, 6.7, 6.8 because you have that wide range to play with—4.03 per cent to 6.9 per cent—and we have just been getting the basic minimum, 4.03 per cent.

11.15 a.m.

Nothing ties your hands, so if you are talking about love we need to be talking about 4.03 per cent plus, and we certainly did not get that. Now, Mr. President, you know what is even more—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Even if you want to give the 4.03, just do not misrepresent it.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Yes, true, it is okay to give the 4.03 per cent but do not misrepresent it.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Just say so.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Just say so. Come out plain and say so. You got 4.03 per cent. I do not understand what the games are about. But, Mr. President—[ Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “You imputing” improper motives.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—what I find very—[ Interruption]

Hon. Senator: [ Inaudible]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Maybe you are.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—disturbing, Mr. President is that, earlier in this year, this is the same Government that came to the national population and said, “We are prepared to give Tobago 8 per cent.”

Sen. Beckles: “Hmm, yeah.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah.”

Sen. Beckles: Just before the election.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: All in the election campaign, in their manifesto they said, “We are about Tobago, we love Tobago and you know what, we are prepared—[ Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: “Yuh didn agree?”

Sen. Beckles: “Because we know it wasn true.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to give Tobago 8 per cent. [ Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is right.

Sen. Maharaj: “All yuh didn agree.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Would you not think that this Government would show the same goodwill and even try to move a little closer—[ Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to that 8 per cent that they had—[ Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Shameless!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—proposed and promised?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Shameless!
Sen. S. Cudjoe: And I hear Sen. Maharaj shouting across the floor but “all yuh did not agree to that”; but, Mr. President, I tell you we did not agree to that package, that legislative package that was brought—[Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to the House.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: That rushed process with no proper consultation. [Desk thumping] And in addition to that—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Mamaguy. [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—in addition to the poor process, Mr. President, that legislation, that package came with several profane and obscene positions—[Interruption]

Hon. Senators: “Ohh.” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and provisions that belittle the people of Tobago—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: “The 8 per cent tie up with the rest.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and caused severe discomfort to our people and our Tobago House of Assembly institution. And, Mr. President, we are just not prepared, as a society, to sell ourselves for 8 per cent and take any abuse for 8 per cent of the national—that is prostitution with a cheque and we are not signing up for that.

Sen. Beckles: That is why we vote them out.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: And that is why, Mr. President, that is why on January 21, we voted resoundingly against that, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Beckles: The 8 per cent.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: Because we are a people of principle, Mr. President—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—people of proper morale, and we would not lay down and take that, Mr. President. We are not willing to trade our dignity—[Interruption]
Sen. Deyalsingh: “Yeah.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: Yes. [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:——we are not willing to trade our identity——[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Yes.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:——and our integrity——[Desk thumping]——for a couple dollars. That is prostitution with a cheque and we will not fall for that.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Well said!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So Mr. President, we condemned the Bill. We did not support its contents and we certainly did not support the process, Mr. President.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is right.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: We voted against them——we gave them a licking at the polls, 12-nil. Not a seat for them, Mr. President. [Desk thumping] And we make no apologies “eh”, we make no apologies for standing up for ourselves, for defending our ground and protecting our heritage, Mr. President.

And I will let you know, Mr. President, this is not a PNM position, this is a Tobago position——[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Yes. [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:——because any, any government, any administration, any party that treats us with disdain and disrespects us, you are going to walk through the valleys of the shadow of political death——[Interruption]

Hon. Senators: Ohh. Whay! [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:——and not a person could save you until you get back to basics and find out what is it the people of Tobago want. Only then you will gain our respect. PNM, ILP, UNC, whatever you want to call it, it is a Tobago position and we all are prepared——[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: That is right. [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:——and we all are prepared to stand by that. So Mr. President, for 20 years, for 20 years in Tobago the people kept the PNM out because at that time we felt that we were being disrespected, but in 2001——[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: They saw the light.
Sen. S. Cudjoe:—they came and they proved that they were worthy of our votes—[Interruption]

Sen. Beckles: They saw the light. They saw the light!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and they have treated us well ever since, Mr. President.

[Desk thumping]

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is right.

Sen. Deyalsingh: That is right.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: And not until you can beat that we would consider you.

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible] this morning.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: “Before that, we not looking at you so doh even waste yuh time.” So Mr. President, it is because of that strong moral compass and because of that position that we have taken and that we stand firm by as Tobagonians, I believe that the people of Tobago are being punished and the Tobago House of Assembly is being placed in timeout.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Typical, typical. [Desk thumping]


Sen. S. Cudjoe: This is a Tobago-in-timeout budget. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Beckles: Not for long, not for long; one more year. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Not for long. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Beckles: One more year.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: This is a Tobago-in-timeout budget, Mr. President, because despite the several meetings and consultations held between the Tobago House of Assembly and the Minister and the staff—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Which Minister?

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the members of staff, his whole team in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, there was the Chief Secretary and the Minister of Finance and the Economy—the Secretary of Finance would have rolled out the comprehensive economic development plan that would guide Tobago through our development for the next four years. We rolled out our plans, our ideas, our recommendations, and there seemed to have been some perceived agreement, Mr. President, but at the end of the day we ended up with 4.03 per cent.
Sen. Beckles: Same thing.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: You are in timeout.

Sen. Beckles: “Mmm.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So Mr. President, with not even a commitment to examine or even discuss other measures by which the shortfall could be taken care of, here we are, another year, 4.03 per cent. It does not put us in any better position than we were in any of the other years.

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible] could say so?

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Four point zero three per cent, $2.458 billion to Tobago—[Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: Not even an adjustment for inflation.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—of which $2.1 billion is for recurrent expenditure and $300 million for development programmes. Now, if you know anything about budgeting and about fiscal management and economics, Mr. President, you would know that true development cannot be done with recurrent expenditure. True development is all about the money that you allocate to the development programmes. These are the programmes and the projects that would take people up the social and economic ladder and improve your quality of life.

So Mr. President, let me give you an example of the kind of funding that has been provided for our development programmes. This is the kind of interest this Government has in improving the welfare of the unfortunate and the disadvantaged. I will give you an example. The Caregivers Programme where young people are employed to go to the homes of senior citizens who are sick, unable to move about, unable to do their own laundry, and so on—$500,000 for that programme for the fiscal year.

Hon. Senator: “Nah!”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Yesterday, Sen. Raziah Ahmed spoke about the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and we are also having that problem in Tobago. We have a programme called the Programme for Adolescent Mothers. So when young people get pregnant we take them into an institution and we try to help them get back in school, get them back into education, going to college, starting their own businesses and so on. And I remember working in the Division of Social Services in 2009 when that project was starting up and at that time we had at least an 85 per cent success rate in that programme, but this Government, this People’s Partnership Government who claims to love Tobago too much, they gave us $100,000 to fund that programme—[Interruption]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—only $100,000. Mr. President, the CEPEP; CEPEP is a programme that was developed by the Tobago House of Assembly and a programme which we are still very pleased about. It was called the Community Enhancement Programme at the time and the whole idea of the CEPEP Programme—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible] called them swine.

Sen. Al-Rawi: What is it you called them?

Hon. Senator: Al-Rawi.

Hon. Senator: Swine?

Hon. Senator: He called them swine.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—was to get single mothers and people who take care of their children in the morning to come out early, do some work—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: He said pig.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and then learn a trade or learn some kind of skill for the rest of the day. Most of my beauticians, the people who braid my hair and do my nails came through the CEPEP Programme—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah man.” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and some of them even teach in YTEPP now. Mr. President, I was very pleased a couple weeks ago when a young man who graduated—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—from high school without any subjects, he started the CEPEP Programme, he learnt a trade and I was happy to see him. He came to my mother’s house with an NEC certificate. So through the programme, we helped him to enrol, to get certified and now he was looking at starting his own business.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: And these are the success stories that we could tell from a Tobago perspective about CEPEP. I know in Trinidad, in some areas, it could be quite different but in Tobago CEPEP remains a programme that we have been proud of and we continue to be very proud of.

Mr. President, this Government allocated zero dollars and zero cents to CEPEP in Tobago.
Sen. Al-Rawi: No, no, no.
Sen. S. Cudjoe: Not a red cent—[Interruption]
Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to CEPEP in Tobago.
Sen. Deyalsingh: Not a yellow cent.
Sen. Deyalsingh: Not a yellow cent.
Sen. Beckles: “Dat cyar be true.”
Sen. S. Cudjoe: That is very true. Check your books.
Hon. Senator: Shamfa “yuh lying.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Check your books. And “if you not seeing right, I have two glasses, I can lend you one.” [Laughter and desk thumping] So Mr. President, I want to move on now to another critical area that Sen.—[Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—Edwards would have raised yesterday—housing, Mr. President. For housing, and all housing concerns in Tobago, all settlement concerns, this Government has allocated $28 million.

Hon. Senator: “Nah.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Now, Mr. President, if you check the books, if you check the draft estimates you would see that housing projects in Trinidad are done through loans and grants and so on; when you check the books properly you are seeing $800 million loans and so on. Mr. President, for Tobago $28 million, and we have been talking and pleading with the Government about this issue for some time that it is just not enough.

For the home subsidy programme, the Home Improvement Subsidy Programme where people would have had their houses for a couple of years and just need some refurbishment, this Government allocated zero dollars and zero cents. And I find
that quite interesting because I remember in Sen. Tewarie’s contribution, he was
talking about the different grants that they would have handed out for home
improvement. And, Mr. President, they did not allocate any to the Tobago House
of Assembly.

Mr. President, “leh” me give you an example of some of the figures. For the
Aventura housing project, $3 million. For the Signal Hill Housing Estate, $1
million. How many houses “dat could do”? For Charlottesville, it gets better,
$200,000. This Government cannot be serious. That is the kind of contempt that
this Government has for Tobagonians, for the development of human capital and
for the welfare of the people of Tobago.

Mr. President, I want to talk a little bit on human capital because as a young
person I know many Tobagonians depend on this scholarship programme that the
Tobago House of Assembly has. We requested $8 million, we got $1 million. One
million dollars for Tobago House of Assembly scholarships for students from
Tobago.

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** How much Delmon got?

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** And I—thanks for mentioning that because I know that
Minister Baker in 2000/2001 when the People’s National Movement took office
in Tobago, Mr. Delmon Baker was one of those students stranded in Grenada—
[Interruption]

**Hon. Senator:** Grenada. That is right.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:**—for funding. Starved of funding—at that point in time the
Hochoy Charles administration was in a sort of partnership with the UNC but they
“get away”. And Mr. Panday decided to starve the House of Assembly of funds. I
remember going to the bank at that time to cash a cheque and the bank “not taking
yuh cheque, yuh not getting any loan—anything from the bank”, and it is when
Mr. Orville London, the hon. Chief Secretary in the Tobago House of Assembly
under a caring, loving People’s National Movement came into office [Desk
thumping] we, we were the ones who helped those in Grenada and paid up all
their fees—[Interruption]

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Including Baker.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:**—and it is very, very disheartening to know that Dr. Baker,
Minister of Tobago Development, would sit in a Cabinet—[Interruption]

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** And spite his own people.
Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and stay quiet when this Government is allocating $1 million to scholarships for students from Tobago. That is a shame.

Sen. Deyalsingh: And he got $800,000.

Sen. Al-Rawi: He got $800,000 by himself.

Sen. Beckles: Shame!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, allow me to move on now to training programmes for young people in agriculture.

Hon. Senator: [Inaudible]

Hon. Senator: Baker get $800,000.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: No money. Zero dollars and zero cents. Agro-food processing in Tobago, $200,000 for agro-food processing, Mr. President. This Government cannot be serious.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Minister Maharaj you ent talk ’bout dat?”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President—yeah, Minister Maharaj did not talk about that.

Sen. Maharaj: THA [Inaudible]

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, as I called out these figures, you could see these ridiculous allocations that would frustrate any meaningful progress for Tobago, for business development in Tobago, for economic diversification. “Leh me” take you on a trip down that lane, Mr. President. Enterprise Development, $2 million. Business Incubator Programme, $1 million. Venture Capital Programme—that is a programme that is used for people who have really big business ideas and who are interested in accessing business opportunities at home, $1 million.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Like [Inaudible] used to get more than that.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Now, the lower limit for the Venture Capital programme is $250,000. So let us say we are giving out grants, Venture Capital funding at 250, you could only serve four entrepreneurs for that fiscal year, Mr. President. That bothered me because I sat here earlier this week and I listened to Sen. Tewarie as he boasted about this Government during this fiscal year giving 53 grants to new business owners at $200,000.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Each?
Sen. S. Cudjoe: At $200,000 each, 53 grants. That is more than $10 million but for Venture Capital in Tobago, give $1 million, Mr. President? Is that Trinidad walking side by side with Tobago, Mr. President, that they like to boast about? Mr. President, so you talk, when we get back in power in 2015 we would perform. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Maharaj: They spend, we have to pay.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: You spend and we would have to pay. And as I say you spend we would have to pay, allow me to segue a little bit, Mr. President. I was on the—[Interruption]—“I no warring with you, Sen. Maharaj, you have enough problems, Sookoo for you, Sookoo for you”—[Laughter and desk thumping]—I “no warring with you”.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. President, I sat on [sic] the airport on Saturday, waiting to go home—and the “amm”—[Minister Alleyne-Toppin enters Chamber]—I want to welcome the hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin—[Interruption]

Sen. Beckles: “They send for Vernella for you, man, yes.” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—as she enters the Senate. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Beckles: As soon as you start talking Tobago.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: As soon as I start talking Tobago. [Interruption] That is not a problem. I guarantee you, she does a better job than the other gentleman. [Desk thumping] “Amm”, Mr. President, I will tell you this little story. A Saturday I sat on [sic] the airport and the—[Interruption]

Sen. Majaraj: “Yuh sat on the airport?”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Sen. Maharaj—[Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe: No. Let Sen. Maharaj have a good time because “you see, when Miss Sookoo ready fuh him, I would not be able tuh help him.” So have a good time. [Desk thumping] Mr. President, at the airport I witnessed the President and an entourage getting on the plane to go to Tobago. There was a couple and a friend in the airport and the man said: “I do not see why he should fly the plane, he needs his own helicopter.”
The wife turned to him and said—the lady that was with the couple turned to him and said—“Are you prepared to pay for it? Do you know that comes from our purse?” He said: “But nobody cares anymore.” And she said: “Are you prepared to pay for it?” And he did this [Sen. Cudjoe folds her hands and utters a steups]. Mr. President, they are spending but “somebody else have tuh pay.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah”, that is right, delivery by spending.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: And this money is coming out of the public purse.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: So have fun, we would have to pay.

Mr. President, allow me, I want to talk a little bit about our business development and economic diversification.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Excellent.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: I want to talk about enterprise development and economic diversification because this is a main pillar in our development thrust right now in Tobago, so I want to talk a little bit about Cove.

I think all the announcements that have been made about Cove just go to show the kind of contempt this Government has for development in Tobago. I think it is a very cynical approach for the Minister to announce Cove as a free zone area and then not allocate $1 to the development of Cove.

Hon. Senators: “Oooo!”


Sen. S. Cudjoe: Zero dollars and zero cents, Mr. President.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is delivery, though.

Sen. Deyalsingh: “Yeah.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Free zone area—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is talk and delivery in one.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—everybody could jump and have a good time.

Sen. Beckles: Just talk and walk.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: Not a cent, not a cent to the—[Interruption]
Sen. Deyalsingh: Not a yellow cent!

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to the development of Cove.

Now, Mr. President, for this year for Cove we had planned to develop 36 MPUs, that is small factory shells, between 4,000 and 12,000 square feet, to accommodate small manufacturers. We also had plans to build the new infrastructure to accommodate the authorizing bodies and the ancillary services like WASA, health, Town and Country Planning, and so on, and even customs, to try to make Cove a one-stop shop, to try to improve our business environment and to make the park more attractive to potential investors.

If you check the records over the past couple of years, well the last three years, this Government has not allocated one cent, under the development of Cove heading, if you check the books.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: So all these unspent balances that people are prepared to talk about, thank God we have that feature in our budgeting system, because it is those unspent balances and unexpended balances that come into play to cover these costs. Another programme or another project might have to suffer, in order for you to invest in a project that is deemed to be more profitable to your development or to your developmental thrust right now.

So, we have learnt to cut and contrive but if you are prepared to make these boastful comments about Tobago and development in Tobago, we have to be prepared to put our money where our mouths are.

Mr. President, to make matters worse, let me tell you “a little something”, you have, down at Cove, businesses like—state enterprises, like the NGC and T&TEC, operating in the park that refuse to pay their lease; refuse to pay their rental fees; sitting in the park, enjoying water, waste management, all those services, and they refuse to even pay the common service charges. We are billing them, we are talking to them, we are asking for meetings and they refuse to talk to us. Does that sound like a Government that is serious about business development and transforming the economy of Trinidad and Tobago; Tobago walking side by side with Trinidad? No.

We pay T&TEC, per billing term, at least $35,000 in fees. We have to pay them for their electricity to service the park. Why would T&TEC not pay us our lease? Why would T&TEC not pay us our fees? We gave them 5.7 hectares of land, with a commitment to discuss the lease arrangement and now it is time to talk the lease arrangement and T&TEC refuses to speak with us.
So, Mr. President, we have been holding land—I want to direct this also, through you, to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—at Cove for the Eastern Caribbean gas pipeline project and I really want to ask: what is taking place with that project? Because that project was scheduled to be completed by 2016, and to this date nothing has happened. So we are here holding—[ Interruption]—I am just saying, Mr. President, through you, tell us what to do with our land, because we are holding and holding and holding this land for you. We can give it to somebody else. Tell us what is going on with the Eastern Caribbean pipeline project. Have you abandoned this project? What are your plans? What do we do? Should we continue to sit and wait for three more years for you?

Mr. President, I want to make the statement that Cove is not a social programme. It is a business initiative. Eventually, we are supposed to raise money, raise funds and make a greater contribution, a more significant contribution, to the national economy. And if we are not prepared to treat our own business initiative with respect, you cannot expect that from external investors. You cannot expect to get the FDI that you constantly talk about. Mr. President, we have to step up our game.

Mr. President, I have another concern, as it relates to Cove. I think that this really is a brilliant business initiative and there is so much potential but, we have to be prepared to make that serious investment to bring this thing to life.

Mr. President, I remember in the 1970s—I was not alive but I read about it—when the People’s National Movement had set out to do the Point Lisas Industrial Park and some people thought we were crazy.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Sitting opposite.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** But look at Point Lisas now. Look at Point Lisas now. Point Lisas is a project that we can be very, very proud about. Everybody who open their mouth to speak about energy and industrialization—[ Desk thumping]—and a robust economy in Trinidad and Tobago, you have to talk about Point Lisas.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Ramnarine say men of the past.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** You have to talk about Point Lisas and that is a project of the People’s National Movement. And I think that Cove, that eco-industrial park, could do the very same thing for Tobago.

**Sen. Maharaj:** They “Sookooernize” the—[ Interruption]
Sen. S. Cudjoe: So we have to respect our very own. We cannot expect people from the outside to come and invest if we are not prepared to respect our very own.

I have another question about: how is this thing going to work? How is this free zone area going to work? During the election campaign, we heard the hon. Prime Minister making announcements on the election platform talking about: “We are going to make all of Tobago a free zone area.” Is this part of the plan?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Still? “If it ain one—” [Inaudible]

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Is this part of the plan? Mr. President, we want to know: is the whole park going to be made a free zone area? Is part of the park going to be a free zone area? Is this thing going to be phased? I just find it kind of embarrassing asking these questions because all Tobagonians have these same questions and there was no consultation with the people on the ground, no consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly. So when that announcement was made, I looked to the Chief Secretary and his eyebrows went up and my eyebrows went up too.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is talk and delivery, right there.

Sen. Singh: We have a plan for the free zone in Tobago.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, it does not take—it does not cost us anything to talk. It does not cost us anything to negotiate. Now, if this is going to be the whole park, there are going to be some serious implications for the Tobago House of Assembly and for the Cove estate. We would need to do some re-lotification. That is going to cost some money. Was any money allocated for the development of Cove? No.

The free zones Act speaks to having 24-hour security. There were no plans for that because we did not know that you were going to give us this big surprise on budget day. The free zones Act says that the free zone area should accommodate customs. We have no money in the budget for that. That was not in our plans at this point in time, because the Government decided to give us a big surprise on budget day.

There are also some serious issues, because I remember in August, we would have notified some potential investors that we do not know what is happening with this whole free zone issue, because they were waiting for the park to become a free zone area. So we were holding space for them pending that the park becomes a free zone area. This is as far as I understand. And the letters were sent out in August telling them: “You know what, we cannot hold any longer. We do not know where this free zone thing is going to go.”
And then, September morning, announcement, free zone area. Now you have to go now like a puppy dog and say: “Hey, come back, come back. Minister Howai says we could have a free zone area.” That embarrassment could have been avoided, because it looks like we are not serious about business just because the Government decides to grandstand and keep this thing a secret and give us a big surprise.

Now, Mr. President, I want to move on to another part of the free zones Act that speaks to energy-based enterprises. We have several energy-based enterprises down at Cove. You have people like T&TEC, NGC and this whole Eastern Caribbean gas pipeline. They take up about 33/35 per cent of the park right now and the free zones Act does not allow energy-based businesses to enjoy that kind of concessions made in the free zones Act. Right? So we would now have to look at how we are going to treat with that for the energy-based businesses that are already at the park.

We have a company in waiting called DECA, and DECA—we are holding land for DECA because DECA is interested in converting condensate from NGC to make some by-product of natural gas.

Sen. Maharaj: Without tender?

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Wait, I said we are considering. We have a list of people we are considering, but this is stuff that you need to tell people—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: [Inaudible] Corruption!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: You had your chance to talk. “Talk to Sookoo when your time reach. Leave me alone.” Mr. President, we need to talk, straighten and iron out these things, so when we speak to our investors, we will know what to tell them, we will know what to expect and how to operate our businesses. We cannot operate like this, where the Government throws out a surprise; we “doh” know how it is going to work. We are supposed to be in this development thing together. [Crosstalk]

Mr. President, I want to raise again, as I had raised with the Minister before, the issue of ports and port facilities. If you are going to have a free zone area at Cove, then we need to be talking about port facilities at Cove. I see some $500,000 or some amount in that area was allocated for research for the port facilities. So, here we are, we have a free zone area without a proper port close to Cove. We are dealing with one small port at Scarborough that takes care of pretty much everything: the cruise line, the local ferry, tourist, cargo. Everything
happens right at that port. We are going to have some challenges with bringing raw material into the free zone area and exporting, getting the finished material out, if we do not have a proper port.

I would have raised in the debate earlier this year, when we spoke about the port facilities, the kinds of problems that Tobago business people face. Now, some of our issues include corruption at the port in Trinidad. To get your material, to get your merchandise fast, you just have to know somebody. You have to be prepared to “grease somebody hand”. You have to be prepared to pay for some staff party.

Sen. Al-Rawi: So you are informed.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So I am informed and you can go back to the debate on the port. Sen. Howai said he would have looked into that for me at that time.

Mr. President, there is a problem because after clearing on the international side of the port, the Tobago businessmen now have to worry about moving the merchandise and the containers from the international side to the local side. So that is another set of transportation fees.

We are also concerned about the equipment to move containers. The machine that you have to lift containers from one side to another does not hold the top lid of the containers properly and it is damaging the containers. So, these are some of the issues that the Tobago Chamber would have asked me to raise.

11.45 a.m.

Now, Mr. President, now that you know the enormity of our development agenda, you can certainly see where $300 million for development for Tobago, for this fiscal year, is not enough.

We are well aware of the constraints faced by the Government as it relates to financing, and we think that our demands are quite reasonable. Now, I know that no specific Ministry gets exactly what it asks for, but I also know that if during the fiscal year a Ministry runs out of money or a state board runs out of money, and they need financing to conduct a certain project, there are supplemental variations and the Government comes back to the House at least two times a year for more money.

Now, in the past three years, far back as to 2010/2011, every time this Government came back, this Government did not give one red cent to Tobago—[Interruption]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and that, Mr. President, it makes us further disadvantaged, because here you are, you start off in September, October, the beginning of the financial year, with 4.03 per cent, the Government comes back and accesses more money from the Consolidated Fund and you remain at 4.03 per cent, where really and truly you are not at 4.03 per cent, because the Government expenditure goes up and yours remains at that same level.

So if you go back and you do the math, you will see in many instances, in many fiscal years we have gone down to three-point-something per cent, even 3 per cent. I know the Secretary of Finance has been having discussion about this with the Minister of Finance and the Economy. So I hope that that could be worked out.

But what I want to raise, Mr. President, is that the Ministries and the state bodies in Trinidad, they have the luxury of coming back to the Parliament and asking for more funds. The Tobago House of Assembly, we do not enjoy that luxury. You have the ability to engage in private/public partnership, you have the ability to access loans and grants, and the Tobago House of Assembly simply does not enjoy any of those things.

I want to even raise the issue of the IDF funding. When you check the books and you look at the IDF funding, this Government has some $4 billion stashed away in the IDF to take care of development programmes in Trinidad. None of that money goes to the Tobago House of Assembly when you check the IDF funding in the budget books that were provided to us, and that was not counted in the $61 billion. So you have $4 billion in the IDF and the Tobago House of Assembly has access to not one red or yellow cent. So we are at a serious disadvantage here, Mr. President, but I do not want to belabour those points.

In the consultations with the Minister, I know the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of Finance would have discussed with the Minister our willingness to collaborate to implement strategies for funding and to treat with the fallout from public/private partnerships to borrowing. I listened to the Minister’s statement and he encouraged the state bodies to try to get a credit rating. Well, Tobago already has a credit rating of Baa 1, and what we are asking for is that the Government would even consider allowing us to borrow with our good credit rating.

I remember the last time—before I get there, Mr. President, when you check the newspaper and you look at the kind of money that state bodies have been spending, it has been a lot. Far back as September 2011 we were talking about debt by state bodies of $21 billion—debt owed by state enterprises and guaranteed by central government—that is September 2011. I could imagine where that debt stands right now.
So, Mr. President, when this Government came into power, debt was 34 per cent of GDP. [Crosstalk] Today it is 74 per cent of GDP. The point I am making is, we share in the burden, the Tobago House of Assembly and Tobagonians share in the burden of debt with you. For state bodies our money is spent in Trinidad, not spent in Tobago. I think that if we are sharing in the burden, we should also be able to share in the benefit. If we are serious about Tobago walking side by side with Trinidad, especially considering that we have a proper credit rating, I think that this area needs to be examined, as it relates to giving the Tobago House of Assembly the opportunity to borrow, [Crosstalk] just like the state bodies.

Mr. President, allow me to turn now to the ability to engage—[Interuption]

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. President:** Sen. Cudjoe.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. President—

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** You have seen the light—

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:**—and thank you to my government smoothie, Mr. Ganga Singh.

**Hon. Senators:** “Ooooh! Ay-ay-ay. Ooooh!”

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** [Blows a kiss to Sen. Singh] So—[Laughter] allow me to move on now to the private/public partnerships, Mr. President. I want to raise specifically, under this heading, the Milshirv project.

**Hon. Senators:** Yes!

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** We all can remember the Milshirv project.

**Hon. Senators:** Tell them.

**Sen. Beckles:** Now, where is the AG for this?

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** I remember round election time these big posters in town with a picture of Dr. Anselm London, Mr. Orville London, laughing, ha, ha, and another gentleman—and money, make it rain, money all over, Mr. President, and everywhere you travelled in Tobago on the floor, now you see “TOP/Milshirv”,

---

*Appropriation Bill, 2013*  
*Wednesday, September 25, 2013*
“TOP/Milshirv” printed on all the roads throughout all the villages. Because, over the election campaign period, this Government would have criminalized people, and just tarnished the reputation of families and some of our leaders in Tobago, trying to promulgate the Milshirv transaction as something that was a big conspiracy, a big criminal—[Interruption]

Sen. Beckles: They did not listen to Vernella, man. They did not let her talk—[Inaudible]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—transaction, Mr. President, and I listened to them and they brought in Dr. Tsoi-a-Fatt and her family, and they went down to their home and they made a mockery out of our people and our leaders.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Shame! Shame!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: I remember the Attorney General and some of the Government Ministers saying, “Yes, somebody hah to take ah jail” and—oh, Mr. President, we sat at the end of our seats [Crosstalk] and we provided hundreds and hundreds of pages of documents to state our contention. It was published online so that the world could see that this was no criminal or covert activity.

We went to court and faced the embarrassment and all the slanderous talk that was being said about the Tobago House of Assembly and our leaders. To this date—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Mmm.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—after the dust settled—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: The truth seems to—[Inaudible]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and the truth came to the top, Mr. President, this whole thing resounded down to a whole case of interpretation. This thing boiled down—this case boiled down to a whole issue of interpretation, simple interpretation as to whether or not the Tobago House of Assembly has the authority to engage in such a transaction without the permission of the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

So after all this slanderous talk—I do not know if Sen. Ameed [sic] had heard that kind of slanderous talk.

Hon. Senator: “Nah.”

Sen. Beckles: “Nah, she did not hear dat.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: “Ah know she woulda correct dem, but she did not hear.” So after all this slanderous talk and incriminating people and making—


Sen. S. Cudjoe: I did not christen her—Sen. Raziah Ahmed. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: “It right dey.”


Hon. Senator: Well said. Well said.


Sen. Beckles: She did not take it personally. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: I pronounce her name properly.

Hon. Senator: Leave him alone.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: So anyway, Mr. President, this thing got to the point of a whole issue of interpretation, to the whole point where the AG and his legal team had to concede, they had to back away and leave the Tobago House of Assembly alone. I want to commend Sen. The Hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Mr. Larry Howai—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “Yeah. Yeah.” [Desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—for his wisdom and his level-headedness in treating with this matter, [Crosstalk] because he made the decision to approve all the aspects of the Milshirv transaction.

Sen. Beckles: “When yuh do something right, yuh geh credit for it.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. Howai, through you, Mr. President, “doh mind the past chairman”—the former chairman of the TOP, Mr. Lionel Coker. He is calling for your head, for the Prime Minister to fire you for making that decision. I would stand up in Sen. Howai’s defence [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: “TOP do yuh dat, boy?”

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and I want to commend him for his wisdom—[Interruption]
Hon. Senator: Good horse, wrong stable.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—and his level-headedness in letting the AG know to back off. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Yeah, yeah, man.” [Crosstalk]

Sen. S. Cudjoe: So, Mr. President, I have here with me a copy of the letter sent from the Minister to the hon. Chief Secretary, Orville London, letting him know everything—the Minister of Finance and the Economy to Mr. Orville London letting him know, you know, everything is all right. You could see a copy of it. [Sen. Cudjoe waves a document] “Dey could kiss and make up, Mr. President.” I hope the Attorney General is willing to—[ Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Admit the error of his ways.

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—admit the error. If time permits, allow me to read some of the letter.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Date?

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Date, August 07, 2013, to the Chief Secretary.

Sen. Al-Rawi: From?

Sen. S. Cudjoe: This is from Minister Howai:

“I refer to the proposed Administrative Office at Shirvan, Tobago and to pending Court proceedings, CV”—and the whole number—“between the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago”—and the THA—

“In the said proceedings the decision of the THA to enter into a form of financing known as…BOLT for the construction of the proposed Administrative Office, without the consent of the Minister of Finance, has been challenged. The THA contends it does not require the Minister’s consent to enter into BOLT agreements, including the financing component.

It is evident therefore that the question as to whether the THA can enter into such arrangements, including the financing component, without the consent of the Minister…is an important issue which requires the guidance of the Court.

I am informed by the Honourable Attorney General that it is proposed that the said proceedings be converted into a construction summons seeking…Court’s interpretation as to the true extent of the THA’s powers under the”—THA—“Act...”
Sen. Al-Rawi: Ah!

Sen. S. Cudjoe: “In the meantime however, in view of the possibility that the rights of innocent third parties, in particular Milshirv Properties Limited and…First Citizens Bank…may be adversely affected by the Court proceedings as presently constituted and in the interest of good public administration…”

Sen. Beckles: Hmm.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: “I have decided:

(i) to approve under section 51(b) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act…”


Sen. S. Cudjoe: “…and all other enabling powers, the construction of the Administration Office” [Continuous desk thumping] “as well as the lease and mortgage of the same to the”—Tobago House of Assembly—“and First Citizens Bank Limited respectively…” [Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: That was not public. That was not on the Internet.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: “…pursuant to BOLT arrangements entered into between the THA and Milshirv Properties Limited…” [Laughter]


Sen. S. Cudjoe: And,

“(ii) to approve under section 51(b) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act expenditure for the payment of lease rents to MPL under the proposed Office Lease between”—Tobago House of Assembly—“and Milshirv”. [Desk thumping]

“Yours sincerely,”

The hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy

[Desk thumping] Mr. President, now that is leadership.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is what we call an admission, man.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: That is leadership.

Sen. Deyalsingh: “That is what 12-nil will do you.”
Sen. S. Cudjoe: And as calm and as humble as a little dove, the Attorney General had to back down. So, with that said, the Assembly simply [Interruption]—Mr. President, I am not worried about Sen. Coudray, you know. “She good in crosstalk, buh when is time to talk”—anyway—

Hon. Senators: “Ohhh, yeah.” [Continuous desk thumping]

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, with that said, the Assembly simply wants the Minister and the Government to consider giving us the ability—[Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to engage in these kinds of projects. We run the paperwork by you, we engage each other, we talk, we consult. But the end of the day we could see how some of these arrangements could help to treat with the shortfall in finances.

You may stick to the 4.03 per cent—right?—because we know it is about legality and not about love, but there are other financial arrangements and funding mechanisms that could be used to ensure that Tobago is brought up to par and is able to walk side by side with Trinidad, Mr. Minister.


Sen. S. Cudjoe: If time permits, I want to raise, before my time expires, the issue of constitutional reform. I was very concerned when the Minister would have raised the issue of a Prime Minister limit—terms of limit—and proportional representation in his speech, but he was eloquently silent about the issue of internal self-government and constitutional reform for Tobago.

So I want to take this opportunity—[Interruption]


Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to place this issue on the front burner again.

12.00 noon

Sen. S. Cudjoe:—to place this issue on the front burner again.

A lot of money has been spent; a lot of time has been spent treating with this issue in the public domain. We have gotten as far as consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago, even bringing a first piece of legislation to the Parliament. What the Assembly is asking for and the people of Tobago are requesting at this time is for some kind of reconciliation committee where we can bring our concerns to the fore, you could bring your concerns to the fore, and we can deal
with this thing in a very peaceful manner that would be beneficial to you here in Trinidad and to us here in Tobago, rather than foisting on us something that the people of Tobago do not agree to.

So with the little time I have left, Mr. President, I want to raise quickly—until my time runs out—some other concerns that I have been asked to raise by some other Tobagonians—the Tourism Fund. The Tourism Fund is a wonderful idea that was implemented under this administration. Now every year the Tourism Fund is going up—$150 million, $200 million. The hoteliers and the tourism service providers in Tobago are complaining that it is very difficult to access the money—especially the larger business places, the larger companies. It is very difficult to access the money, so if there is some way to meet and talk and consult to make this funding more accessible, so that we can reach our tourism objectives, then that would be greatly appreciated.

Airlift: we welcome the new Scandinavian airlift that is going to be flying to Tobago this winter and I want to commend the Tobago House of Assembly because this has been a result of their efforts.

I want to speak to CAL through you, Mr. President, because there had been some consultations between the Tobago House of Assembly and Caribbean Airlines as it relates to airlift between Trinidad and Tobago, regional airlift between Tobago and Barbados, Tobago and Grenada. We had been having talks about having another flight, a midweek flight, rather than just the Sunday flight from Tobago to New York and back because the average American is not concerned about spending a whole week. Some of them want to go back midweek or hop to another island. We have been having talks with Caribbean Airlines and they promised to get back to us before the budget and they did not. So I do not know if the Minister could address this.

In the days of Mr. Aleong, under the PNM administration, we used to have a Tobago to Washington DC flight once every Thursday and there were talks about bringing back—reintroducing—this flight because most of our diasporic people are in Washington DC. They go to Howard University because there is a large Tobago population out there, so that Tobago to DC flight would be very, very beneficial.

Land titles: prior to the election, this Government had made a lot of rain about treating with the issue of land titles and land legislation for Tobago. Many of our housing problems in Tobago are not because people do not have land, you know. We do not have the paperwork to take to the bank to get the financing, so the last
appropriation bill, 2013  

wednesday, september 25, 2013

[SEN. CUDJOE]

resort, we just go ahead and apply for public housing but in your heart of hearts, you do not really want public housing. What we want is the ability to have our land titles. I know in the days of minister Alleyne-Toppin, widespread consultations would have taken place and we are yet to see the result of this widespread consultation. Maybe if she speaks today, she will be able to give us some kind of response.

Sen. Beckles: “But dey move her; dat’s why.”

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, I recognize the allocation for the Dog Catching Unit for the Tobago House of Assembly at $100,000. I remember, as we closed the last session, we were talking about the dangerous dogs Bill and the Tobago House of Assembly was given the responsibility for catching the dogs and housing them in Tobago and so on. I think $100,000 for that kind of responsibility is very minimal. I do not think we would be able to set up a dog catching unit with that.

I do not know if the budget team would have gotten together with the legislative team; or if they would have considered your legislative agenda in making these allocations; but then again you do not have a legislative agenda. [Desk thumping] So I want to call on you [Desk thumping] to create your legislative agenda and present it to us, so that these budget figures could reflect the same.

Mr. President, when we debate the next Bill to treat with giving some action and service to this Bill, I will raise some other issues, but allow me to close as I know my time is winding down.

Oh, two more issues—the integrated campus. There still has not been proper consultation between the Ministry and the Tobago House of Assembly as to how this thing is going to be done; how it is going to be worked; the curriculum and so on. So I hope that we could find some time during this fiscal year to really talk to the House of Assembly and so on. All right?

Sen. Karim: We brought the bachelor’s in education for the first time.

Sen. S. Cudjoe: No, you did not bring the bachelor of education for the first time.

Sen. Karim: Oh, you did?

Sen. S. Cudjoe: Mr. President, I want to place on the record that I have a cousin by the name of Roxanne Braithwaite. She did the bachelor’s in education a
couple years ago right there in Tobago and now she is doing the master’s—[Interruption] [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Karim:** Not with UTT.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** Probably not with UTT, but it was available. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Anyway, Mr. President, crime and policing: [Crosstalk] we do not have so much of a problem with murders, but right now on the rise, our serious issue in Tobago is burglary and breaking-in. I can speak personally when I went on vacation in August, when I came back my house was burglarized—[Interruption]

**Mr. President:** You need to wind up.

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:**—burglarized and vandalized—all my jewellery, everything taken. When I went to the store and started telling somebody else about it, they said, “Well me, too”—and a whole lot of other people are complaining about the same thing. So I do not know if improving the community policing aspect—

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Quick, quick, wrap up, wrap up!

**Sen. S. Cudjoe:** So, Mr. President, I know the Minister of National Security will treat with that. In the final analysis, as I close, I want to say the main issues that we face here today are the same issues that we faced three years ago and those are issues of consultation, collaboration and political will.

Mr. President, this Government met us in power in Tobago and you would leave us, the PNM, in power in Tobago. So we have no choice but to work together and respect each other. The political grandstanding and the mud-slinging and the backbiting must end. You do not have to love us, but respect us you must. Respect our aspirations; respect our intentions, our recommendations. It does not take anything from us to talk. So, at the end of the day I want to thank you for this opportunity to contribute and may we work together so that we can make a better contribution to the national economy and to raising our heads once again as equal partners in this national community.

Mr. President, with those few words, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. President:** Hon. Senators, before we proceed to the next speaker, I thought perhaps I would draw it to your attention that I understand it is the birthday of Sen. Roach.

**Hon. Senator:** Ahhhhh! [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]
Sen. Singh: “Whey de cake?” [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: Cake and ice cream.

Hon. Senator: Make sure everybody get.

Sen. George: Send for it one time! Send for the ice cream and cake one time!

Mr. President: Is it that this House wants to break at this point for lunch?

Hon. Senator: Yes, Sir.

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business?

Sen. Singh: I think we should have Minister Vernella Toppin.

Mr. President: Minister Vernella Toppin. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: The teacher shall now lecture the students. [Crosstalk]

The Minister in the Ministry of the People and Social Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I want to thank the hon. Senator there for giving me such a warm welcome to the Senate. [Desk thumping] It is indeed a privilege to be here and a pleasure.

When I spoke in the Senate last and I answered the hon. Senator from Tobago, a Bethel “badjohn”, just like Sen. The Hon. Dr. Delmon Baker; a Bethel “badjohn”. Bethel is famous for “badjohns”, you know.

Hon. Senator: She is a “badjohn”?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: A Bethel “badjohn”.

Hon. Senator: You taught her?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes, I did teach her, so I know where she is at in terms of education of the issues.

Hon. Senator: You did a good job.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I spoke last time about how her contribution—and I said some words, you know, that I do not usually like to say. I talked about how vile and how vapid and how vituperative—[Interruption]

Hon. Senators: Ohhhh!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—and vitriolic and venomous her contribution was and also how vacuous it was.

Hon. Senators: Ohhhh!
Hon. Senator: All the Vs.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I tried very hard to make sure we do not go to the position of “vamp”. We do not go to the position of “vamp”. You can look up the meaning of “vamp” because we have to understand not to be rude in the Senate.

Hon. Senator: That is right!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We must not be rude to—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Be relevant!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—Hon. Senator here. [Points to Sen. Ahmed]

Sen. Beckles: She was not.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We must not be rude in our contributions. We must be respectful. And she also called for respect and we must be respectful. You know the meaning of “vamp”, teacher. We have to be very careful. We have some other teachers, here. I encourage you to look up the meaning of “vamp”. [Interruption]


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I encourage you to look up the meaning of “vamp”. [Interruption]

Sen. George: I said she sounds like a teacher.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Mr. President, let us just talk a little bit about what the Senator is talking about because I understand. She said I was not—she was not around in the 70s. I was there. I was born in the 50s and, you know, there is a good reason for being born in the 50s, you know. It gives you experience and it gives you on-hand experience. I was there; I was a voter when the Ministry of Tobago Affairs was disbanded. I was a teacher at the time and I know what happened. I know how we voted and I know where all of this started.


Hon. Senator: “Eh-heh?”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: And all that Basil Pitt said and all that Cynthia Alfred said and all that Patrick said and we will go to that in a while.

Let me go very chronologically according—that is not the word, but the word—“sequentially”, according to how the speaker unfolded.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: She said this is the largest budget—the hon. Senator here said this is the largest budget ever, 4.03, and that she was taken aback—I was listening on the radio because I had to come over from Tobago this morning and I got here just in time to, you know, to listen, and I am very happy that I did that.

Sen. Karim: We are happy you came too.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes, thank you very much. Largest budget ever, taken aback by the Minister of Finance and the Economy boasting that the People’s Partnership Government has given Tobago the largest budget ever.

Now, Tobago got its 4.03 per cent allocation. The Tobago House of Assembly is to get, according to law, a minimum of 4.03 per cent and this is what happened. I will go back through a process and show you where the previous Governments, beginning with the allocation of Yetming, continuing into the allocation of Prime Minister Patrick Manning, who was also a Minister of Tobago Affairs, going on to the Minister of Finance Karen Nunez-Tesheira and look at the allocations that were given to Tobago over the period.

The PNM Government never gave Tobago nearly as much money as the People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping] Never! And I am Tobagonian talking for Tobago. I am not talking against Tobago getting more. I wish Tobago could get all of what it needs, but there is nobody in Trinidad and Tobago who can get all of what they need. We are not working with an infinite sum of money, and considering how generous our Senator here has been this year with the allocations—much, way and above what has happened before—considering how Prime Minister Patrick Manning said he did not know what Tobago wanted; he could never tell what Tobago wanted, so he did not give them anything. Considering all of that, let us just go to the statistics.


What was done in Tobago by the PNM-led THA with that inflow of funds—$22 billion? If you go over to Tobago, can you tell me: are we getting quality for money? It is all well and good to stand here and tell people: “Listen, you did not
give us this and you did not give us that.” When we give you, what do you do with it? [Desk thumping] It is like pouring money into a bottomless pit and as a responsible Tobagonian, I cannot stand and see my country Trinidad and Tobago pouring money into a bottomless pit. The Tobago House of Assembly, in its present incarnation, the PNM-led THA is a runaway horse.

12.15 p.m.

And I am saying it every time—this is the fourth year that I am saying that—we have to rein that horse in. And I am asking, if we in Tobago are suckers for punishment, why are we continuing to vote for them? I will explain some of the reasons why.

This year, our allocation from Trinidad—from the central government—and people feel it is from Trinidad. It is from Trinidad and Tobago. Remember that Tobago became a ward of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. It did not become a ward of Trinidad. So whatever happens in Trinidad; whatever is collected in Trinidad belongs to Trinidad and Tobago. There are 300,000 Tobagonians living in Trinidad. So whatever is coming from the national pie is coming to all of us. It is not coming for Tobago or coming to Trinidad. It is coming for all of us.

So when the Senator tells you about customs and immigration and all of those things, they override the THA and they belong under the purview of the central government. So, of course, the Senator has to put money there, but this year he has put 800—what, how much million? How much million? Let me get it. I do not want to get too hot, “but ah feeling kinda hot”, you know, because I do not want our people in Tobago to be further miseducated—further miseducated and misled. And we come in this honourable House as Members of Parliament, and we mislead the people in the public domain.

Sen. Maharaj: Knowingly. [Desk thumping]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—knowingly mislead the people. [Desk thumping] Now, a great debater could argue any point with the same point.

Hon. Senator: True.

Sen. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You could stay over there and argue; I could use your same point and argue my story—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: It is about who could fool people better.

Sen. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—but you have to understand that we might be brilliant in here—might be—but a lot of the people that we are talking to are depending on us for the truth; depending on us for honesty; depending on us to understand where
to go. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] You were talking about somebody who went and became better off because of whatever—they came through something. I cannot remember the story properly, I have it somewhere there. But that person is somebody who benefited from secondary education, somebody who benefited from everything that we have to offer that everybody is getting, whether they are in QRC or they are—wherever they are—in this country where education is free—primary, secondary, tertiary and pre-primary.

A lot of our young people—I am saying this without reserve—are very irresponsible in their approach to education; a lot of our parents are very irresponsible in the approach of their children to education; and a lot of our teachers are very irresponsible in our approach to education. So we have many more schools than we ever had, and we have much less education.

What we have to look after in Tobago, hon. Senator—Mr. President, I am sorry—is the delivery of education and the value and the quality and whether there is substance to what is happening because our students are telling us—when we go to the primary schools and we ask about education—“What do you want to be when you grow up?”—they are telling us a CEPEP. Our children are telling us, “I want to be ah CEPEP.”

Now, you are talking about no allocation for CEPEP. Well, listen, we have to wean people off CEPEP; we have to wean people off CEPEP. CEPEP in Trinidad works differently, and that is another thing. Education: CEPEP in Trinidad belongs to CEPEP contractors under the purview of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, I think. Contractors who are contracted to contract other people to do work and they do work.

In Tobago, CEPEP is under the purview of the Tobago House of Assembly; it is straight House of Assembly, and you are only getting a CEPEP job—continuous employment painting every pebble—if you are PNM, which is the meaning of URP. URP means “you are PNM”. [Laughter and desk thumping] Or else you are not getting any work. “Yuh not getting work”; and CEPEP means “continuous employment painting every pebble”.

They actually—[ Interruption] you know where I live, hon. Senator. CEPEP occupy my land and fix it up and paint all the pebbles and fix it up but, “dey ent know is my land. Yuh understand?”

Hon. Senator: “Dey charge yuh for it?”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No, well I leave them.
**Hon. Senator:** “Dey do it fuh yuh fuh free.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Yeah. They keep it down. “Yuh understand”?—“continuous employment painting every pebble” and talking about people graduating out of CEPEP. The children are following the parents into CEPEP, and following the grandparents into CEPEP, graduating where? What kinds of programme are there? Do not fool anybody, with that story.

Let me just go back to “meh lil scrippy, scrippy”. Yeah! The incumbent that the THA PNM met was superior in delivery and accountability and was light years ahead of the Orville London administration in performance. When consideration is given to the excellent foundation that was laid—being in the fortunate position of having a guaranteed flow of transfers from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and having been in office for three conservative terms, 12 long years—what masquerades as governance in the THA can only be referred to as a travesty. It is a travesty. So I do not know what we are protecting. We are protecting a heritage, and that is the story.

I would say it in Tobagonian but the Hansard people could never write Tobagonian. You all must take a course in writing Tobagonian. [Laughter] They could never understand it, so I have to speak in the Queen’s English. “Ah might ha problem but ah go ha tuh translate.”

The THA under the PNM has adopted all of the negatives that are synonymous with the national party, the PNM party—nepotism, tribalism, cronyism, kickbacks, ghost gangs, sweetheart deals, like the Milshirv. [Desk thumping] The question about Milshirv is not whether a BOLT arrangement is a good thing or a bad thing. The question is whether you approach the Ministry of Finance and the Economy before you entered into such an arrangement because an arrangement like that, should something happen—should it fall apart—it becomes the State’s debt, and the State is all of us. And, you know, we cannot get some people to understand that the State is all of us. The State is all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including central government; including all the local government; including the THA; including all of the people.

So, when people campaign and they say throw out Hochoy Charles because of Ringbang and because of ADDA: how come all of a sudden you do not have to come to the Minister of Finance and the Economy and you can come after the fact?

I want to say that it is because we love you in Tobago, because the People’s Partnership loves us in Tobago, why Sen. The Hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy said, “Okay, go ahead, build it.” I am very certain it has nothing to do with the details of that Milshirv sweetheart deal. [Desk thumping] It is because we do not want to carry a war of attrition. We do not want a fight. We want to cooperate and we want to ensure that Tobago gets what it needs.
Milshirv is opposite to a whole body of land—must be 300-and-something acres—owned by the Tobago House of Assembly, State lands. So instead of building Milshirv across the road on Shirvan on the left hand side when you are going up, “you could ah build Milshirv”—not Milshirv—you could have still called it Milshirv because there is Milford and Shirvan—the same corner Milford and Shirvan—they could have built it on the lands that they already own on Friendship Estate. So this is what we are saying. Why go and organize something where “it look as if yuh giving a pardner when yuh have land?”

**Sen. Maharaj:** “Not look, dey giving ah pardner.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** So that is what we were talking about when we campaigned in 2012 in January. And whoever wants to say we get a 12-nil, all right we get a 12-nil, but it is Tobago that is suffering. It is Tobago that is suffering. Do you know why? Because we are dealing with a lot of young people in Tobago who the PNM understand like instant gratification and that is “ah young people kinda feeling.” “Yuh doh think yuh go last too long—the thing eh go last and we ha to gather here and grab here. Yuh understand?” So if I give you a little CEPEP contract—“January yuh get it—yuh geh URP in January, development. When election finish—ah send yuh home, “ah kick yuh out.” And this happened in 2009. By February, more than 1,700 people were sent home. “Dey done vote.”

**Sen. George:** What? [Crosstalk]

**Hon. Senator:** “Dey done vote.”

**Sen. Lambert:** “Dey say dai ent true eh.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** “Eh?”

**Sen. Lambert:** “Dey say dia ent true, but.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** It is true. I could read all of those documents to you, but I do not have too much time right now. I could put it on the newspapers; I could put it on the social media. Last week—we told them that again this time, you know, that they are going to send you all home as soon as election is finished. “This time dey hold on a lil bit, dey wait ah lil bit and dey send dem home. Senator, you know that. Nearly 5,000 people went home last week from the division of the hon. Hilton Sandy, who I must say is very sick and I am very sorry because I find that he is a man with a good heart. **[Desk thumping]** More than 1,700—[Interruption]

**Sen. Cudjoe:** That is not true.
Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We are talking about truth. We are talking about truth.

Hon. Senator: “Tell us nah!”

Sen. Cudjoe: That is not true.

Hon. Senator: Well what is true?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Well, last night I was—[Interruption]

Sen. Lambert: Well, what is true?

Sen. Cudjoe: Look at the document—it is not true.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Mr. President—[Interruption]

Sen. George: Tell her she will talk when she has time to talk.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Mr. President, I could talk about “meh” own family—‘ah could talk ’bout friends, ah could talk ’bout all neighbours, ah could talk about all kinds ah people”—sent home after the elections. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Cudjoe: That is not true.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Last night—how could the Senator say that? [Crosstalk] Last night I was in the company—yesterday we had a whole big—

Sen. Maharaj: “Dey doh bring facts, yuh know, doh study dem.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—celebration in Tobago. We always have this on September 24 in Roxborough. [Crosstalk] I run, you know, work with a little choir, village choir, Roxborough Folk Performers—[Interruption]

Sen. Cudjoe: Where that was, in London?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—several of them have been sent home and they have letters to show it. I am sorry I did not bring one of the letters. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Cudjoe: Why you did not bring the letter?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I am sorry I did not bring one. [Crosstalk] Because, you see, Tobago knows. Tobago is listening and Tobago you are hearing, and you are hearing me and you are hearing our hon. Senator there. Which of us is telling the truth? [Desk thumping] You see, the thing about truth—[Desk thumping]—my own stepdaughter was sent home last week. Which of us is telling the truth? You see, truth is something that reveals itself. You do not have to prove truth, you know—[Desk thumping]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—you could try and prove all kinds of things [Desk thumping] you do not have to prove truth.

Sen. Cudjoe: And you have your own records.

Hon. Senator: “Yuh out ah a job there—

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You do not have to prove truth.

Sen. Cudjoe: You have your own records.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: More than 1,700 and many more—almost 5,000 people—have been sent home.


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: That is how you must hold your point when you are, you know, arguing. You must hold your point.


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: And the hon. Senator here had no idea what he is talking about. You know what it is like when nobody in the family working? I know, you know. I walk around. This morning I was in Moriah; this morning I was in Moriah—I want to keep this thing tight, you know. I just came here over the sea, hard work—the ferry now taking so long because it break down. I was in Moriah this morning giving people school grants and food cards, and I know because they crying—well, let me go on because she might let me hold on to that point. [Laughter] Right?

Sweetheart deals, generations of overnight millionaires emerging: just at the same time when many of the people are being pauperized, the rest are becoming overnight millionaires, you see. The average—if you follow the UN index—income in Tobago is $1,700 a month. “Yuh understand what I am talking about?”

Sen. Singh: “Not Shamfa yuh know.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You know how you could get a $1,700 a month average? You have to have many, many, many people at the bottom getting either nothing or next to nothing or minus amounts. “So I doh know why people talking ’bout it is not true, yuh know” because I have a higher calling to which I address myself, you know.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So I have to say what is true.

Sen. Cudjoe: You alone. [Crosstalk]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I have to say what is true. “Ah tell allyuh is ah Bethel badjohn, yuh know.” I from government house so I really doh [Desk thumping]—ah never had that kinda training, [Desk thumping] ah doh ha de practice. [Desk thumping] Ah never cuss nobody. Ah doh even know how to use de words. Ah have a different kind ah training. But, you see, ah spend ah lot ah time in Bethel. Ah used to run de Montgomery youth choir in de church fuh years and play de organ in de church”, so I am accustomed to the story. [Crosstalk] We accustomed to the story. Yeah.

So sweetheart deals, generations of millionaires emerging: You have people going around in January—“assemblymen going around with cheques in dey pocket, and when dey get to ah house dey say, hear what: add on ah downstairs nah, put on ah new roof nah, build up”—and they just giving—[Crosstalk] You could understand that, right? That is Trinidad dialect—“put on ah new roof nah, and dey giving yuh ah cheque made out to all kinda hardware stores”—No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, No.5 hardware—all kinds of hardware stores.

So what you are doing here, you are ensuring that you create some millionaires up here, and you are giving people—just handing them out—“vote for meh”—and this is what is happening. “So when you come now and yuh tell me, okay, me eh even want no downstairs, put on and here—$30,000 put on ah downstairs, and then dey go round de corner and dey say, yuh want some land? Okay, look ah thing. Yuh occupy over dey”—three acres, four acres, two acres—this is what is happening in Tobago.

12.30 p.m.

So when you give the largesse from the purse of Trinidad and Tobago, PNM partners getting it, [Desk thumping] getting all.

Sen. Al-Rawi: The SIS.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: If I have to get a simple—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Gopaul, PNM.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—if I have to get a simple pair of crutches, a simple pair of crutches from the division of social welfare for somebody who “break dey foot”—and that happened to “meh” about two weeks ago—I had to get somebody on the inside, underneath the table to call and say, “Hear nah, this boy break he
foot, yuh could organize ah ting? Doh tell dem is me send the boy.” And that is the only way you get it, because the THA will not recognize the social welfare board, duly, constitutionally installed by the honourable doctor, from the other place, who is the Minister of social welfare.

You are not recognizing the board, therefore for the past three years nobody “cyah” get social welfare—they cut off your foot, and we are having 15 to 20 amputations a month, “eh”; 15 to 20 amputations a month in a small place like Tobago. The people at social welfare are coming to me, “Minister, you could bring ah wheelchair from Trinidad for me please”—I am talking about the physiotherapist—“Yuh could bring ah wheelchair for me please, because we eh ha no wheelchair, and yuh know”, and I have to go and give them “behind back” so that they could—“yuh know what is behind back, right?”—

**Hon. Senator:** Yeah.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—so that they could give somebody. And we talk about we love Tobago. Who loves Tobago?

**Hon. Senator:** Not them.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Who loves Tobago? The PNM loves Tobago? Let me make sure that I read.

**Hon. Senator:** Robinson loves Tobago, ANR Robinson.

**Hon. Senator:** They love to suffer Tobago.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** February 10, 1978:

The Joint Select Committee on self-rule for Tobago held its last public sitting yesterday and heard evidence from the ruling People’s National Movement. The party was represented by a three-member delegation, headed by Ambassador Plenipotentiary, Mr. Basil Pitt, who is also vice-chairman of the PNM. Others were Mrs. Cynthia Alfred, a Member of the PNM General Council, employed in the division of culture, and Rennie Mathews, an alderman and chairman of the St. Patrick County Council.

Mr. Pitt, spokesman for the delegation, outlined to the committee, the ways and means in which the PNM went about gaining a consensus on the issue of internal self-government.

—which we all know Prime Minister Robinson raised, and Orville London said in the House in Tobago that Kamaluddin Mohammed brought that Motion to the House. We all know that the Motion was brought to this national Parliament by ANR Robinson—fantastic man, a son of the soil.
Mr. Pitt was the spokesman for the delegation, right? The consensus as outlined in the party’s memorandum was that it rejected the proposition of internal self-government for Tobago.

The PNM in 1978 rejected the proposition of internal self-government for Tobago.

Hon. Senator: PNM?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: According to Mr. Pitt—PNM—promises never materialize. In Tobago, that is what they say PNM is “eh”, part of it: promises never materialize. According to Mr. Pitt:

It was the party’s view that whatever name is given, the council for Tobago, it should have essentially the powers accorded to local government bodies, except for the fact that on the question, the right of consultation and participation in state-owned enterprises, Tobago would receive special attention reflecting its unique position in respect of air and sea communications.

This is the exact point we are raising in respect of its position, in respect of air and sea communication, the fact that we are divided from Trinidad by 23 miles of sea, we want a different arrangement for Tobago.

We have fought all those long years, 1978 and 10, ’88 and 10, ’98 and 10, 2008, and every time we had a fight, the fight was with the PNM, Tobago versus the PNM. There is a book written by Dr. Jefferson Davidson, Tobago Versus PNM; every time Tobago has tried to step, it is Tobago versus the PNM. Every time another Government has come in, we have had collaboration, and every time it is the PNM we have had to fight, and we are not getting anywhere. [Interruption]

Sen. Singh: You could ask her to give way.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Therefore, Mr. President, in this—[Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Edwards: Hon. Member, would you give way to a question, please? Sorry I took so long, I am trying to understand the proceedings. You just said 5,000 jobs were lost in Tobago, and that is a large number, because if 5,000 jobs are lost in Trinidad, that is a huge number and you would hear about it in the press. I have a question: the THA is responsible for 60 per cent of employment in Tobago; Tobago has a poor private sector—and I am Tobagonian, so I can tell you that. I am—[Interruption]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I could tell that. I think you are my family.
Sen. Dr. Edwards: We may be, I do not know. However, in this budget, THA got 80 per cent of its recurrent expenses, so I want to know—because you bring it across as though it is PNM victimization, I want to know if it is not expected that jobs will be lost when you cannot cover your entire budget that—because your recurring fees is your salaries, et cetera, right?

So I want to know, one, if some level of unemployment is not expected based on this budget, and, two, what is being put in place to strengthen the private sector in Tobago, that 40 per cent?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you very much. I am a Washington, so if you are Edwards, we are cousins. Right? “It is a pity yuh doh stay home some more and help us with what we are doing there.” If you collect, if you bring out a whole vote bank before elections, you have to drop them off after elections, and THA hires more than 80 per cent of the people in Tobago, not 60 per cent. “Doh leh anybody mislead you, you are brilliant. Doh let anybody mislead you.” And in what kinds of jobs? In what kind of jobs?

When I tell you there are 300,000 Tobagonians living in Trinidad, you think it is because they want to live here? It is because this is the land for us of opportunity. This is the land of opportunity—[ Interruption] [ Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: That is why you went and ask to—[ Inaudible]

Hon. Senator: What?

Hon. Senator: So she will have a brief?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Notwithstanding. This is the land of opportunity, and you must understand—[ Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: What is wrong with you—[ Inaudible]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Mr. President.

Mr. President: Senators, let us listen to Minister Vernella Alleyne-Toppin in silence. Thanks.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you, Mr. President—[ Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is a devious statement you are making—[ Inaudible]

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, [ Crosstalk] please, I take on a point of order.

Sen. Singh: No. What is the point of order?

Sen. Deyalsingh: I take umbrage of the implication—[ Interruption]
Sen. Singh: What is the point of order?

Hon. Senator: 35(5).

Sen. Deyalsingh: 35(5).

Mr. President: Senators—25(5)?

Sen. Deyalsingh: 35(5).

Hon. Senator: Sit down now.

Hon. Senator: Sit down.

Sen. Al-Rawi: You cannot tell him to sit down.

Hon. Senator: Yes. The President has said—[Inaudible]

Mr. President: I do not uphold your objection.

Sen. Deyalsingh: [Inaudible]—anyone to ask a question.

Sen. Singh: Quote the Standing Order and sit down. That is the order—[Inaudible]

Mr. President: There is no objection to be upheld. Minister Vernelle Alleyne-Toppin. [Desk thumping]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Deyalsingh: You disappoint me.

Sen. Cudjoe: You say that is “ah” independent. What independent in that. [Crosstalk]

Mr. President: Can we listen to the Minister in silence, thank you. [Desk thumping]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: And to answer the final part of the question, what is being done to build a private sector in Tobago, or what is being done to build jobs in Tobago? Mr. President, the THA is in charge, this is the point I am making. Over the past 13 years, what has the THA, PNM THA, done to generate income. [Desk thumping] What has it took—the THA in Tobago has erased foreign investment, erased, and the people who are Caucasian tell me, “Mr. London doh like Caucasian people”. That is all the big word.

Hon. Senator: Well done.

Sen. Cudjoe: Really, Mr. President.
Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I am repeating what the people who I speak with tell me.

Sen. Cudjoe: Really, Minister, really.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: They tell me that some of them do not want you to vote for certain people because a Calcutta ship will come in. [Desk thumping] Right? You understand? [Crosstalk]

Mr. President, the people who did the hospital—what we call the Mongolian people, we are talking about Caucasian people, we are talking about—they tell me, you know, “They eh want us here, either”. You understand? So we want to run tourism, but we want to make sure that we erase all kinds “ah” people. You would run “ah” whole story about Calcutta ship, so you erase a whole set of people and you run your tourism down to the ground, because people say, “Okay, if is me that metaphor about Calcutta ship is about, I eh going dey”. So the hotels and the guest houses remain empty.

Hon. Senator: They paying for PNM—[Inaudible]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You understand? And then we say, if the Caucasian people say, “Well you eh gehin we no—we cyah buy no land, we cyah do nothing here, we not coming dey, we gone; we gone Costa Rica, we gone all about”, and we are talking about building tourism. And we are talking about building some kind of—hon. Senator, some kind of private sector. You do not build private sector without proper incentives for fiscal development.

Hon. Senator: That is it. [Desk thumping]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You do not build it, you just cannot build it.

Hon. Senator: “Yuh eh teach she dat.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: My former—what you call—Minister of Finance said, “No island is an island”. How can Tobago all of a sudden decide, we are such loving good people. Senator, there too, loving good people—Senator there. But, you know, how come just because of the politics, “yuh ent want dis one here, and yuh ent want dat one here, and yuh ent want that”.

Mr. President, I ran a guest house, and if that—whatever metaphor, Calcutta ship was not happening, I was not going to get a cent. You understand? So I want to tell Tobago people, I want to tell Tobago people; you see all of that—my thing—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: You see the curse Calcutta.
Hon. Senator: Sit and be quiet.

Hon. Senator: You see the Calcutta curse, what about the—[Inaudible]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—my—what do you call it? My principal in Teacher’s College used to call “blim blim blightis”—“Yuh see all of dat blim blim blightis, just disabuse yourself of it.” I am sorry—disabuse yourself of it in Tobago, and look at the issues, look at the issues.

It is felt—I am talking about the PNM position in 1978, and it continues to date—it is felt there should be a senior administrative officer who would be responsible for the administration of Tobago. This is all they want for Tobago, “just one person sitting down dey and saying, Oh, well, okay, d-d-d”. When I was in teaching in 1976—and I wanted to tell you that I did not say 5,000 people were dismissed “eh”; I said, 1,700 people were dismissed—and that is not all “eh” because I could add all the other places—[ Interruption]


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—from one area, development. That is just one, you know, I “ent” talking about the people who were in the public service with contracts and so on, I “ent” talking about them, because I know, close to home, you would know Senator, the people that I am talking about.

And talking about 2001—I have to talk about so many things—2001, I came home from Commonwealth scholarship in New Zealand, came home for a holiday and said to the hon. Orville London, wrote him, “I need nine more months of my salary”—which they were not paying for me in any case—“nine months’ salary”—must be $4,000 a month—“to return to New Zealand to continue my thesis into a PhD”, and he said, “The Assembly has no money”. So when you are talking about you rescued Delmon Baker and all “kinda” thing, nonsense because me, [Desk thumping] I could not go back to New Zealand. [Desk thumping]

Not only me, but many other people had to cut their scholarships, cut their whatever studies outside and come home, many, many people.

Sen. Karim: “Da is ah a next V.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So this is what happened. The people that Hochoy Charles had sent and—what is his name before that?—Denoon has sent and Jeff Davidson had sent on scholarship to build capacity in Tobago, the London administration, as soon as they came in 2001, cut it out.

Hon. Senator: Lick them up.
Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Mash it up, lick them up.” These people had a school; hon. Senator here had a school. Anybody would know Morean College—“lick it up, no money for dat”.

Hon. Senator: PNM victimization.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Ty had a school, Mr. Mitchell, Skipper Mitch—“lick it up”. The Adventists used to get subventions through the Ministry of Education—“lick it up”, and then you are talking about giving us land for a university; we want land for university, integrated campus, we are fighting it all the time.

THA has 34 estates in Tobago, not one under cultivation, not one, and we are begging them for a piece of land to put a university down. Fight! “Yuh know the young people say, fight dong.”

Hon. Senator: And agriculture suffering in Tobago.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Fight! Fight! Three years we are begging for that.

Hon. Senator: Thirty-four estates, no agriculture.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No agriculture. Thirty-four estates—last three weeks ago we had to beg and fight before we could get “ah piece ah land” to put T&TEC substation in Studley Park. So Minister, hon. Senator here for energy, you are talking about some things that are going on, but we owing T&TEC. “The THA owing T&TEC so much money, it eh funny.”

NGC has made some payments towards the lease of lands at Cove, okay, that they occupy. THA is requesting a higher rate; that is ridiculous. THA wants the central government to pay the THA rent for land in Studley Park. Studley Park is state lands. Now, in Tobago we are getting confused about what are state lands, you know. Some people feel THA lands different from state lands; THA lands are THA lands which are also state lands.

You know I tell them when I go to functions in Tobago, I went to “ah” function last night—“nobody, dem eh seeing me at all. You see how yuh does say honourable this and honourable dat when yuh beginning.” Ah! Sometimes. Sometimes when they finish and they call everybody, and they call the janitor, they call me—and Sen. The Hon. Vernella. [Laughter] “Dey ent see we at all, we invisible,” and talking about respect.

Hon. Senator: No respect.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No respect. [Desk thumping]
Sen. Al-Rawi: That is how—[Inaudible]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Absolutely no respect.

Hon. Senator: Disrespectful.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Only that one “yuh” picking up.

Sen. Singh: Expose the underbelly of the PNM across there.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is how the UNC—[Inaudible]

Sen. Singh: It in their DNA.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Mr. President, I am trying to understand what is the meaning of “that is not true”, because I “doh” understand what it is. Maybe it is a different language and I “doh” understand.

Hon. Senator: You talking Tobagonian.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Last night I was in Roxborough. The people talk and talk and talk—who notice me?—when the leader went up, he called me first. The last time I was in a function with him, a fire, Independence Day, he called everybody and then he said, “Eh, eh, I forget you”, and we sitting at the same table. [Laughter] He said, “I forget you, I sorry”. What is not true? [Desk thumping]

Let us decide that we are talking in reverse, you know, like when you steering a wrong-side box cart, remember we used to make box cart and we used to turn over the handle and steer, “when yuh want to go so, yuh ha to go”—yeah.

Hon. Senator: “You ha the Calcutta ship, da is why.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So what is true is not true, but I really want to say I wish—[Interuption]


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We love Tobago. The people’s Partnership loves Tobago, but does the PNM love Tobago? Does the PNM-led THA love Tobago? And you know I wanted to outline all that Yetming give, and who give, and who give, but I “ent” bothering to go to it. You could go to the Hansard because I was quoting just now from my budget contribution.

12.45 p.m.

Every year that we have been here, we have given the THA much more money. I want to say for all the Tobago people who are out there quarrelling—because we know how to quarrel, eh—“yuh see me, me nuh like Kam, we nuh like dat one, turn off meh TV”. I am saying to you categorically—and you could research it—the People’s
Partnership Government has given Tobago more than any other government. [Desk thumping] Then what are you doing with all of this money for recurrent expenditure, apart from the fact that the House of Assembly gets its allocation en bloc every quarter and the House of Assembly takes the money? I was Minister of Tobago Development—[Interrupt]

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Why are you not there?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—and I never, never, never, never, interfered. “Because we doh stay”—Mr. President, nobody stays anywhere forever. Does anybody stay anywhere forever? [Laughter] You know, we are all here for a period of time, passing the baton to my honourable colleague, hon. Dr. Delmon Baker. Why not?—whose other seat in the other House I am sitting in now.

**Sen. Maharaj:** “He now come in de PNM, yuh know, since 2009.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Why are we so sure that we have all kinds of answers to what—what they say?—“que sera, sera”.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** “Talk about de credit card!” [Crosstalk]

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** “Que sera, sera. “

**Sen. Maharaj:** “Doh get distracted.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** No, when we finish I will talk to him personally.

**Hon. Senator:** “Doh encourage dat.”

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** “Talk about de credit card.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** So constitutional reform—internal self-government for Tobago is an issue that we have placed on the front burner, beginning with ANR Robinson. This year we did something called the “Belmanna Riots”, a re-enactment. It was during that time there was a Tobago House of Assembly in Tobago. In 1876 there was a Tobago House of Assembly, and before that Tobago was managing its own affairs. Then after the Belmanna Riots the Crown decided to remove the Tobago House of Assembly because Tobago’s economy started to go down.

The Belmanna Riots came about because of labour struggles in Tobago, so we had to import a lot of people from all about. Indentured servants came from Barbados and all about, and we had many riots because of the treatment of those people. It was akin to slavery. They disbanded that, joined us in 1889 to Trinidad and then in 1898 we became a complete ward of the country of Trinidad and Tobago.
But Tobago has struggled since then for internal self-government. It was brought forward again by Robinson in 1976/1977/1978. We have begged right through—and I am saying begged—every time it is a PNM Government we have to beg. When it is another Government we could negotiate.

Now that we have come to the table, you hear the Chief Secretary and others saying “what dey want and how dey want”, and they had never asked Prime Minister Patrick Manning for it. “They never asked the Leader of the Opposition to bring a motion in de House and leh we talk bout it.” He has never talked about that.

So if you so want this and you so love Tobago, why not come with some issues. And talking about your story, hon. Senator—[Minister Alleyne-Toppin points to Sen. Karim] the Bachelor of Education degree in Tobago was brought to Tobago under the insistence of the People’s Partnership Government [Desk thumping] and this Member for Tobago East. I went to my Government and said, “It is a social disruption to come to Trinidad all of the time to study.” I have done it. I have lived in Trinidad, I have lived in Tobago, I have lived elsewhere, and it is very difficult for families.

The strength of a nation lies in the strength of the family. “And for all who doh understand dat, try and keep your families together.” What is happening is that when the people come to Trinidad to study six years and so on, children are left with father or mother or “tanty” or granny, and it is a social upheaval situation that we have to face.

When I was at UTT, there were 17 UTT campuses in Trinidad and not one in Tobago, and every time I approached the Chair for a campus in Tobago, he said, “There is no money for dat.”—every time. Now, that time there was a PNM Government in Trinidad and a PNM Government in Tobago. So I jumped out of UTT, risked everything, saying, “Win or lose or whatever, I have taken it”, and I went to try and get into this honourable House to say what I am saying here today. As soon as I got in, the hon. Senator here put in a Bachelor of Education degree in Tobago, where you could start in year one, year two, year three, year four. [Desk thumping] Who is doing that?

All of the time that Roxanne—I taught Roxanne Braithwaite, who she was talking about, in Scarborough Secondary, and I know that when you did your Bachelor of Education Degree in Tobago under UWI, you had to come to Trinidad to do year three or four or two; you had to come.
The UWI library in Tobago that they are talking about, Mr. President—excuse me, let me demonstrate. I am five feet two without “muh shoes”, and when you go into the UWI library in Tobago—I used to go; I used to teach there—if I stretch out too far out this side and too far that side, I touch the two sides of the walls, you know. [Minister Alleyne-Toppin gesticulates] And if I turn so, and I stretch again and stretch again, I touch the two sides of the walls. That is the library—a little, little room with a few books. And you want to fool Tobago people? I have studied all over the place; I have spent hours in libraries.

I studied in New Zealand and lectured there; 50 books at a time I could take home. I do not know if when I was there that library had 50 books. [Laughter] You understand what I am saying? Fifty books at a time “yuh” taking home, you know, on a trolley, push it to your car trunk, pile them in your car trunk and carry it. You understand? “And we talking about Tobago”. That is why our education system is where it is. Ten years to build a library, and every time they build, they take off plum bricks. “All yuh see de library?” It was just concrete all around. When last “yuh” went home?

“Theen they say it too heavy, it sinking. Dey start to take off—is de truth ah telling yuh—dey start to take off parts. Dey take off wing here, dey take off—ah mean, break it down, yuh know. Break down all de concrete and everything, mash up everything, throw it way and put on some different ting.”

**Sen. Singh:** “How come Al-Rawi so quiet, like is de truth?”

**Sen. Maharaj:** Let him pay attention.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Ten years the library building? Ten years the cultural complex building? Ten years all kinda house—dey build 337 houses in 10 years? Three hundred and thirty-seven houses in 10 years and then yuh give five to one family—brothers and sisters of a man who used to sit in this House?”

**Hon. Senator:** “Who is de family?”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** “Call name, ah go whistle.”

**Sen. Maharaj:** London is it?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** “When I say on platform, ‘Yuh know dey give five of dem houses up de road to’—one of de brothers come and tell me, ‘No, is only three we get.’” [Laughter and desk thumping] “Yuh know why he say dat? Because he feel I doh know.” [Crosstalk] The next two went to people who are not living in Tobago.
Hon. Senator: “Where dey from?”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Dey born dey; dey living all about, but dey born dey. Yuh understand? But if yuh brother is de ting, yuh getting de ting, yuh eh have to live dey, you could rent it out; or if yuh father is de ting—yuh understand. I am talking the truth—the whole truth, according to de ting, and nothing but the truth, [Crosstalk] and people know. It is not that the people who are getting doh know dat de other people eh getting, because all ah we is one family.”

“This is why it does hurt meh so much, dat right next door dis person eh hah nuttin to eat and over here you just pumping a set ah ting dey, and making sure nobody else eh get, for dem to vote for you. Well, all right, I say vote for who yuh want, but de national pie belongs to everybody. [Desk thumping] It belongs to everybody. So politics aside, even if the politics allows you to give your people whatever—I watching it and I understand it—doh leave out de rest of de people, man, it is unfair. You could only be a doctor if you is ah PNM?” [Interruption]

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

Motion made: That the hon. Minister’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you, Mr. President. I was teaching in 1976—[Interruption] “He said dat? So both of we not telling de truth?” [Desk thumping and laughter] [Crosstalk] I did not hear him.

When the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, said “Tobago people could eat grass”—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Did you not see when Devant Maharaj said let them secede and go to Grenada.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—“I will not hold them back, let them go. If they want to go, let them go”, and disbanded the Ministry of Tobago Affairs. [Desk thumping] I was a recipient of a salary. In 1976 I was teaching in Scarborough Methodist School. “When de salary come, is nearly de next month for de salary; and doh talk about de boat and loading de boat and unloading de boat. Listen, we learn to eat everything that moving in Tobago, yuh know—everything.”

Sen. Maharaj: “That is why nuttin remain!” [Laughter]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “We eat crab; we eat conch; we eat fish; we eat ’gouti; we eat booby—ah doh think all yuh know what is booby. Booby is pelican. We eating anything that moving, because we not depending—because we kinda mannish too, eh—we not depending on any man cutting style in Trinidad. Doh mind we say he is de
father of de nation. Fadder? Kind ah remind me of the fathers that we having sometimes here now. When some people could say that is the father of the nation, and we also say that he is the father of the nation, wha kind ah father yuh talking bout? Cut off some of de children because yuh exercise yuh franchise. We say we doh like how yuh treating we, we want to go with Robinson, so you cut we off. Yuh cut us off, and you trying to tell me dat is father? What kind ah father is dat? That is not even godfather. [Laughter] Dat is not even stepfather. I do not know; maybe we doh have a term for that yet, yuh know.” [Crosstalk]

The THA gets its money en bloc and they can use the money however they want. I think I said that. They can use the money however they want. They could vire the money anywhere they want.

“When she talk about GATE and NESC, congratulate the Senator here. [Minister Alleyne-Toppin points to Sen. Karim] Congratulate the Senator here for getting in and getting your certificate that says you could build this and you could build that, and all of that.” [Desk thumping]

Let me see what else. I want to make sure that I do not leave out—DECA. I just researched DECA. Who is DECA? How does the THA pick its people? “How dey pick Milshirv, how they pick DECA? The hon. Senator could not answer that question. You know sometimes we doh answer ah aside question because we know we cyar answer dat one, eh. [Laughter] I hear some people asking all kind ah aside question of how dey pick DECA, right.”

Hon. Senator: “Who DECA is?”

Sen. Cudjoe: Anybody said DECA was picked?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Somebody nearly said that.

Sen. Cudjoe: Who said DECA was picked?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Ah tink somebody go get in trouble for saying that we pick DECA, eh, because when dey go back”—

Hon. Senator: “De cat in de bag come out.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Yuh understand. Now, the Hansard is important, eh. De Hansard is always so important, because I wanted to say to the Senator over there that I did not say 5,000 people were let go, you know.” I said almost; I said “closer” to 5,000 people than 1,700. I am very careful where I place my words and what I say. Every word is advisedly put. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Well said, well said.
Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: When I was writing my notes, I knew that I did not have the exact figure. If I said 5,000, some bright Tobagonian over there would jump up.


Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So I said "closer." You could look at it here, "Here nuh, we brilliant, yuh know. We eat a lot ah fish head and ting. [Laughter] We brilliant, we brilliant. We doh even know what tuh do with the brains we have there."

Sen. Maharaj: “Send dem to Trinidad.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Yuh know; yuh know. But does the Assembly have a problem in understanding law? I think the Assembly has—I doh want to say anything bad bout any lawyer, you know—plenty lawyers inside here—they used to call—some used to say ‘locally assembled’ and dat was a bad ting. Dey used to say, ent? Some are saying ‘two by four’, and then my father used to say about a certain man, a lawyer, they used to call the lawyer ‘Mr. Necessity’. I say, “Daddy why yuh calling dis man Mr. Necessity?” He say, ‘Because necessity knows no law.’ [Laughter and desk thumping] Yuh understand.

If ah talking to yuh by yuhself, I go tell yuh which lawyer they used to call ‘Mr. Necessity’.″ [Crosstalk]

Sen. Maharaj: “At least they know dat.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Does the THA know no law? “The THA must know that before you go and ask somebody to do a deal with yuh, if is ah big money, yuh have to ask the hon. Senator here if ah could do it, and he go tell yuh in front. So what is the Assembly doing? The Assembly is trying to break all the laws and want everything to come to us.”

Hon. Senator: PNM style!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Break all the laws and let everything come to us. I wish the THA could recognize that we must work within the purview of the law.

“There were some little points in the end, tourism—de Assembly mash up tourism and all yuh know dat. So we now trying to build it up back. Every time they try to put somebody else in there to ting it, dey mash it up a little more. Ask the Tobago hoteliers; ask the Chamber of Commerce. We just organize, and hear what we do: we mash up everything home, we have no viable economy, so we buy two fast ferry. Dat is what de PNM boasting, yuh know, ‘We buy two fast ferry, so yuh could run down in Trinidad and get what yuh want here.’ Yuh understand.”
“So when you want to buy groceries, run down in Trinidad and buy groceries because it cheaper down dey. When you want to buy a dress, run down in Trinidad and buy a dress because it cheaper down dey.”

So the ferry is running, they moving 800-and-something people every three hours. So everybody is just depending on Trinidad. Why? The same way we come from the THA to the national budget area and we say, “I want that, and gi meh dat, and gi meh dat, and then like Oliver Twist, gi meh more.” What are you doing with it?

2005 was the last time that the Auditor General get anything to come and say, “hear what, this is what the Assembly doing with the money; $500 million missing, $300 million missing. All kinda money missing. Whey it gone? Where it gone? Yuh hear what de lady say? In unspent balances; unspent balances that are supposed to be used for capital expenditure. Which capital expenditure? To pave ah man driveway? To give him ah cheque for this?” Which capital expenditure do we have in Tobago?

The cultural complex that is now taking 10 years; I think it is 11 years now? “That dey put a big, big hat on it. De hat I got for Christmas it too beeeg. [Laughter] Big, big, big roof. [Desk thumping and laughter] A big, big roof. Then they realized—now if yuh from Tobago or even if yuh just visiting Tobago yuh will know dat down dey does sink; down by Shaw Park.”

Hon. Senator: “Oh gawd.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Hear nhu, when I went to Scarborough Sec. to work we had a big, big field in de back. I use to teach PE. One morning we get up, de field gone. Whey de field gone? It gone down in de sea.” Right? APT James had said in 40 years that school would disappear. It is just a little more than 40 years the school has to be rebuilt. Right? Because there is sinking sand. “Yuh cyar build a house on sinking sand.”

So when they put on “de big, big hat, de ting start to sink! They take off back de hat. So yuh build a roof then yuh take it off. [Laughter] You know what dey say, when they designed de structure they did not design a roof. Yuh ever hear that anywhere in yuh life?” [Laughter]

So what you “was going to do with dat nice complex? When yuh design it, yuh design it without ah roof, eh. So yuh gone in an yuh sit down, and if rain start to fall, yuh hold up ah umbrella, and if sun start to shine, everybody geh ah umbrella. Dey making Tobago people look foolish and we not foolish, we bright,

When “dey finish they will try to ridicule me. Dey might talk ’bout meh face, dey might talk ’bout meh foot.” What does that have to do with governance? We have to understand how to zero in—“as meh father use to say, set your face steadfastly and go whey yuh going. All dem distractions and all dem thing dey saying on de side bout, she lie, she lie. Who lie? De people who saying, yuh lie, lie. [Laughter] Lying! For what? It is not like—I want people to vote for me, but I eh telling them no lie.”

So if you are an hon. Senator, “yuh eh ha to tell dem no lie. Yuh eh ha to—what is de point ah lying? Everybody know is true. I doh know why yuh looking at me like dat?” [Crosstalk] You understand? No, no, no.

So I want to come back to—quiet down. My time nearly, almost up, Mr. President?

Mr. President: You have six more—five more minutes.

Sen. Maharaj: Take your time. Take your time.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So much to say. “Wha we say, tory de for talk but time no dey from fuh am. Yuh could write dat? To spell, T-O-R-Y [Laughter] den D-E.” Stories are there to be told, but there is not enough time to tell such stories. “Tory de for talk but time no dey fuh am. We have our own language home; own language that you Trinis doh understand”; sorry.

Hon. Senator: We understand.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Right. “When I studied and ting they taught us TV, and TV was Trinidad Vernacular. Nobody eh teaching Tobago vernacular. So when we doh want you all to know what we saying, we does say it in our own language.”

I want to go to Dr. The Hon. Rodger Samuel somebody. Hear what I say? Dr. The Hon. Rodger Samuel.

Hon. Senator: He is a doctor?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Hear why I want to go to the other place. A man in the other place, the Leader of the Opposition and the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West took the honourable doctor to task for bringing God into politics. [Crosstalk] I want to tell you all, if we “doh” bring God into politics, if
we do not bring God into politics, God will leave us out of politics. Righteousness exalteth a nation, wherever persuasion you belong to; I am quite sure that that is so. And sin is a reproach to any people. I am quite sure that that is so, no matter what religious persuasion you belong to.

So if you want to approach Allah, you want to approach Shiva, whoever you want to approach, you have to approach in the same—along the same principles. So when you ridicule in this place where we are celebrating discipline, tolerance, production; and I think I want to rewrite that, discipline, appreciation and production. Tolerance means that I just “stanning you, I just—you know, I really cyar tolerate yuh, you know. You know what ah mean? The real meaning of tolerance is just a basic, yuh know, yuh know, is all right. You know, like how dey use to say, yuh not black enough and those things.” It is a measure.

Appreciation: we have to appreciate each other and appreciate each other’s culture. Appreciate the fact that when you—a man wants to approach his God, you do not ridicule the man. You do not ridicule the man to get political mileage; otherwise, as you say, you walk through the valley of the shadow of political death. I was hearing, you know, but the valley of the shadow of political death. Whatever happens, God alone has the power to put up and to take down.

So when this man says to me, hon. Senator says, something to the effect that, “why you was not there”, because had I been there now, I would not have had the opportunity to say some of the things that I am saying and see some of the poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. Now that I walk with the Ministry of the People and Social Development, I can see the PNM neglect of every community this morning. [Desk thumping]

Although I was in Moriah, people were calling me from Laventille, “Oh God please, Minister, we want a food card here, we want a ting there. I organizing all that on the telephone, so that by time ah reach here, I tell them ah coming lunch time. By the time I reach here, I know when ah done talk, ah go finishing talking and they must be there waiting because they have nothing.” We have sat here as a Government talking about PNM, talking about this and talking about that, and the People’s Partnership has moved to help the poor man. [Desk thumping] Help the poor man. [Crosstalk]

**Hon. Senator:** “All yuh help all yuh self.” [Crosstalk]

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** With all of the money and all of—the poor in Tobago are not being served by the PNM. That is the point I want to make, and I want to invite the hon. Senator to walk with me. I want to invite you to walk with me.
Sen. Maharaj: “Al-Rawi, yuh talking to eh”?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No. I walk with people from the other side, you know. I walk with people from Laventille. I walk with people everywhere. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Al-Rawi: I will be proud to walk with you.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I walk with people from everywhere. And I want you to walk with me. Walk with me, and see what I have to look at on a daily basis, and have no finances for myself to give anybody anything.

Sen. Maharaj: Next week Friday.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No finances. As Minister in the Ministry of the People and Social Development I could only use what is in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and the Ministry of the People and Social Development is really, really supposed to be taking care of Trinidad. The Tobago House of Assembly is supposed to be taking care of social services in Tobago. [Desk thumping] And I gave an old lady with one leg, a food card and they stopped her social benefits; “yuh went to Vermella”.

Hon. Senator: They stop Anselm London?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: They stopped giving her—[Crosstalk]

Sen. Maharaj: “He get $60,000. Dey stop he too.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: That is another story. That need another long time to talk.

Sen. Maharaj: “He eh get no food card, he geh $60,000.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Yuh know?” So, Mr. President, I want to close by—where I began. When you come with a vile, vapid, vituperative, vitriolic, venomous contribution, that is vacuous, what do you expect the people to take away? What do you expect them to take away? I would challenge anybody to say anything that I said in this Senate this morning is not true. And I would challenge everybody who has been listening to say, what is true and what is not true from the contribution of the other side.

Mr. Speaker, truth reveals—Mr. President, sorry—itself and you do not have to argue about truth. You do not have to argue. [Desk thumping] It is self-revealing. I thank you. [Desk thumping]
Sen. Dr. Edwards: I would like to thank Mrs. Alleyne-Toppin for answering my question. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Just for clarification.

Sen. Dr. Edwards: Just for clarification. Thank you very much, Sir. The question asked was in fact, a question that I had. I simply seek clarification on how to pose said question. Okay. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, it is 1.09 p.m. I propose to take the lunch break at this time and resume at 2.00 p.m. This Senate stands suspended until 2.00 p.m.

1.09 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: Minister of Communications.

Hon. Senator: Aie-yaie-yaie.

The Minister of Communications (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Hadeed): Mr. President, my first contribution in the Senate, I would like to have it on record, it is a journey for me. It started in 1956 when my father took up the mantle to try to make this place a better place.

Many people have asked me why I put my business aside to take the responsibility of being a Minister of Government. I said to whoever asked me, and I let them know, that as the Minister of Communications it is part of a pilgrimage started many years ago by my deceased father. As a matter of fact, the journey started in 1956. I do not know if very many people know that in 1958 my deceased brother, Alphonzo, won a seat in the Port of Spain City Council in 1958. [Desk thumping] So we have been—and as a matter of fact, he was the first ever councillor for the DLP in Port of Spain. So my lineage on this side, on the Government side, is well articulated. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: Your nephew was a Senator.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: And also my nephew was a UNC Senator, now converted to “PNMism”.

Hon. Senator: He saw the light.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: It is part of a journey that started with my father and it is in his memory that I follow in his path. [Desk thumping]
My father was a very humble man who never bowed to political pressure from politicians. His closest friends were Opposition stalwarts. Lionel Seukeran, your grandfather—[Interuption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:—Sen. Al-Rawi, was a good friend of his.


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Albert Gomes, the hon. Bhadase Sagan Maraj and no other person than the father of our dear Senator, Sen. Vasant Bharath, John Bharath, those were his friends.

Mr. President, Lionel Seukeran, as we all called him the ol’ Seukie, was a gentleman and he was also a fierce and ferocious debater. I used to love to listen to him, just like his grandson—he is a good debater.

When I recognize his grandson here today and I pay tribute to his pedigree, I am sure that the ol’ Seukie must be very concerned that one of his descendants would become an apologist and the PR man [Laughter] for the party that took Trinidad and Tobago from the promise land and made it the land of promises. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

I have a letter here written by Seukie on November 21, 1959, in England during the famous Marlborough discussions on self-government for Trinidad and Tobago. This was sent to Bhadase Sagan Maraj, and even though it was confidential, Bhadase placed so much trust and confidence in my dad that he shared the letter with him. Let me quote one line so you can see how valuable this document is. He said to Bhadase:

We are now fighting for an independent boundary commission with seats shared on a proportional basis.

Mr. President, there they were fighting for proportional representation as early as 1958. [Desk thumping] Even in those days, because they realized how valuable it was as a mechanism for equality, justice and fairness.

2.05 p.m.

Sen. George: “Doh worry with he.”

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: The PNM with all its conspiracy theories never looked at proportional representation properly. The PNM conceived that it was a conspiracy for the Opposition to take over the country.
I have another letter from the Conference at Marlborough House. It was from
Albert Gomes to my dad. It was sent on November 02, 1959. And it was to inform
Bhadase what was happening at the talks. Mr. Gomes said:

We had our first meeting today with the Colonial office. The boys did very
well and cooperated nicely.

He asked Bhadase to protest against the new Constitution unless there was an
election. He asked for a DLP show of strength because that is what Williams did.
He also said that Butler was there with him, Butler being Uriah Buzz Butler. He
said Uriah was cooperating with the “boys” and was very happy with how things
were going.

I can tell you I was extremely close to Dr. Williams. We always had a lot of
good times talking together. I was never a PNM, but we had good relations. Dr.
Williams admitted to me that my father was the only man who refused to be
bought or bow despite the pressure that he got. [Desk thumping]

My father ran a dry goods store and in those days you needed import licences
to import materials, but they refused to give him any and he had to shut the store
down. They almost had him in bankruptcy. They starved him of the only
mechanism to import materials to survive. As I say he had to go on to do other
things. He went on to become one of the most successful insurance people in this
country. [Desk thumping] He taught me to look for opportunities in the worst
crisis and to be constructive instead of destructive. He told me always to be
positive and not negative.

Mr. President, Dr. Williams was an intellectual, but he was sometimes very
stubborn and illogical. He could also be very vindictive as I pointed out.
Proportional representation is one of those causes that he was unreasonable about.
Perhaps, it was because Sir Hugh Wooding supported it. Dr. Williams had a
problem with Sir Hugh, so he had a problem with proportional representation.
[Crosstalk] Proportional representation has so many benefits and advantages over
the first-past-the-post system that there is no reason to oppose it. But, Dr.
Williams bitterly opposed it. He saw it as a threat to him and the PNM.

Here is what Dr. Selwyn Ryan said on September 22, Sunday Express. He said
that Williams rejected proportional representation outright. Dr. Ryan said that the
first-past-the-post system gives too much power to the majority party and too little
to the losing party. He pointed out that you can get the majority of votes, but if
you do not get the majority of seats the people who voted for you have no say in the way the country is run. I ask the question: is this right? Is it right? The answer has to be no. Dr. Ryan identified many benefits from proportional representation.

The Germans have a combination of proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system more elaborate and widespread than we are introducing in the local government, and it is working very well for them.

Even Sir Ellis Clarke supported the version, but it was Mr. Manning who vetoed it. Dr. Ryan advised the PNM to change its views about proportional representation. I do hope they listen. He ended it by saying that proportional representation is an idea whose time has come. Well, it has come. It is here and the PNM should see that it will benefit the country as a whole. The PNM has to stop being short-sighted.

Proportional representation adds value to the vote of everyone. The Congress of the People is strongly advocating that the present constitution committee strongly commits—considers that proportional representation should be a major part of any revision to the existing Constitution. It was a proud moment for me when I voted with the People’s Partnership Government to pass the Representation of the People Act that included proportional representation.

**Sen. Al-Rawi:** Municipal Corporations Act.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:** The Municipal Corporations Act. I thank you. And here is where the election will elect aldermen who will be put up by various parties. As I said earlier, the PNM took the promised land and made it a land of promises. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I repeat, the PNM has taken our promised land and made it a land of promises. And so, Mr. President, this is part of my pilgrimage; and the Opposition who took the promised land of Trinidad and Tobago and made it a land of promises, they took this land of opportunity and turned it into a land of oppression against some of our people. This is why I am here. I am here to make this country a land of opportunity. I wish to advise all of our people and also all of our supporters that this is your land, this is your place and this is your time.

To those of you who felt marginalized and felt left out now is your time. Join me and the People’s Partnership Government in making the future prosperous and enjoyable for all. I would like to say that the UNC and the COP are both offsprings from the DLP and the POPPG. [*Desk thumping*] I have been steadfast and remain steadfast and totally committed to this Government because we have delivered on our promises, we have delivered on the promises in our manifesto of 2010.
Appropriation Bill, 2013  Wednesday, September 25, 2013

[SEN. THE HON. G. HADEED]

I want all to know I was born in a small underprivileged town called Corbeau Town, close to Sackville Street. That is where I was born, and I am proud to say I came from Corbeau Town, and I am proud to say I am standing here representing all the people of Corbeau Town and the environs, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, the PNM boasts about introducing the one-person/one-vote system in their party. They use that to say that they are a democratic organization. However, as soon as former Port of Spain Mayor, Louis Lee Sing said that he was challenging Dr. Rowley for the leadership, they circled their wagons all around and started to castigate Mayor Lee Sing. If your party is truly democratic you have to give everyone a chance to contest for any position of choice. [Desk thumping]

This is the same reason why they are against proportional representation, even though they know it will help them. Are they truly democratic? Are they truly a democratic political party? Our Government embraces proportional representation as a benefit to our country because we know that the empowerment of our entire society, our youth, our senior citizens, all of our people, proportional representation will be the best way to preserve and protect the freedoms and democracy that we now have. Empowerment, yes, Mr. President, empowerment is what is required to be continued.

I would like now to turn to the former Prime Minister, the geologist who does not know solid ground from quicksand. Mr. President, the former political leader, Mr. Patrick Manning, who claims to be a geologist, cannot tell the difference between solid rock and quicksand. And not once, but twice, when he thought he was on solid ground he sank into oblivion. He called early elections twice and lost both times, and some people say that he wanted to lose because he lost control of the party and the economy.

Mr. Manning spent large sums of money on mega projects and paid huge salaries to his yes-men. He continued to behave as if money was no problem, but when Mr. Manning was faced with outstanding demands from the unions and the bills from contractors which were piling up at the time, because of his squandermania attitude, he had to call an early election and left the UNC to clean up the mess.

This is exactly what was done prior to 1981 with the second oil boom.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, Standing Order 35(1), this is about a debate on the budget for 2014.
Mr. President: Senator, if I may, it is customary that on his maiden speech we will not interrupt or take any points of order against. So I would allow the Minister of Communications to continue. [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I will come to that part in due course. This is exactly what was done prior to 1981. Prime Minister George Chambers started the reconstruction and laid the foundation that the NAR inherited in 1986. He lost the election because of the stringent measures he had to take to try to bring some rationality back into Government. I do praise George Michael Chambers for the work he did. As I said, when the PNM does good I will say they do good. When they go off course I will say when they go off course.

The NAR built on the foundation that he had laid. Members of the Cabinet almost lost their lives in 1990 because of the very stringent measures, and the very unpopular measures that had to be taken under the stewardship of no better a leader than the hon. ANR Robinson, who today I say also, is a statesman of quality and he is a true son of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Not once, not twice, but three times now the PNM has left the country in a catastrophic economic mess. Mr. President, the letters “PNM” stand for, I can say it, as my colleague from Tobago said earlier “Promises Never Materialize.” [Desk thumping] Let me say it again—PNM means “Promises Never Materialize.” [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I sat here for the past few days, and on Monday especially, the day before we celebrated Republic Day, I heard some misinformation and innuendoes that demonstrated how desperate our opponents have become, how power hungry they are. Yes, they want to send this beautiful land of ours, this paradise, back to the 19th Century. This they will not get. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I was a businessman and did business nationally, regionally and internationally. Business is about confidence. Confidence is the hallmark of any society. Confidence is what the People’s Partnership Government is putting in place. They will say: “Gerry boy, we like doing business with your country, but all these negatives we are hearing we are afraid to do business there.”

What I heard on Monday, all the misinformation that the Opposition are just spewing out will have that effect on investment. The opportunists see that an upcoming local government election is in the air and they feel that the truth will not help them, so they resort to misinformation. The Opposition does not seem to realize or care about the negative impact that misinformation will have on our economy and the future of our children and grandchildren, their children and grandchildren included. But it does not work that way.
Mr. President, we need to become more competitive, we need to make it easier for people to do business in this country for the benefit of our country and our people. The Gospel according to Mark Chapter 8, Verse 36, the question is asked:

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Desk thumping]


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I want to ask the other side, what profit do you think you will derive from all the misinformation, lies and innuendoes? What could the Opposition gain from that?

2.20 p.m.

Mr. President, imagine the impact of the false information that was spread about the MOU between our country and Venezuela over the Loran-Manatee field. As Minister Ramnarine has said, the false information from so-called experts and Members of this honourable Opposition can adversely affect the negotiations. What is incredible, Mr. President, is this project was proposed and supported by the PNM in 2003, but I will say some more about this later.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Reckless! Reckless!

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Here, ladies and gentlemen, Senators, are budget statements from 2002—2009 during the PNM administration. Every budget speech is here. I would love the population to get copies of this and see the promises that were laid between 2002—2009. I will deal with this part of the budget in a while.

I want to inform this honourable House that the misinformation leaked to the Opposition from some unreliable source in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs has been irrefutably contradicted by the Venezuelan Energy Minister, Rafael Ramirez, and somewhere in a Guardian article dated November last year, Minister Ramirez has affirmed that substantive amounts of gas will be processed in Trinidad as liquefied natural gas because of Trinidad and Tobago’s advanced infrastructure and experience in the natural gas model of development which Venezuela can learn from Trinidad.

So rather than attempting to discourage and disparage one of the most important economic developments in this country, the Opposition should first try to verify its information and avoid dissemination of false information [Desk thumping] detrimental to the national interest. Mr. President, we need to become more competitive. We need to make it easier for people to do business in our country for the benefit of our country and our people.
Mr. President, my job is to get rid of the poisons and clear the air. I promise truth and honesty as the basis of our communications, and I will deliver on my promises. I have said I will be accessible to the media 24/7 to tell the truth about what the Government is doing on behalf of our people. In other words, my role is to detoxify and get rid of the poisons the Opposition is spreading. [Desk thumping]


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Mr. President, if and when I come across misinformation, innuendoes, coming from the Opposition, I will personally deal with the contaminants and ensure the truth is well reported. In other words, my role, and the role of my Ministry, is to detoxify and get rid of the poisons our opponents are spreading and let the truth be told.

However, Mr. President, I find it difficult to understand why anyone would seek to govern and build a nation on a foundation of falsehoods. How can we allow these falsehoods to fester and infect our country? If you try to win an election based on falsehoods, what happens if you win? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. [Desk thumping]

Whatever the Opposition does will affect them in the long run. Does the Opposition not see this? Has the fruitless search for power made them so blind that they cannot see what goes around will come around? [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senators: Oooh!

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Mr. President, this is why I am here and why I am continuing my father’s pilgrimage for truth, justice and equality.

Now, Mr. President, let us deal with the PNM rainbow. I want to advise our people—the people of our country—that a rainbow is a very pretty object. It is colourful; it is attractive, and many people believe there is a pot of gold at the end of it. I want to warn everybody about the PNM’s rainbow. There is no pot of gold at the end of the PNM rainbow, or any rainbow. The scientists say that a rainbow is caused by dust trapped in water particles. That is what makes the pretty colours. But when the rain starts and then stops falling, all you will get is what David Rudder says, “Dust in your face”. [Laughter and desk thumping]

That is what the PNM will give you, dust in your face. Do not be fooled by promises. Take it from me. This is why I have always opposed them, and this is why I have decided that I will be part of the People’s Partnership [Desk thumping] because it is not a party that makes promises. This is a party that delivers. It is
about delivery, Mr. President. We deliver. This is what the People’s Partnership is all about. It is about the people and it is what is right for the people and what is best for the people and what is best for our country.

Take a look at our manifesto. We have lived up to our promises and commitments. This is what the PP Government is about. They do not keep their promise and we deliver. The Opposition uses misinformation; the People’s Partnership Government uses information; the Opposition uses miscommunication; the People’s Government uses communications. The PP Government consults; the PP Government cares. Yes, Mr. President, the People’s Partnership Government cares for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I have a book—

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Mr. President.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:** Sorry. Mr. President, I have a book, a very thick book, on the budget speeches from 2002—2010. If you want the truth of what the PNM means, you will find it here; promises never materialized. [Desk thumping] These documents in here—all of these budget statements, if you go through them page by page, budget by budget, it is promises with no delivery. I may have time to point some of these out to you if my speaking time does not expire before, but I ask everybody, get those budget speeches from 2002 to 2009—

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Yeah. Well said. Well said.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:**—and read it. Do not be fooled. Mr. Speaker—

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Mr. President.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:** Sorry. Mr. President, as I said, I have a very thick book of budget speeches from 2002—2009. If you want the truth, what the PNM means, you will find it there.

Mr. President, on Monday we heard that the PNM was the architect of our oil wealth. So tell us, what was the reason, when Venezuela came to us to join OPEC, the then Prime Minister at the time refused to have anything to do with our Caribbean neighbour? He gave up our opportunity of a lifetime to be part and parcel of OPEC. He refused Venezuela for us to join into OPEC.

What is happening now? I can tell you. Then in 2003, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Patrick Manning, delivered his budget speech and called it “Vision 2020—People our Priority”, but the PNM’s priority was to promise and not deliver. As usual, they talk the talk while we walk the walk. [Desk thumping] Again, they promised and again, we delivered.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Anyhow, in the 2003 budget, Mr. Manning promised oil production will rise from 120,000 barrels to 200,000 barrels by the middle of 2006. That never materialized. Mr. Manning, in the same budget speech in 2003, said that we will have train 5 and train 6, and this will fuel further exploration of our offshore natural gas fields while strengthening our relations with Venezuela. Well, I can say that they had very little drilling activity during that period of time so, obviously, what was said there meant nothing because nothing was done.

Mr. President, all the miscommunication, all the misinformation, all the innuendoes, all the attacks and accusations about Loran-Manatee, right now the energy Minister is undertaking a promise made by the PNM on Loran-Manatee in 2003 that went the way of all other promises. Instead of condemning Sen. Ramnarine, they should be supporting and praising him.


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: This is an absolute opportunity that cannot be left to die. Mr. President, our relationship with Venezuela goes back in time. Even though it is not on a front page every week, it has been steady, continuous and amicable. This is not something we should jeopardize as a nation. An agreement on oil and gas now can go into one that helps our cross-border trade, that can help our fishing industry and create many, many more opportunities. Let us not “mash” it up.

Mr. President, in the same speech in 2003, Mr. Manning promised a US $850 million gas-to-liquids plant; a billion dollar smelter and a $1.2 billion ethylene complex. Mr. Manning promised a host of downstream industries for La Brea. He, his party and his Government, played a very cruel joke on the people of Point Fortin and La Brea. This is where much of the wealth of our country came from. These are constituencies that have continuously voted as PNM constituencies, but yet these are two of the most neglected areas in our country.

These are the people who have never asked for too much. All they wanted was an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work. They wanted the opportunity to build better lives for themselves and their children. They wanted their children off the streets and in safety. Someday the PNM will pay for the exploitation of these people; no mercy, no pity, no concern for them.

We are building the highway to Point Fortin that Dr. Williams promised them in 1956.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “Oh ya yoi!” [Desk thumping]
Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: We are opening up industries and opportunities for our citizens, and the new highway will bring not just the big equipment that is needed to build the plants of the future, the Point Fortin highway will afford for the future of growth, job opportunities and economic benefits to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but more importantly, to the people of Point Fortin and La Brea.

In the same budget speech of 2003, Mr. Manning promised a service port in Galeota and a port for CNG exports at Cove Estate in Tobago. As a Tobagonian, Lord Nelson said, “Yuh hear lie? Dat is lie!” [Desk thumping] We delivered the port in Galeota and an expansion is already planned for the future. We also completed the port at Cove and the Cove Industrial Estate.

Mr. Manning promised fisheries landing sites. Who built them? We built them 10 years later. We, the People’s Partnership, built them, not the PNM, not Mr. Manning, none of them. Our Minister of Food Production, Mr. Devant Maharaj, delivered on this promise. [Desk thumping]

When the people of Caroni (1975) Limited see the PNM, they have every right to reject them, the same way I rejected them because the PNM never delivered. Remember all of those promises Manning made to Caroni workers and farmers in 2003: they would get land; they would get support; they would get machinery; they would be the food basket of the country? Now it is left for us to deliver on those promises. The citizens of Caroni and the environs received those promises from the People’s Partnership Government.

Mr. President, I can go on forever about all of those broken promises, all of those promises that were never fulfilled; all the dust they raised in the face of our people. My pilgrimage is to show just how the Opposition will continue to try to fool the people of this country. This is my promise. They take, we contribute; they talk, we act; they promise, we deliver.

Mr. President, there is so much we can pick from these budgets. So many promises that they broke; so many projects that failed or fell apart, like the Brian Lara Stadium. But the one that captures the full extent of the incompetence in Mr. Manning’s 2003 contribution was on how they would eliminate the scourge of crime in this country. He came up with a programme that he called: “Weed and Seed Programme”.

2.35 p.m.

Sen. Hinds—who is not here—you remember. You were there, weed and seed. Yes, weed and seed. Mr. Manning said, “Weed and seed is an innovative programme geared to weed out the criminal elements in the community and to seed it with values.”
Now, I am going to make a statement here that cast no aspersions on anyone in this honourable Chamber. Well it is either “he plant the seed and then smoke the weed”, or that the whole Cabinet “grow the seed and smoke the weed.” [Desk thumping and laughter] That was in 2003, 10 years ago, and they allowed crime to get out of control.

Mr. President, the sadness and sickest story—

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, Standing Order 35(5). Does a maiden contribution allow someone to breach all Standing Orders?

Mr. President: Minister of Communications, I may rule on the issue. Senator, I took the Minister of Communications to be making an allegorical statement and not imputing any motive to anyone that I have seen. You may continue, Minister. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “Yeh, yeh, yeh.”

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Thank you very much. Mr. President, thank you very much.


Hon. Senator: What they are trying to do is break your stride.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Not this one. I now come to talk about the billion dollar scrap iron plant—the billion dollar scrap iron plant. Mr. President, the saddest and sickest story about the PNM and its wastage, its corruption and its incompetence, is the gas-to-liquids plant at Petrotrin. Here is where the plot thickens. I was a member of the Board of UTC when this project came before us. I remember asking the snake-oil salesman how they proposed to turn a used methanol reactor into a reactor for the conversion of gas to fuel oil. I was given a very flimsy explanation. I then asked them if the investors could get a contractors’ completion guarantee that should the process not produce the results expected, we would have recourse to the contractors. They could not answer if it was possible to get a contractors’ guarantee. I then advised the Board that they should reject the investment outright. Imagine, they used Trinidad and Tobago as a guinea pig country. [Desk thumping]


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: To use a reformer, a reactor, from a methanol produce plant to try to bring it here cost us billions and billions of dollars—[Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:—but not get the results and not have recourse to these snake-oil salesmen that they come and bring here to the country. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Maharaj: “Say a Standing Order now, nah.”

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I am certain that the directors of Petrotrin at the time never asked for contractors’ completion guarantee, otherwise we would not find ourselves in this position—[Interruption]

Sen. Singh: The question is why?

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:—a loss of billions on this project. I will then tell you about the feeding frenzy on the Caribbean pipeline initiative. Someone in the Senate asked the question: “why?” Why no pipeline to the island?


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Again, snake-oil salesmen eating at the trough with their feasibility study which cost in excess of $50 million. It was only for the chosen few of the PNM to use feasibility studies to enrich themselves. It was the same thing with the rapid rail, or should I say “racket rail”. A feasibility contract is a legal way to extract large sums of money legally without having to answer questions about corruption. [Desk thumping] The chairman of Petrotrin, Lindsay Gillette, described it as horrible and disgusting. This was a deal between the two Ms—Mr. Manning and Mr. Malcolm Jones—and a US company to contract a gas to liquids plant on the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery.

Mr. Gillette was stunned. He could not understand how Petrotrin or Manning and Malcolm could put all the money forward and not have a say in what happened.

Sen. Singh: Give a bad word to M&M.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Gillette said, “I just do not know how anybody can go into a project like that without veto powers.” Mr. Gillette might not understand because he is accustomed to facts not fiction.

Mr. President, this reminds me of a story, “Alice in Wonderland”. Alice started in the rabbit hole and ended up in fantasy land. I am not sure what kind of hole Manning and Malcolm fell into, but they left Petrotrin in a hole with millions of dollars—[Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, Manning is a Member of the Lower House. He should be referred to by his title, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, please.
Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: For San Fernando East, please. Right! Okay! Thank you for the—

Mr. President: You will have to refer to him by his proper constituency.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much, Mr. Deyalsingh.


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Sen. Deyalsingh. Thank you again for the correction. Think of how much better the lives of our senior citizens could be, the hundreds of schools, hundreds of playgrounds and hundreds of community centres. Think about the support of our athletes, think of the thousands of houses that could have been built, Mr. President. It is enough to bring tears to the eyes of anyone who loves this country. [Desk thumping] I hope the people understand what happened. People get little money in the lottery and they have dreams and plans. I would like to stage the competition with the school children to ask them: if they had $14 billion what would they do with it? It would be educational for that side.

Mr. President, what everyone knows about me is that I am passionate about my country, our country, Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] I believe that if we truly aspire together as one people, as one nation and as one red force, we will make an even greater impact on the world than we have already done. Mr. President, ours is a nation that comes together as one. Race or religion is never a factor when we support our nationals, when we celebrate Carnival, when we celebrate Divali, when we celebrate Eid. We support the Mumbai Indians because Pollard plays for the Mumbai Indians. Our Olympic gold medallist Keshorn Walcott and our World Championship gold medallist Jehue Gordon, and all of our athletes and sports persons have the support of our entire nation. Our nation was united and is united in support of our people regardless of race, colour or creed.

Mr. President, ask our athletes about the PNM promises—so many promises. They promised, but never delivered. The hon. Anil Roberts, our Minster of Sport, has delivered and will deliver the finest sporting facilities [Desk thumping] our athletes will ever have.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “Yeh, yeh, yeh.”

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: The athletes will have the very best for every sport. Mr. President, I am embarrassed by the way the PNM have treated our record holder, Brian Lara. He is a friend and while he is a cool and humble individual, he is justifiably upset that his name will be attached to a monstrosity and a disgrace.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Brian is a national icon. He is now with our national team, T-20 team, of cricketers in India. This Government is aware of how important it is to ensure that the stadium named after this cricketing genius—a national cricketing genius—should rank among the best facilities in the world for the sport which he has made our country proud and famous. We are prepared as a Government to complete the facility if only to restore the pride and to make up to Brian Lara for the pain that it has caused him. Again, we will deliver.

Mr. President, I am a simple patriot and I will do anything for my country. Anything I can do for this country—to make the country the shining star and the guiding light of the Caribbean, in fact, the guiding light of the world—I will do it. I see my role now as helping to achieve our national motto and to guarantee that every creed and race finds an equal place in our beloved country. [Desk thumping]

We have a goal and our goal is sustainable development. It is clear that last year’s budget and this year’s budget—this is the direction that my colleague, the Finance and the Economy Minister, Larry Howai is taking. His 2013 budget has the formula for Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity. We did that! Now this year we have taken one step ahead, Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity. [Desk thumping] In other words, Mr. President, as every businessman knows, you have to put things in place to grow your business and to make money, and then your next step should be to make sure that the business continues to grow and it keeps on profitable to create jobs, enhance your employees’ wages and to honour your responsibility as a good corporate citizen.

This is the direction of the People’s Partnership Government. Mr. President, this is what we are doing in the 2014 budget. [Desk thumping] It is wise for the country to adopt the approach of the Minister of Finance and the Economy to our country’s development. Trinidad and Tobago is a business and our resources must be used for continuous growth and prosperity. We have to prepare for a future without oil and gas, and to do that—

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the Minister of Communications has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.
Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. President. We have to continue to prepare for the future without oil and gas, and to do that we have to use the money we get from oil and gas and harvest it into non-renewable resources to create a platform for sustainable development.

Take the highway to Point Fortin, Mr. President. Under the PNM, Point Fortin and La Brea were neglected and the young people had very limited opportunities for advancement. Point Fortin should have been the jewel in our crown. The people have contributed more to our oil wealth than any other part of this nation and should have benefited more from it. The Government is making sure that this will happen.

Mr. President, when a country expands its communication network, it creates more opportunities for progress, more business development, more options, more employment, more wealth for our citizens. This will also eliminate the term “rural” from our vocabulary—rural. Singapore is smaller than Tobago, but it has expanded development through the entire country because of road and infrastructure development that add value to the country’s economic development. They have eliminated from their vocabulary the word “rural”. This we will also do. [Desk thumping] Nowhere in Trinidad and Tobago should be considered rural. It is impossible that a country as wealthy as ours should still have what is considered rural areas in Trinidad and Tobago.


Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Mr. President, roads are like the veins in our bodies. They are arteries.

Following the Second World War in the United States of America, they went into a highway development construction project that opened up the country to growth and industrial development. This is the reason the highway to Point Fortin will become a reality. It was promised in 1956. It was never built. It was just an election promise that never was intended to be implemented.

Hon. Senator: They practise that. They promise—[Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: We the People’s Partnership Government is doing it all and will do more. They promise, we deliver. Point Fortin is an important growth pole and we will grow. Not only Point, we will grow Mayaro, Guayaguayare, with also the same experience with development. The Government will open up the country with road networks, communication.

They promised to build the Diego Martin highway. The Diego Martin highway—[Interruption]
Sen. George: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I live in Diego Martin and every afternoon and every morning if I do not leave at half past five, I cannot get out of there for an hour. Same thing in the afternoon, you back up to MovieTowne. It is not right. They promised to build the Diego Martin highway, yet still thousands of cars and people spend hours getting into Port of Spain or going back to Diego Martin. Think about the lost productivity and the frustration the people have. The Government is in the process of building this highway at the present time. It will be commissioned next year. [Desk thumping] That will ease the frustrations of the citizens of Diego Martin and Port of Spain.

Remember the heap of gravel on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway? We all remember it.

Sen. George: In O’Meara.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: In O’Meara. The PNM promised to deliver dualling of the highway from the second roundabout to Wallerfield. It took this Government to finish this project enabling our citizens and easing the frustrations and many man-hours lost in traffic. [Desk thumping]

2.50 p.m.

Sustainable development is not about money, it is about people. Sustainable development is not just about buildings, it is about preserving and protecting our environment. Sustainable development is not about politics, it is about governance. It is on these three pillars: people, preservation and governance that we will build a platform for growth, a platform for innovation, a platform for unity, harmony and creativity to withstand the strong waves and storms that the future can bring. It will be a platform built upon the native genius of our people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, last year, Sen. Howai developed a budget to stimulate growth and develop prosperity. The question is: did we deliver? I am going to take just a few examples of how futuristic the budget was and how much we accomplished towards sustainable development. The Opposition questioned where the money went but they know, because the figures are all there in the budget presentation, but did they read it?

I would question whether they read it because they could not have asked such a silly question because the figures are there to show in the presentation of the budget how much went to social services especially for our senior citizens, our
widows, our children, our children in need, our roads and infrastructure: pensions and gratuity was $2.3 billion, grants for the assisted secondary schools and goods and services, $53.9 million. There are many such goods and services and these are what helped to stimulate local business.

The school meals programme alone got $252.8 million, water $1.3 billion. When last did you see anybody complaining for water in Trinidad and Tobago? \([Desk thumping]\) I mean, when last? People are happy they are getting water; it is a necessity for life. We have made sure that we are contributing to enhance the best value people can get for living standards. That is what this Government is about.

The school meals programme alone got $252.8 million feeding our children at school; UTT, $312.2 million; YTEPP, $66.5; senior citizens got $2.5 billion. The expenditures are there for the benefit of our people. Is the Opposition questioning why we are assisting people? Well, this was one of our promises in our 2010 manifesto and we kept it and we intend to keep all of our promises.

Mr. President, the UNC Government ran the entire country in 1998—I will give you some figures here that I think you would—off my head. The UNC Government in 1998 ran this country on $10.8 billion; in 2009, $11 billion; in 2010, $13 billion or $14 billion. That was what this country—[Interrupt]


**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:** 1998, 1999 and 2000. I am saying that with that little bit of money, so much was done.

Why do I point this out? Could you imagine the debt of Petrotrin today is $15 billion more than what the Government in 2008, 2009 and 2010—


**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:**—1998, 1999 and 2000. I beg your pardon. What I am going to do, I am laying in Parliament the documents so that everyone can have a look at it so I will lay this in Parliament for the population to have a look at.

Mr. President, I have a very, very long list of major accomplishments by our Government but since I believe in people and in the future, I will select a few that illustrate clearly and convincingly how much we have advanced the cause of sustainable development. Think about the children, the future needs, present and their scholarship programme. I start with the future of our children. We think
about the children not about later but now. Do you know that the Government has rationalized and streamlined the scholarship process and we have tied it to sustainable development? We have identified the skills and competencies we will need for sustainable development and we would provide scholarships in these areas.

We are not waiting for the roads to become overcrowded and to talk about building roads. We are proactive in planning for the future. This is part of the transformation of our country which the hon. Prime Minister said must go hand in hand with the gold to diamond transformation of our public service. The public service transformation will help to make our country more competitive and make it easier to do business.

Any citizen will be able to use a cell phone and call any Ministry or walk into any office of any Ministry and start the process to get a passport, a birth certificate, a death certificate or renew your driver’s licence. All government will be more available. You will be able to go online 24/7 and access these services. They will become cheaper and better.

The Ministry of Public Administration has set up a diamond standard for excellence in service delivery, and that is what is happening right now. The PNM tried many times and had people like Dr. Gordon Draper spending a lot of time and money on public service reform, nothing happened. That is what we are delivering to our people as promised in our manifesto.

There is already sufficient evidence that our laptop programme has made a difference and that getting our children into the information age is an investment in the future. The Ministry of Education is going to try to ensure broadband access to all children in the entire country, and we are doing everything possible to provide every citizen free access to wireless and broadband facilities just like in Korea.

We will have three competing mobile phone providers instead of two, so by bringing the cost and the rates down. At the same time, we are expanding the educational opportunities available in Trinidad and Tobago with COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande, a UTT campus in Tobago. I see Sen. Cudjoe is not there.

**Sen. Rammarine:** Which part that campus is?

**Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed:** In Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And a UWI campus in Debe. Now, you can still get the best doubles in Debe but you will also get the best education.

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Yeah, yeah. [*Desk thumping*]
Hon. Senators: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Added to all of this investment in the future is the Chancery Lane teaching hospital in San Fernando. Mr. President, this is our vision, this is our future. We are creating the future now. The future is already here and we are making sure that we keep a step ahead. The world is not going to wait for us; we must invest in the future. [Desk thumping]

We have a base of diversity to which to build that future and are doing it. This is what my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the Economy is putting the programme in place block by block, piece by piece and budget by budget. Let me show you how this budget, this vision of the future is what guides us. There is a tertiary education allowance of 60,000 for children attending universities abroad. We recognize for the future of our country, there are some areas of specialization that we need and we are supporting young people in their studies. We have a tax allowance of 25 per cent of the value of solar water heating equipment at a maximum value of $10,000. This is the future of energy conservation—reducing the dependence on fossil fuel and preserving our environment.

This is also the thinking behind the removal of the existing tax credit of 25 per cent to individuals who convert CNG vehicles and replacing this with a simple tax allowance of 100 per cent on the cost of converting motor vehicles to use CNG up to a maximum expenditure of $40,000 per vehicle.

Hon. Senator: Very good!

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: We have a plan. We have a plan to support small business, encourage exploration and sustainable development.

Mr. President, you are watching the future unfold and it is very clear that we have a plan and we are already putting it in place. Consider the support we have given to small business. At the same time, we are encouraging exploration and the development in the petroleum sector and are working to bring more gas back to the country for supplying feedstock to Atlantic through the alliance with Venezuela. This is to ensure that we use our energy resources so they last as long as possible and so provide this country with the resources we need to provide alternatives.

Mr. President, our concern for the future, especially our environment, is also behind our increasing severity with illegal quarrying and littering. We are cracking down on these activities. Wildlife and fisheries conservation are just a few things that I can tell you about.
Mr. President: Senator, you will have to wrap up now.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Okay. So what I am saying is that the future is now, the future is here and the future is real.

During my next contribution, I will give all the information that I have to give on why I became a Minister of Communication. With that, I close my contribution and I thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Minister of Health.

[Both the Minister of Health and Sen. Elton Prescott SC stand]

Hon. Khan: Go ahead?

Mr. President: I take it you came from the other place and I decided to give you the preference in terms of the speaking rather than delay you here longer than you need to be.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan): Mr. President, thank you very much. I want to thank the Members of this honourable Senate for indulging me from my visit from the other place to your place. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you, Sen. Prescott, thank you very much.

First, let me start by saying, we have been listening to the contributions and I think the contributions are of a very high standard, and I would just like to develop some points on the health sector, the Ministry of Health, and the directions that we are going to hope to go in the oncoming year, but first let me deal with a couple of small points that Dr. Wheeler, you have raised.

Now, I will try to bring it into my contribution—my brief contribution—where I am going to speak today about what we hope to expect. You see, for a very long time, we have been looking at structures, more than function. The structures are going to be built, the hospitals are going to be built and all these different things—as I said, infrastructure is going to be built. But when you look at the whole health sector as a total, one looks and sees exactly what is it and where do I have to direct my energies to give one special thing, which is care to patients.

A patient that enters a system comes in for a special kind of care or a special movement and the majority of our systems, if you focus it down, is focused towards that one patient and the development of and the management of that illness. When Dr. Wheeler spoke about the Scarborough hospital—and the Scarborough hospital is now up and running to a very good extent—and what occurred to the older hospital.

Sen. Ramnarine: Who finished the Scarborough hospital?
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: The people of Tobago, initially when I first became Minister two years ago, we had a very hard time of convincing most of the movement from the old hospital to the new hospital, and we took a decision then to open that hospital and see exactly what occurs thereafter.

I must say that the Tobago people have really and truly put their shoulders to the wheel [Desk thumping] and developed the system in such a nice way that recently while I was at a function, I was approached by a very prominent citizen who indicated that he needed to indicate that they were in Tobago on holidays and what occurred—I think their daughter or family had ingested some poisonous substance, so-called, or something that was considered a poisonous substance. They were rushed to the Scarborough hospital and the treatment that was given at that hospital was very superior and very good that they—in fact, they were giving it kudos, and I indicated to them that it would be nice for that to be written in a newspaper—[ Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Exactly!

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—because, you know, we tend to get all the negatives and all the positives—I read it on my cellphone but I ask that it continues. [ Interruption]

Mr. President, what I would like to say, when we broke down the system, for the last year, we treated close to 2.5 million patients in our health system which is quite a bit. So when you look about 2.5 million people and we get about, let us say 20 negative comments, so if you say 20 divide by 2.5 million multiply by 100, you will see the percentage of that is very, very minute as compared to the volume of patients that are treated in the health centre. But that does not mean to say we are going to write off the complaints, because I want to go into the complaints. I started my initial contribution in the other place, in the Lower House, based on complaints.

3.05 p.m.

So when one does the market research or market analysis of what you are going to do with your target users, what you are going to look at, are you going to look at how many buildings we have built? How many structures we have put up? But I tend to look at what is the general complaint. What was the complaint that was taking first preference in the health sector? And what came about, after looking at the total of the four regions, and Tobago also, five regions, we came up with, one of the biggest problems would be misplaced medical records, believe it or not.
One has to use medical records to develop, as they say, insurance claims and also for ongoing patient analysis and patient management. That was one of the major points and the major problems. As a result of that, we have decided to computerize the whole system of the health system and it is in place, not only with electronic medical records but also with financial records, management records, and it goes across the cadre of all recording systems that, at a moment’s notice, you could click on a computer and develop exactly and see exactly where you are at and what is happening.

The other thing about it would be staff attitude. Now, how do we legislate staff attitude? In our system we have always accepted somebody having a bad attitude, sometime doctors, sometime nurses, sometime attendants. We have accepted that and say, “it is the public system”. What we have been doing for the last two years is training our staff in what we call caring—caring for the caregivers and customer service training. And that is going quite well because recently a Member of the House approached and indicated that their family went into the Mount. Hope Hospital and it was a very good experience, from the customer service onwards. As they say, customer service entrance, the triage system, the doctors, nurses, as well as the radiologists, et cetera, and also the security guards.

So it is bearing fruit. Now we want to develop—now I “doh” want to just talk about hospital medicine. Hospital medicine is one of the medicine that we all see in the forefront of all our health problems and our health analyses. Hospital medicine is where people go when they are very sick. Hospital medicine is where people go because they have a heart attack, kidney failure, et cetera. What we are promoting this year is the development of the primary health care thrust where we are going to develop the health offices, the actual peripheral health clinics where we can push the system in a manner where they will look at wellness centres.

A wellness centre will be a centre where you can go in, check your blood pressure, check your basic parameters, check your weight, check your fat analysis and check your overall body condition. In other words, what it would be, is a preventative approach to medicine rather than a management approach to medicine. What we do right now in our country is a management approach to illnesses. What we are doing now is a preventative approach to illnesses. Now, it will take root and decrease our health budget in the next, let us say 15/20 years.

May I say that Cuba, Cuba has done this a long time ago, developed primary health care system and their health budget per capita is, let us say about US $300 to US $500, as compared to the United States, where they are now starting to do
that. Rather than a generation of, as they say, management oriented medicine, they have gone preventative medicine. The cost factor per capita in the United States is about $8,000 per patient on their health budget. So you see where preventative medicine versus, as they say, management medicine, it makes a difference.

The whole world—there is an epidemic that has hit the world that is now becoming known because of Trinidad and Tobago’s input. In 2009, when we had our CHOGM here it was developed, and also in 2011 it was brought up in the United Nations’ General Assembly where the chronic non-communicable diseases, the epidemic of non-communicable diseases is taking the forefront. HIV, tuberculosis, et cetera have now gone on the decline. What has risen its ugly head is lifestyle diseases.

Lifestyle diseases such as what, hypertension, diabetes, kidney failure and you look also at some cancers, as well as cardiac diseases. We are looking at that for this year coming up and we have had discussions with the RHAs to develop a plan where the wellness centres will be there to take your—know your numbers, know your status, they know exactly what you are going to do and counselling of healthy lifestyles. You see, Mr. President, our lifestyle changes—now it may be a moot point, people might say “why is he talking so much about it”, but the majority of the $5 billion health budget, approximately most of that goes into treating people who have complications of the non-communicable diseases, most of it.

If you look at the dialysis centres, the dialysis in this country is rising at an alarming rate. When I first went in to the Ministry, the older records showed the dialysis costing was about $5 million to $8 million. We have gone as much as $28 million to $35 million in one year, and we might, based on the graphical explanation, it is approximately $53 million we think we might spend by extrapolating it to that area. So that just goes to show “yuh”, Mr. President, where we are going with the complications of non-communicable diseases.

Kidney failure is a result of, one, abnormally high blood pressures over a long period of time, poorly controlled diabetes, two things, major problems of kidney—and they have inherent kidney diseases, stones, et cetera, that you cannot help. But the ones you can help, the majority and the largest amount, the largest incidence is of chronic non-communicable diseases.

So we are putting a plan in place where the wellness centres, the primary health care thrust, monitoring “yuh” blood pressure, monitoring “yuh” blood
sugar, even preventing it with diet and exercise, will prevent you from getting these illnesses 15 years down the road, especially for young people.

May I show also that we have started an analysis of childhood obesity. We have clinics in Mount Hope and we are going to start the clinics back in Port of Spain, et cetera. What we have found, a lot of young children are obese, I mean when you look at it, but what is much more frightening is that those little children, they have Type 2 diabetes which is the elderly onset diabetes, rather than the Type 1. And also, they have high cholesterol. They have adult onset cholesterol levels and that in itself, if you look at a five year old and a seven year old with, as they say, diabetes already, because of obesity and also high cholesterol levels, you are looking at somebody aged 15, 25, 30 with heart attacks, kidney failures and the ongoing problems. So that is the reason why we are really and truly pushing our primary health care thrust.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Minister, would just give way for a second please?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Sure.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Would you be able to tell us—because this is a serious issue—would you be able to give us some geographic and demographic distribution of childhood obesity, please?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Off the top of my head, along the more affluent areas, they tend to have a higher level of the childhood obesity, as compared to the country areas.

**Sen. Maharaj:** “Whey you living and ting”, Valsayn area.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** No. “Yuh” follow what I am saying. So that is where you would get it. What is happening also—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Maharaj:** “Not whey we living.”

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:**—is that in the rural areas, there is a level of childhood obesity but not so much as the town level, the urban levels.

**Hon. Senator:** Junk food.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** The reason behind that, and we have zeroed it down to, as “yuh” say, the processed food industry and the fast food industry.

**Hon. Senator:** Häagen-Daz.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** In the fast food industry, you have to spend—you have to get people addicted to the fast foods and children are the ones that are targeted. Once you target children, they are what you call the influencers. They influence, they also
make the decisions and you end up having the person who is the purchaser, which are the parents to make everything stay quiet. Now what we have found is that the natural flavours which are similar to MSGs and that group of drugs together with chemicals, the excitotoxins in the food itself, cause what they call the addiction to the food, it is called food addiction, and you get food addiction.

Once you get food addiction, nothing else tastes—you cannot get your taste. So the children are addicted to certain foods, but those foods are what we call the empty calorie foods. And when you have empty calorie high sugars and they metabolize very fast, causing what we call an insulin purge. Once you take the sugars in, the insulin rises and then what it does, it changes into lipid and fats. So when you look at the whole aspect of it, it not only happens in children. Because of that industry, you find that, if you look around, we have gone from an obesity rate, obesity incidence of approximately let us say 20 years ago about 15 per cent or less, let us say between the ages of 15 to about 35/40. That was about 10 per cent or less. We have now gone as high as almost about 40 per cent or 50 per cent when you look at the figures, obesity rates in that population.

Believe it or not, the older age groups, which are the, let us say, the 50 onwards—[Interruption]

**Hon. Senator:** You all then.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Well us then, basically, we have now, the obesity rate has dropped as compared to before. The children on the other hand went from an obesity incidence of about 10 per cent to now 55 per cent.

**Sen. Maharaj:** Buying KFC for the children.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** So you are pushing our children into that realm of disease. In fact, what you are doing, they say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, all right, and you are going to put them in an area of hell.

Now the reason I am spending some time on this—I could talk about hospitals, I could talk about Chancery Lane Complex, as Dr. Wheeler said, it is magnificent. But what is it doing? Children illnesses, maternal illnesses, that will take care of the maternity mortality rate hopefully as we go along. It is a very serious topic, but it is a topic that is always put on the side of the room because when somebody has a heart attack, we give the most amount of the movement—it is a big thing—somebody has a heart attack, you must get it done or else they will die, fine.
When we look at the majority of the population tending to be along that way in the future, as a Minister of Health, they say, “you are a Minister of Health, you are not a Minister of sickness” so you have to keep population healthy, and that is—[Interruption]

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Are we beginning to see—is there any evidence of paediatric cardiac events and ischaemic events? Are we beginning to see that in Trinidad yet?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Not yet. They are more confined to the genetic type of hole-in-the-heart syndrome and also the conduction diseases.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** I thank you.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Not so much of the cardiac but I would suspect 10 years from today, you will see that and when they are about 15, 18, 20, you will see that, definitely see that.

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** Thank you Minister.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** What I am saying is that we could talk about a lot of hospital building which we are going to do, because we have to take care of the population that have heart attacks, that have illnesses, diabetic feet, diabetic complications, et cetera. So that is where you see Chancery Lane Hospital is going to need more beds. We are going to need more beds. Point Fortin Hospital, more beds. Couva Children Hospital has about, I think, 180 beds for adults, more beds.

Why are we having more beds? When you dissect and analyze it in a total, what you are seeing, all these beds that we are building are for people with heart diseases, people with kidney diseases most likely, people with different diseases. Even pneumonia, let us take pneumonia, what is causing a lot of the pneumonia, some people, second-hand smoke. Smoking and also lack of exercise, lack of opening up “yuh” lungs, lack of running, lack of movement. And what is causing diabetic feet? Abnormally controlled diabetes or diabetes not properly controlled because you are not going to the health offices in time. There is no health office open for you to go to.

So instead of going to an Accident and Emergency system, you will tell yourself “buh ah have to wait too long”. So that is one of the complaints, too long waiting times. Why is the waiting time so long? The waiting times are long because people with non-emergent illnesses go to the Accident and Emergency area and say “I am supposed to be seen”, which is their right, but they are
supposed to be seen in a health office setting so this is why I am pushing the health office movement. So it would take the load off the Accident and Emergency. So what they will see there will be accident and emergency patients, which are very ill patients who need to be seen right away. Mind you, I am not saying the patients who go there do not need to be seen, but the area and the place they need to be seen.

So we started to discuss this morning about opening what they call the GP clinics. St. Joseph Health Centre has one and it is working quite well. When somebody has a minor illness, they go to the GP clinic between 8.00 and let us say 10.00 in the night, they are seen and discharged. Those who are very sick go to the A&E, but other areas need it and I think Tobago will have to develop that approach.

So in an overall concept what you are looking at, you are looking at a health sector that is delivering a care service, a care service in a manner that is going to prevent illnesses and take care of the other illnesses, such as the major illnesses—when you look and you break it down—cancer of the breast, cancer of the cervix, cancer of the prostate, those cancers, and we come on to what we are doing, the oncology centre.

3.20 p.m.

The oncology centre is being, as they say, it has started to be built. They are cleaning the grounds. They are doing what they are supposed to. It has been given to a contractor called Bouygues, after tender processes. We are going to have what they call a state-of-the-art centre. As Dr. Wheeler indicated—[Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: Just before you go into detail on the oncology centre, with respect to the other hospitals, more hospitals are being built, have you identified a plan to staff it with specialists, because that is a little problem we are having now? The other thing is, the clinic you mentioned about dealing with childhood obesity, is that something that is going to start, or is that something that has already started? Because I am not quite sure that those clinics are actually functioning right now.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We have clinics in the paediatric—in the hospital in Mount Hope. There are clinics there that are functioning. We have close to about 300 children there right now but we want to expand it out.

Sen. Dr. Edwards: Sorry to interrupt. Actually, that clinic is not functional. We refer children to the General Medicine Clinic. The clinic started, it was going well, then they had some issues in terms of even the dietitians who the family would have to go to and as such, the clinic is actually not functional at this time.
**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Thanks a lot, because the last time I spoke to Dr. Fernandez, she said they were having the clinics going on and—but she—[Interruption]

**Sen. Dr. Edwards:** It started and it was going well.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** What I did, I brought Dr. Fernandez into the Ministry to develop those clinics. There was a doctor who was pioneering those clinics in Mount Hope and we had about 300 obese children dealing with, in fact, to the point that we had, as we say, childhood obesity camps over the summer. We had about 10 of those camps around the country. But she was brought to the Ministry so she could develop the paediatric obesity system camps, as I say, throughout the country and sort of, as they say, pioneer the ones that she did. So, hopefully I would look at it to see what is happening there. But that is the thrust we are going to do with the thing, the obesity clinics.

The specialists: now, you would know that it is difficult to get a specialist around from abroad, because they are very few and far between. What we are doing, I am doing with the University of the West Indies, is trying to do a system with them where we could develop our young doctors to go into the system. They do not have to really and truly be in a programme such as sign up for a programme and be in a programme but they get the different training under recognized specialists, whether it be in the public or private sector and the University of the West Indies—I am trying to do a proposal with them—they would develop an exam such as how we know it was done to us in the University of Edinburgh, the University of London, et cetera, where they could put the exam together and they would be able to allow the doctors to write the exam. Of course, with a very high failure rate and low pass rate, to develop excellence, yes.

In doing that, rather than what happens now, to get a specialist out to the University of the West Indies, they have to go through the whole programme where people with MRCS 1, MRCS 2 or FR or whatever it may be, they cannot write the exam. They might be given DM 1, but hardly anything else in the first part. What I am hoping to do is that you can enter the system, how they do it in England, with the training with a logbook, et cetera, to show exactly you have done the work under a recognized consultant. So we could get more specialists, as they say, certified, as a result of—rather than trying to import specialists from abroad.

What I am also doing, young doctors who have their first degree or let us say their first specialty degree and would like to go into super-specialist status, I am working with the Minister of Public Administration to identify what areas are really needed, so we are going to send people abroad for fellowships into Canada, the United States and England.
We are also, at the same time, working with the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the Royal Society of Medicine in England, to develop—in other words, for the Ministry of Health to buy places in various universities, recommended by those societies, because anybody would give you a place but hardly it might not be accredited; accredited places, so we could send our doctors and nurses, whoever it may be, into those specialty areas. So that is what we are looking at.

For the nursing part of it, we have opened the El Dorado camp for—there is a shortage of about 3,000 nurses we had in the manpower plan and that is going to take care of the nursing shortage, to some extent. The specialized nurses, University of the West Indies, together with COSTAATT, et cetera, will be doing the post-basic nurses, the specialty nurses, the intensive care nurses, the cardiac nurses. We will be taking care of that.


Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Sure.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Thank you hon. Minister, and may I compliment you warmly on a very excellent contribution today. [Desk thumping] Hon. Minister, two things that I wonder if you would have an opportunity to consider responding on. One is that we have a number of foreign doctors that are locally based in Trinidad and have been part of the system for a number of years in the public health care system and who have been knocking at the door of trying to attain practice in a broader sense, in Trinidad and Tobago. So good enough to practise in the public health care system, but not good enough in the practice system, by way of the regulatory approach that MPATT has taken towards it. I am not sure if the Minister may have a position on that in trying to level the playing field somewhat.

And then the second one, which is an issue I hope that you can address, there are entities in Trinidad and Tobago where terminal patients still are literally wrestling for proper medication to assist them in dying, literally; the pain control medication and the FDA limitations that we have in Trinidad. Has the Minister been able to make any progress on that latter ground? I know that is a ground that we all share is in need of urgent attention.

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: Yeah, thanks. I just want to come back to the plan for specialist certification. It is just that I know it is compromised to what the ideal is. The danger with just having someone enter the system and filling a logbook and doing an exam is that the quality of the product would be less than what is ideal and I do not know that it would really be best to have new buildings with new equipment and the patients to be managed by doctors who are not qualified in keeping with the standard of those buildings. That is just my caution with that.
The other thing, while you answered the question of the nurses, there was
discussion, a couple years ago, about nurse practitioner. I do not know if this is
something that you plan to pursue in the near future. Thanks.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: First thing, let me just go with the first one, the specialist
thing, the way of training specialists is the same way I was trained. We did our
specialty training in Trinidad. We did everything in Trinidad. It was based on a,
as I say, requirement by the Fellowship Royal College of Central Edinburgh. We
had to do everything in Trinidad. We went up to London. We wrote the exams
and we came back. The pass rate was less than 10 per cent. We had about 800
people and less than 80 of us passed. So that is what I am saying, specialty status
was the same thing. We did our training here. We went up to England on a course.

The course may have taught you something about the English system but our
training was done in Trinidad, based on recommendations and requirements from
London and we did it like that. We went up to London, did our exams and, of
course, the failure: parts one, two and three, depends on where you were. By the
time you finished the exam, it was less than 5 per cent pass.

What I am saying, that system created us. Then we came back to Trinidad and
worked under our consultants who were, as you say, consultants from long, and
developed our own style and systems and here we are today. So what I am saying
to you is that it can work, because if I go to work, if I go to wait to develop
specialists or get specialists from abroad, we will always be running on a
treadmill, reaching absolutely nowhere.

The system is going to be made in a manner where you are going to now
stimulate research and development; you are going to stimulate paper writing.
You are going to stimulate a lot more academia than what occurs now, because, at
the end of the day, if you do not publish your papers in peer review journals, you
may not be ready. You may not be allowed to sit an exam.

Once the criteria has been established and the requirements are necessary, that
system on home ground training, with elective training abroad, with the Internet
service these days, I do laparoscopic surgery and see laparoscopic surgery from
France. I could look at it and I could go through the Web search and I see it—new
techniques. It is not like what it was long ago. So, I would like you to think a little
more along those lines, rather than saying initially because we do not have the
substrate here we would not get to be as good as. But I am a person who believes
we have the substrate. In fact, our surgeons here—now I am talking surgery and
gynaecology—are much better than some surgeons abroad because they do not touch people, because there are too many of them. We, at least, operate on people and our techniques tend to be honed in better.

So, I would like to try that system to develop a specialist cadre because we need them in this country and the university is looking at it. They are going to critique it, of course, and see whether it will go. We could try it as a pilot run. I just hope that will work, to some extent. But also, remember I am backing it with the fellowship training. You are going to get people going with fellowship training abroad, which the Government is going to pay for and I may say in this honourable Senate, I hope they come back because we pay a lot of money for specialists and most of them stay. So, I am just hoping that we find a system to bring them back to Trinidad.

As far as the nurse practitioner, I will develop that now, we will be coming with amendments to the Nurses and Midwives Registration Act. Right now I am in the final phase of—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: Minister.

Sen. Dr. Edwards: Minister, I wanted to ask: Is it not easier, for example the University of the West Indies has the DM programmes for a couple specialties, as opposed to sending people abroad, not being sure if they will come back, is it not easier to develop these DM programmes where the spaces or the lots in the programme, the seats in the programme, are not RHA positions, so that people can move into these positions and move out?

For example, if I join the DM programme, as opposed to being an RHA employee and probably in a programme for five years that takes four, or six years that take four, as a Ministry personnel—because that is who is hiring me now, I am moving forward and as I move up from first year to second year, someone else can then take that spot? Because I think that is one of the problems the DM candidates have actually. Because they are RHA employees, sometimes their boss transfers them into departments that have nothing to do with the specialty training that they are getting, so that it takes them a longer period of time to actually finish those programmes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: I have looked at that and exactly what Prof. Ramsawak and myself and Clement Sankat, we are looking at that. So exactly what you say is being done, it is going to cost about $109 million per year, but this is what I am trying—you see, working on the budget cost versus exactly what we are getting out of it.
In other words, I am also going to let every single hospital in the country become a teaching hospital and every single consultant be linked to the University of the West Indies and they will become either a professor, or an associate professor. Because we have people in the private sector who are excellent surgeons but are not teaching. I am going to bring them in the teaching programmes, a lot of them who I know personally, and they can link with the University of the West Indies and the same DM students can go there to learn, not just in the RHAs. All right? And we are going to do the system when one moves, the other moves like that, so we are going to always have that run. Okay? So that is being taken care of.

I am going to yours now. The Nurses and Midwives Registration Act, I am hoping to bring it to Parliament soon. It is going to address nurses and their examinations. We are going to have a cadre of nurses called the nurse intern. The nurse intern would be the ones who will, as they leave nursing school, between that time and writing their exam, become RN. They could enter the system and work as a nurse intern, like how we have interns and they will write the exam. There is a system for the exam writing, based on Caricom.

Two, the nurse practitioner is in that legislation and we are going to develop the nurse practitioner programme. I am glad you said that. We could look at Jamaica. So I would be bringing some “Jamaica people” across here to assist us with the development of it. So the nurse practitioner is there also. I had to sell the two things one time. They bought the nurse practitioner and I get the exam out.

**Sen. Dr. Wheeler:** The Medical Board Act with CME.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** The Medical Board Act, yes. I think that has been passed already, you know. The Medical Board Act, yes it has, and specialist register. They both came together and we have to now put that in place, through the medical board and the Ministry.

**Sen. Dr. Wheeler:** Do you know the time frame for that?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** “Eh?”

**Sen. Dr. Wheeler:** The time frame?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** It should have been done already. But I would look at it again. Looking at the contribution, I had forgotten about it. But I would look at it again. I thought it was happening.

Foreign doctors, Sen. Al-Rawi; the foreign doctors who come to Trinidad and Tobago, okay, they work in the public health care system because when I was the Vice-President of the medical board, I created that to make sure they stay there.
So they always get temporary registration, vying for full registration. Right? When they write the CAMC exam—which some of them do not want to write, the CMC exam, which is the Caribbean exam, they will then be entitled to full registration. The CAMC exam—okay?—is an exam for the region. If they do not want to write that exam, right, they are not going to get full registration. Once they write the exam, they will get full registration or they write the US LME 1, 2 and 3 or they write the PLAB, I think it is the PLAB—when you write that then you will get full registration. But you cannot come to the country, “doh” write any exams, we offer you a system this side. So I started off with a three-year programme while you write the exam. Some have been here for six years or more or longer and have not written the exam.

Now, I am in the process of working with the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago to give an exam similar to that of the Canadian qualifying exam. So the medical board will put that exam in place, and hopefully when they write that, they could be entitled to full registration. Once you have full registration, then you can enter the external market; that is one.

Palliative care patients: we were having a lot of problems with food and drugs. We have—as they say looked to the legislation and we have done a lot of changes to the legislation, to allow entry of those drugs on a faster level. Right now the first part is before Cabinet. We have what they call the quick-win system, where drugs that are being registered abroad in a recognized area, will now be straight in registration here. Only if there is a problem, we will pull it and as you say, monitor and regulate it. So that will take care of that.

**Sen. Dr. Wheeler:** [Inaudible]—bypassing.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** No, not bypassing it will be going into—the registration will not have to go through the whole system again. Once it is recognized in a country that has a good FDA approval system, it will go straight in. [Crosstalk] So that is being changed as we speak.

Dr. Wheeler, I noticed you wrote a little bit about electronic medical records and audit systems, which is what we are putting in place. We are putting audit systems, the electronic medical record system, the eHealth System, believe it or not is going to be like an audit system. You are going to be able to tell at a glance what is happening, how long somebody took to get—between, as you say, assessment to investigation to management. You will be able to click and see which doctor did it, how many patients did that doctor do, how many operations that doctor did, how many patients in the clinic that doctor did.
You follow what I am saying? You will be able to basically micromanage exactly the whole audit system. Also, what we are doing is trying to produce a system of audits to see deaths, mortality, and morbidity, exactly what is happening, who is happening, and exactly where it is happening, so we could put systems in place to decrease the level of that type of negative medical practice.

**Sen. Dr. Wheeler:** It is just that my concern with it is that, the training for the doctors in particular that are going to be entering the information, because the same way part of the reason for having CME is to have doctors updated, and there are some doctors who have not done any updates since they qualified 30/40 years ago. Likewise, there are some currently right now who cannot even use a computer. So I know that there is going to be some resistance, because when it is implemented, it will actually benefit the health sector also. I was just concerned about the required training to bring these individuals up to par so they would not be a hindrance to the implementation.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Those who do not have the training, we will offer training; if they do not take the training, we will have people who are trained to assist them, but the system has to continue and it has to work. From what I understood this morning, that has been going around since 1994, and we intend to get it done. As you say, it must be delivered because it is a system that will do two things. One, it will prevent and it will assess audit systems and malpractice. I did not want to use the word malpractice, medical negligence. Also, it will keep cost down and I am going to the cost factor of it. Right now, we need a system that you could monitor and regulate to keep cost down. We pay approximately $600,000 when you look at it, $600 million sorry, in pharmaceuticals. Out of that, $300 million is duplicated pharmaceuticals, duplicated.

So putting a system in place where you can monitor where things happen, and prevent it from being abused, we could save in the CDAP and the pharmaceutical area $300 million to be spent elsewhere. So the audit system, the electronic medical record system, the card system, all will be located—fixed into one area, one card system. So by doing that, we will be able to work on a system where accountability and transparency will be at the forefront of everything else.

So that is why utilization of technology to develop normal processes is very important. Who does not want to get on board, as everything else, is what they call a disruptive innovation, you get out, simple. There was one time mom-and-pop stores—right?—supermarkets take over.

**Hon. Senator:** Creative disruption.
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Right. It is disruptive innovation, “yuh say”?

Hon. Senator: Creative disruption.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Creative disruption. The Internet, the biggest disrupter of all, right now Barnes & Noble I like to go to, closing down. Why? Because books are streamed online for the Kindle, they have to leave, if they cannot, you know—Amazon has gone to the Kindle.

So what I am saying here is that if somebody decides they are not going to learn to use their iPad, or their computer, or their systems, or their card reader, eventually the systems will bypass them and they will drop out on their own. So I would suggest that whoever you are speaking about, learn, take a computer course or something.

Now, you spoke about the need for the gynae-oncologist. We have as you say two in San Fernando. We have one I think in—[Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: One in south.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—one in south, yes, something like that, “yeah”. It is going to the NRC, but there is another girl, she has gone to south, okay. I have maintained, now, gynaec-oncology is something that gynaecologists could go to. They could do it. We will be—if it is at all necessary, we will have the gynaecologists to go on a fellowship, learn the procedures under our accredited programmes, or if they get their own programme, do it, and utilize my good friend, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Cabinet, sometimes he gives me an evil eye when “ah bring dem”, but I tend to bring these notes and say: well, you know, they need the fellowship training and whatever, and he allows it to go through, especially when the Minister of Public Administration say that there is a need.

So I am thinking that if we need—if Tobago needs a gynae-oncologist, or an ungynaecologist or, other medico, we could use that system and we could send people on a fellowship training course, United States or England. And I see the Minister of Finance and the Economy has smiled, so that means, yes. [Laughter]

Hon. Senator: Approved. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: Will that be additional funding to take care of that?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Well, I usually use it out of the budget for the Ministry of Health, the training, yeah. If I “doh” have any money, I just beg a little bit and we get it. Is that not so, Minister of Finance and the Economy? Yeah.
Sen. Howai: No comment. [Laughter]

Sen. Deyalsingh: “He give yuh de evil eye.”

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Okay. So really and truly, you spoke a little bit about herbal practitioners, Dr. Wheeler. That is a problem. And I have been fighting with that for the longest while, but when you have major radio stations promoting—right?—individuals who say that “yuh” do not need medication or anything for cancer of the breast, leave it and herbs will draw it out, and I see you mentioned it. You mentioned it in your debate. I have sent those individuals to the DPP through the system. My legal person has done that. We are waiting to see exactly what is the outcome of that. In the meantime, what I am also doing, the professions related to medicine, I am using that legislation to try to bring them to heel by putting what they called regulatory systems and regulatory practices, trying to use the legislation to “kinda” fast-forward this way. So hopefully I will be able to get through with that.

In fact, we had a discussion this morning, the professions related to medicine and see if we could bring the herbal practitioners, the massage therapists, anything that is related, the complementary medicine, et cetera, to develop that. Where the herbal, the major alternative medicine, complementary medicine has—that is a big thing now; external.

The AYUSH people from India are helping with the legislation to actually deal with the alternative—when I say herbal, I mean—I do not want to use the herbal in that sense, the AYUSH type of medicine, which is the Ayurvedic medicine, as well as the homeopathic medicine. That is a big—as they say medical area in their own right.

The other thing I am also looking at, in the United States there is something called the Doctor of Osteopathy. Osteopaths are trained in the same way as general doctors, medical doctors, but because they are DO, people do not recognize them in this country as doctors. So we are also looking at the legislation to change the system so we could get the Doctor of Osteopathy—because they practice as doctors in the United States—in Trinidad also.

So the herbal medicine is being worked on, but it is a bit slow.

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: And just to add podiatrists.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Podiatrists would be under professions related to medicine. Also, I am glad you mentioned that. I am also working with some people who do orthotics, specialists in orthotics and prosthesis to do what we call preventative clinics for diabetic feet and people with abnormal postures. That is going to be
developed very soon in the north/west and south/west regions as well as the eastern region. These clinics, people can go to these clinics to be, one, fitted with prosthesis because of amputations, and also to be assessed on their feet and their limb structure and be given proper orthotic shoes. So we will decrease the incidence of amputations as a result of poorly fitted shoes, and poorly fitting—as you say sandals, et cetera, that causes these neuropathic ulcers. So that is going to be—those who have loss of limb will be given prosthesis as a result of it. There is also—[Interruption]

**Mr. President:** The speaking time of the Minister of Health has expired.

*Motion made:* That the hon. Minister’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. T. Deyalsingh]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. President:** Minister of Health.

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** I thank the Minister for allowing me to interrupt [Laughter] despite the plea by Sen. Deyalsingh. Is the Minister saying that there is nothing in the health regulations or any law that can immediately stop this practice of malpractice of bush medicine, because this is causing a very serious problem where people who are desperate pay through their noses for anything, for promises such as cure for diabetes, immediate cures for heart diseases, immediate cures for cancer and some catch-all medicines that can solve everything? Is there nothing in your rule book or legislative book that can stop that immediately as has happened in Barbados, where places have been shut down?

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** All right. There is nothing—thank you very much for extending my time. I appreciate it very much, Sen. Deyalsingh and the Senate, thank you very much.

What you indicated there, there are two sides to that. One, the bush medicine and also the advertisement of it. Right? Preparation of bush medicine, there is nothing wrong in selling it if it is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago, and has been practised over years. Everybody takes bush medicine they say in Trinidad and it is an indigenous thing to Trinidad and Tobago. So, therefore, it is not really regulated by the FDA, our Food and Drugs. However, utilizing false advertising claims, there are laws against it. So that is the route we are going, and that is the Ministry of Legal Affairs. I think there is the—I do not know the actual law, but there is an advertisement law, that we use that, falsely advertising, but that is what is before the DPP now.
Sen. Drayton: If I may? The Standards Authority controls that, and the Standards Authority according to the law has the power to shut down that advertising.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Thank you very much, Sen. Drayton, for that. Well, we are working on it, and we have done that already utilizing the advertising claims more so than the actual bush medicine thing itself. [Crosstalk]

What—it was before, so we cannot attack a bush medicine practice, but we could attack the advertising claims as we say, and that is how we—somebody cannot say that you take this substance, do not go to your doctors, it is what they call complementary to medicine. It is not taking over from medicine, and as a result of it, that is where advertising part of it—where we can deal with it.

I just wanted to say that right now we have what we call the National Eye Study of Trinidad and Tobago. This National Eye Study is going to be looking throughout Trinidad and Tobago, looking at eye diseases.

3.50 p.m.

We looked at, as I said, diabetics’ feet problems and the orthotics and prostheses. The National Eye Study: we are going to look at the eyes, the retinals, et cetera. In Trinidad and Tobago, it has never been done before and it is being put in place by a group from Britain and is ongoing as we speak.

What we are finding is that there are a lot of people with retinal problems which now need correcting and it has now spawned on to something called the digital retinopathies and looking at the digitization, looking at the retina. San Fernando is doing it right now and I hope to do it throughout the country. In other words, what that will do is it will be screening for early disorders of the retina and prevent the whole amount of vitreoretinal surgeries that are occurring as a result of diabetes—so another preventative movement for the health care.

If you notice, I have not said a word yet about the hospitals. I have been talking about service. That is why I said service onwards. Another service we are looking at—I have found out today that there are approximately 8,000 people who need dental visits in Eric Williams—that is the catchment. We are looking at dental treatment to the country utilizing the primary health care system, putting up dental—they are supposed to have it, but it has not been functioning—so we are looking at putting the dental treatment system in the primary health care so, as a result of that, we will be able to decrease that load of the 8,500 people looking for dental treatment. Because, believe it or not, if you do not have good teeth, you “cyar” eat properly. If you cannot eat properly, you eat foods that you can eat properly, which are usually high caloric foods, et cetera, and the high sugar foods because you have to get your sustenance.
We see it as a form of developing our attack on the NCB system. It goes back to that—proper diet, proper eating, proper lifestyle, proper systems—we will be able to—the dental part of it will be for that. A lot of children with teeth problems, a lot of elderly people with teeth problems, but they cannot afford the dental treatment, so that is what we are looking at. So prevention, again.

Service-oriented medicine and preventing: I have utilized that approach because when I went into the Ministry in the first part, you were hit with the hospitals. You were hit with buildings, staffing, et cetera, as you said. What I tried to do was to bring it into its simplest form. What is the simplest way to do this thing? What is the thing that people need the most? People need service.

The service is going to be in such a manner and by breaking into service-oriented medicine, and doing some little research as they say at the health office level, we were able to “cone” in exactly to what people want.

We are also going to start the eye banking in Mount Hope for corneal transplants. We have done close to 101 kidney transplants because two years ago, when I came in, we had an arrangement with the Government of Spain. They sent down some specialists here for kidney transplants and also we sent up a lot of our young doctors to do three-month stints in Spain and they were able—[Interruption] Yeah Repsol, through Repsol—thanks to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. Repsol did it, together with the Government of Spain. So we have now been able to have an organ transplant system going. Mount Hope will be doing the eye banking so we have corneal transplants going there too. So that is one part of it.

I also want to mention that our rehabilitation system—the rehabilitation of people with strokes or with other, as you say, rehabilitation needs, St. James, the National Radiology Centre—radiotherapy centre—in the St. James Infirmary, there is a large area that is state-of-the-art rehabilitation. Ryan Rampersad went there. He is now basically recovering much more after his unfortunate problems in Port of Spain. Last thing I heard, he is actually moving his limbs and sitting up, which I think is something very, very good. [Interruption] [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Thank God.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We have been paying close to—a million-odd dollars for six months of rehabilitation in Colombia for some people. That is going to stop because you can now go to St. James. So our system is happening.
I am also in the process—now when you have a CT scan and an MRI in one hospital and everybody has to use it, of course you will get a backlog because you have the whole country going to one area. We are going to put what they call diagnostic centres in north, south, central and eastern where you will have just diagnostic services—CT scans, MRIs, ultrasounds, lab testing—in one spot. That will be for external patients. It will have with it what they call the PACA System and the Telemedicine System where we could beam centrally as well as externally for reports. That will take care of that backlog.

We are also developing some health offices—I “doh” want to use the words “health office”, let us say district health facilities such as one in Chaguaramas, one in Siparia, one in Toco/Sangre Grande, so different areas you are choosing. In those health facilities, there will be, believe it or not, CT scans, MRIs, pharmaceutics, everything in that one spot. We have discussed it already today and that is going to be moving forward to pushing the system out of the central area, which is hospital.

I am also—in fact, I mentioned in the Lower House where the military in Chaguaramas and in Cedros, I am going to put what they call small military hospitals—one in Chaguaramas; we have the land already from CDA—and one in Cedros; and also put with it, for the coast guard to run and develop, a sea ambulance system.

Two nights ago, they had—in fact not two nights ago, Monday night, they had—I forget the name of it—a wet fête in Mobs and guess what? They had more than 10,000 people there. You could imagine, if you had a mishap there, just one or two? There is no hospital; you cannot get through; the place is clogged; you need to use the sea to move it. And what tends to happen if something happens in the outside rigs? People are just transported to a centre. There is no treatment and transport. What you need is treat, stabilize and then transport because you notice that you hear a lot of things. They were brought dead on arrival. That is because they were transported sick to the arrival. So we are going to deal with that system.

**Sen. Dr. Mahabir:** Sorry to interrupt Minister, I know your time is short, but it is a question I think I had to pose to you because I think it is very critical for the public interest. I did not get it very clear from you as to when the wellness centres will become operational, and I am also enquiring of you whether in fact, once they become operational, you are going to have a massive public education exercise with respect to healthy lifestyles, preventative medicine and so forth for the population as a whole. Thank you.
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Dr. Mahabir, that is ongoing as we speak. The population as you say, programme, the campaigning—that is why we call it the Fight-the-Fat Programme, to give it some visuals. That is the preventative programme telling them exactly, know your numbers; know exactly what you have to do; watch your healthy lifestyle; watch how much vegetables you are supposed to eat. In fact, this morning, in the executive meeting, I said, “We have to be more visual.” It is being done over the last two years. It has to be more out there. It is being done. The campaign is on and everything is occurring. [ Interruption]

Sen. Mohammed: “The price of vegetable cheaper now.”

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: “The price of vegetable cheaper.” Now that is one part of it.

The wellness centres are very easy to start. All you need to do is to make them aware of it. It is just a matter of having the staff there to do it. We are going to start promoting that in the larger health offices so people could go there and get their system checked.

Someone wrote in on my Facebook page and said, “We only go there when you sick; nobody wants to take my pressure to check it. Only if yuh sick and you go they take yuh pressure.” And that made us think that, “Wait a minute, the guy is right.” We need to do it in such a different manner that you can go there to check your pressure, to check your sugar, to check everything else to make sure you are healthy. So that is how we came about.

The Chaguanas District Health Facility that we are going to put in Chaguanas, I asked them to put a gym on to it, a state-of-the-art gym because it is going to be large, about nine acres of land, and get the private sector to run that gym. Also, we are going to do it with all the different health offices as we speak.

So it is going to be wellness thrust. Before it used to be management thrust, kidney dialysis thrust—when you heard somebody speak long ago, it would be how many cardiac programmes you are doing; how many angiograms you are doing; how many stents you are doing. I want to move away from that and go into a preventative mode that we start to exercise more; we start to eat proper; we start to move proper; we stop eating too much, as they say, the processed foods and the fast foods; take care of your children; take care of yourself and as a result of that, 15 years down the road, we will not be here, but guess what? The health budget will go right down to achieve that level.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Minister, you are saying the wellness centres are already established and running. It is just that we do not know about them?
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: It will be easy to start. I am going to start it off because all you need is the building that we have, and also the policy to do it. You do not need a structure to do it, just the policy to do it. So that is going to be starting soon, based by policy direction.

Time is running out, but I think the other hospitals we spoke—[Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Edwards: Minister, sorry, just to go back a bit, I just want to ask you one question. [Interruption]

Hon. Senator: They are enjoying having you.

Sen. Dr. Edwards: You were talking about the diagnostic centres. I know, for example, Eric Williams has PACS, Sangre Grande also has PACS, but when a patient comes from Sangre Grande to Eric Williams, they either come with the forms or with CDs. Is there any way to link all the PACS system?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: That is why I said the teleradiology—the telemedicine part of it. The PACS term is the archiving system. You have an archiving system, but you have no way to send it out. In fact, pathology has a system, but nowhere to send it out. The teleradiology is what is going to send it out. That is the system that is going to use that and send it out. So that is what we are putting in place. In fact, I told them that every time they do a radiology thing or a pathology thing, make sure that you have your telemedicine on to it.

So if somebody sends from Sangre Grande and there is no radiologist in Sangre Grande, they could use the telemedicine to send it to a radiologist even on his cell phone. He reads it, types it in and says, “Okay, nothing wrong, do not send him down.” That is the level we are going to go at.

The hospitals, well Chancery Lane we spoke about. Arima Hospital is up and coming. That is coming soon.

Let me deal with Tobago a little bit as you are here. Tobago: we are putting the MRI; in fact, the tenders are closed. I understand there is only one bidder for the MRI and the catheterization lab, but they still have to go through evaluation to see if they are ready and everything else. That has to go through and, hopefully, that will be done soon since there are not many bidders as they say.

That will be done, so Tobago will be getting its MRI, as I promised, and also its catheterization lab. I am also thinking of putting on to it a radiotherapy linear accelerator unit.

Hon. Senator: Really?
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yes. I think it is important that Tobago has its own. I have asked Secretary Duke to look for a place on the hospital compound to see where we can put it. I want to put that on.

The old hospital, we had earmarked to be what they call a rehabilitation centre for addicts. I think that is still in keeping, so I will have to go across to take a look and see. I understand since they moved across it is not being taken care of. I will just have to have some discussions with the Secretary and see exactly how—Tobago—Delmon Baker, I want somebody to at least look at it.

There are still certain aspects of that hospital being used for certain things. I cannot remember what it was.

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: Building separate buildings for oncology—[Inaudible]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Something is being used, yes. Oncology and something else, but I think it is very important for rehabilitation exercise. Now, NADAPP—the Prime Minister has put NADAPP under the Ministry of Health so we can now combine the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme, together with the psychiatric system, and bring it together as one system. So we will develop that as we go along.

Mr. President: You have two more minutes. You have two more minutes, Dr. Khan—four minutes.

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: One last thing as—Princess Elizabeth Hospital, I was just asked if any help is going to be provided.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yes, Princess Elizabeth Hospital, they have their equipment. They have the spinal equipment being done and we are also going to put in an elevator because the Rotary Club of Port of Spain, they are going to put a dental unit upstairs for those patients so we are going to take care of the elevator. What else do you want to find out?

Sen. Dr. Wheeler: Flooding, the problem with flooding; flooding, major problem with flooding.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: They do not want to move, so what we are doing is putting everything upstairs and Minister Ganga Singh is promising me that flooding will be a thing of the past in Port of Spain.

Mr. President, thank you very much. It was a pleasure to come to this House and I hope to God that we—[Desk thumping]. Thank you.
Mr. President: Before I call on Sen. Prescott, I did want to congratulate the Minister of Communications on his maiden contribution here this afternoon. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Prescott.

4.05 p.m.

Sen. Elton Prescott SC: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity to contribute to the debate on a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2014. Mine is going to be a very brief intervention, sparked mainly by some of what I had heard today. But first, I join the chorus of those who have offered congratulations to Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai on his budget presentation.

I, too, felt that it extended some hope to the citizenry and, of course, the answer for all of us would be in the implementation of it and, therefore, we look forward to reaping the benefits of whatever the Government has proposed in the year 2013; the financial year 2013/2014.

There is an area that I have a peculiar interest in, and so without detracting from my compliments, I am offering this complementarily rather, to what has been said so far. Early this morning, Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj spoke on agriculture and lamented that no one had mentioned the word except, of course, for Sen. Subhas Ramkhelawan, and I am still struggling with a way of avoiding speaking about agriculture if I want to speak about my pet topic, which is Toco.

I have made it my business every year since I have been here to say that I come from Toco. If only because people may tend to think that nobody comes from there, but we do. I make it my business to say today that it remains a rural community, and before the word is obliterated from the national lexicon as has been proposed by one who spoke before me I repeat, Toco remains rural. It has been rural for at least 60 years that I know of, and the chances are that unless someone speaks on behalf of Toco, it will continue to be so for quite some time.

We do not want it to be urban. We do not want to be exposed to the fast foods and the processed foods naturally. I suspect that we are not on anybody’s national obesity scale or if we are, we are probably on one of the extreme ends, but there are some things that we would very much like to see. And so I observed from reading in the PSIP some of the references to things that are clearly going to be of benefit to the people of Toco. If you will permit me, I would just bring attention to one of them.
At paragraph 48 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2014*, under the caption “Agricultural Land Management” it says:

“Through the Food Basket Programme, the Ministry continued to rehabilitate agricultural access roads to allow farmers to have ease of access to sixty-nine (69) major food basket areas in Trinidad.”

Now, there is a “Box 1” next to that article and it says in reference to “Box 1” that an investment of $40 million was spent for the activities under the programme in 2013 resulting in 20 kilometres of road being created.

I would have said it anyway if it were not set out here in the document, but Toco or the roads on the way to Toco are not included. And, Mr. President, of late—and I refer to the last two years or so—there has been an extensive amount of damage to the roads going to Toco. I go there maybe once a fortnight, and I am quite certain that it has to do with the topography, but it is a difficult topography but it remains part of the means by which our own people can go for some recreation without having to go to Miami or Caracas as the case may be. People go up there because it is a nice place to visit. Even if it is only one day in the week or one day in the month or on public holidays as the case may be, but the road has deteriorated rapidly over the last two, maybe three years.

And I know these days when you speak of something happening within the last three years, some people’s minds run to, I am “making a political statement”, but I am making a factual statement. It has nothing to do with the birth or introduction of a new Government in 2010. The roads have been deteriorating.

**Sen. Maharaj**: Thank you very much, Sen. Prescott, for giving way. The agricultural access roads are just that—to repair and maintain agricultural access roads. So those specific roads in the Toco area—unless they are so designated as agricultural access roads—they would be otherwise taken up by the new Ministry of Local Government or the regional corporation as the case may be. If it is, indeed, an access road it would be on our listing because the Ministry sets out criteria in which roads are categorized and prioritized in order that the roads that affect the most amount of farmers, as well as the production ranking, will be treated with greater priority. I believe the figure you said was 28 kilometres, you cited from the document? Twenty? That I believe is an error. The proper figure is 38.07 kilometres. These are the most accurate figures for the IDF funding of $40 million. Thank you.

**Sen. E. Prescott SC**: The Minister of Finance and the Economy is here, so I trust he would note the correction. Thank you very much. But it leads me to the point—thank you very much Minister—I started there mindful of the fact that what benefits most from having the major roads attended to and maintained are the
roads which the farmers use. Toco is not only rural, it is agricultural. In fact, the two words may be synonyms. We use the access roads to get to our plantations to do the work and to bring the produce out, and when the produce gets out then we use the main roads to get it into the marketing centres, the commercial centres.

The access roads in Toco need some attention and if it is—I gather the Minister is saying that this is an issue for local government then I am pleased to address those who are responsible for it. There must be some impetus to address the access roads in the Toco area. Include it in your list of access roads which are being dealt with. If the main roads are the concern of the Minister of Agriculture and the access roads are the concerns of another Ministry, then I can only use this platform to say, “Who wears the cap, please get on with the job of putting the access roads back in order.”

There is a councillor in the Sangre Grande/Toco area that everybody by now knows—I would not call his name—[Interruption]


Sen. E. Prescott SC:—but all one has to do is to approach him. He is indefatigable. It appears to me that when he is offering service he is unbiased, and so one does not have to ask which party he represents—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: He is Toco.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Get in touch with him. Find out what is needed, and he will have the list at his fingertips ready to assist you. Very affable, you will find no difficulty in dealing with him at all. Get the work done, and people in Toco will feel that they are being represented somewhere in corridors of power by somebody. I do not know who speaks for them now, but some special attention needs to be paid to what is going on there before we cease to use the word “rural” in this country and replace it by something else.

The drainage also is an issue. Once again because we are at the foothills of the mountains there—the north coast—the flow of water onto the roads is torrential, and it really disfigures not only the drains. It causes the drains to collapse; it causes the roads to become impassable in some cases. I put that in the same context of what I have been speaking about, and ask that something be done to address it.

You see, in the PSIP, there is mention of there being food basket areas, and I regret I have not seen the list of the 69 food basket areas. I trust that Toco belongs among them. If it is not mentioned, it ought to be included, otherwise it would
become a “basket case” and we have been that for a long time, transcending all of the governments that we have known. This plea, therefore, is for a little elevation above the level of “basket case” to food basket area.

In the 2010/2011 budget speech, there were five growth poles mentioned, and I was very pleased to see Toco included among them. It might have been the work of the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, but I have not been able to find out what steps have been taken to address Toco as a growth pole quite distinct from any of the others.

There seems to be a need to report to the Parliament from time to time about how these activities are developing, and I am using this opportunity to invite the relevant Minister—

Sen. Maharaj: Minister Tewarie.

Sen. E. Prescott SC:—to bring us up-to-date on how those things are going. I felt certain it was the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. I am sure if he were here he would seize the opportunity to tell me how well he has done in Toco, and I would seize the opportunity to tell him that I have not been seeing it. [Laughter]

Mr. President, I now move on to the things for which I wish also to continue to congratulate the Minister. There is in paragraph 51, reference to the development of fish processing industry and the upgrade of the fishing facilities. The article reads:

“Expenditure in the amount of $10 million was utilized for the Upgrading/Construction of Fishing Facilities to ensure the provision of modern infrastructure and facilities in accordance with international standards. In 2013, the Ministry of Food Protection in collaboration with EMBD commenced refurbishment works to several of the fish landing sites while designs and tender documents have also been prepared and completed for a number of additional sites.”

In the box where reference is made to the fishing facilities and landing sites, I note Cumana and an upgrade to Matelot—so that one only needs to enquire—remember this is a complimentary statement that something is happening—whether there is any chance that Toco, which lies between Cumana and Matelot, could be or is included within the sights of those—and by “sights” I mean the “S-I-G-H-T-S” of those who are doing upgrading work for the construction facility.
Sen. Maharaj: I thank the hon. Senator for giving way, and I thank you most profusely for talking about agriculture, and you have joined the ranks of Sen. Ramkhelawan on this. We have—both Minister Tewarie and myself—identified the Toco site as one of the areas for development, as project zero, for the development of that particular area, and we would be moving apace with the new fiscal year to move forward. So I am sure you will be happy with that.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: Thank you. My colleague whispered to me when he heard you say “project zero”—and I am sure it is Freudian. [Laughter] In paragraph 53 there is a reference to “Project 5 Zero”, could it be the same thing?

Sen. Maharaj: No.

Sen. E. Prescott SC: This is a totally different one. We are getting zero? [Crosstalk] Well, I cannot imagine that I thought it was Freudian. Okay, so Toco is getting project zero, and I am sure that too could be corrected or cleared up. In paragraph 53 of the PSIP it says the following:

“Project 5 Zero is an on-going social restructuring exercise being conducted within five (5) communities of the North Coast of Trinidad. The five (5) communities to benefit from this initiative are Toco, Matelot, Maracas, Las Cuevas and Blanchisseuse. For Fiscal 2013, the project is addressing the immediate relief needs of fishermen at Matelot and Toco. The Engine Locker Room Building at Matelot is being refurbished”—and I skip a bit. There is—“Net Repair Facility…is being constructed by the National Commission for Self-Help temporary storage for eight (8) boat engines and other items has been provided”—for Toco—“through the purchase and modification of a 20 foot container.”

And Minister, for that, we are grateful and I thank you.

Then I heard today from the Minister of Health that dental treatment programmes are coming, and one community that I know requires it—once every quarter should be sufficient for the time being—would be that very community of which I am speaking. It is not difficult for us to fall into bad habits about our dental programme—and I mean in the homes—because unlike many years ago, there does not seem to be many people who see the need to talk about it. I suppose they think that everybody gets toothpastes and toothbrushes and would know what to do with them. People need to be reminded. Somebody was making a joke here about cocoyea and using hibiscus and that kind of thing. It used to be that way once.
I suspect that modern marketing—the way people approach commerce—they would think that if you simply advertise the many toothpastes and toothbrushes that are available, people will know how and when they are to be used; the answer is no. It is like the telephone. There is an etiquette around the use of it; there is an etiquette around the use of the toothbrush. It is not—well, I am not going to endeavour to tell people how to do it because I have been there, but we will welcome the dental treatment programmes if they are to be extended to rural Toco.

4.20 p.m.

The vision testing has not been mentioned, and I know now that it has remained the preserve of non-governmental organizations, charities, and private persons who will go occasionally and say, “I come to do a vision testing programme”, but we all know that there are many students who sit in classrooms and fail because they cannot see properly. They sit in the back because they do not want to draw attention to themselves, or they sit in the front because they really cannot see, and somebody knows about it. What they do not know is that their vision can be tested, and some kind of corrective item can be provided or medication, or whatever it may be, appliance, to assist with their vision. Immediately, it elevates the child in the school from sitting at the rear and not seeing anything at all, and being distracted, to being able to get a clearer view of what is transpiring within the classroom, show some interest, and improve his or her own confidence in himself.

The impact on the outcome of the exams, et cetera, ought to be obvious within a short time. So that if vision testing programmes could be considered for inclusion in the same programme of dental treatment, then that too will be a boon to our community.

And then, finally, the district health facility in Sangre Grande/Toco; congratulations once again, it is going to be a place where diagnostic testing and so can be done. Sangre Grande remains the nearest large city, I do not think we can begrudge that; it would be a blessing if it could be elsewhere. If the facilities could be located closer home, but I do not think anybody will complain if it were available in Sangre Grande, that one could visit.

But Minister of Communications, I have taken the time to make a little note about the use of the term “rural”, and in the Toco sense it equates to no fire station, no emergency ambulance service, no refrigeration facilitates at the fishing depot, no direct communication with central government, and no visibility on the political screen.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: “Sounding like yuh have yuh eye on da seat, yuh know.”

[Laughter]
Sen. E. Prescott SC: There is a great degree of neglect, a great degree of neglect. The lighthouse at Galera, which was proudly renamed, or is to be renamed after Keshorn Walcott, you would be surprised at how over the past two years it has been allowed to run down. There was a great hue and cry in the early stages of this Government about it being upgraded and made available so that tourists will go there in droves to see it.

It really is a small lighthouse “eh” by the way, it is not necessarily going to attract droves, but whenever I have guests who have not been to Toco, I ensure that I take them to the facility. Two or three years ago a group was established under the then Minister with responsibility for that, and people from local government and other community activists were brought in and sat on meetings, et cetera, and they have managed to meet and discuss it into nothingness.

On the last occasion that I drove up there, all I could do was go into the car park, happily the gate had been broken so we were able to enter. The grounds need some upgrading, the structure needs attention, the sign that proudly gave the history of the Galera Lighthouse now stands on the ground, lies on the ground; maybe you could abandon the community Sir, and talk to Mr. Rondon. And I am addressing this to the Senator, Minister of Communications. Thank you very much, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President: Attorney General. [Desk thumping]

Sen. G. Singh: Where is Hinds?

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. Anand Ramlogan SC): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to this budget debate. I would like to start by complimenting my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, for a very comprehensive and thorough budget, and one that is bound to lead to sustainable development and prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago. I want to compliment Sen. Gerald Hadeed, the Minister of Communications, on his maiden address, [Desk thumping] and all my colleagues. It was an esoteric journey into the political annals and records of Trinidad and Tobago, and it was a first-hand account given by the son of one of our great heroes.

Mr. President, perhaps I will respond to some of the concerns raised during the course of the contributions by Members opposite to the matters that concern the Ministry of the Attorney General. As you know, the Ministry of the Attorney General is not a Ministry that has a tangible delivery as in some other Ministries, but we do in fact have an important role in terms of the activities of the
Government. My friend, Sen. Cudjoe, raised the issue during her contribution about the Milshirv matter, which is before the courts, and she said that perhaps the lawyers who were involved in that matter should admit that they were wrong and apologize. I would just like to set the record straight in that matter.

Mr. President, that matter was an application for judicial review and leave being granted, First Citizens Bank and Milshirv properties were joined as parties to the proceedings. The core of that application for judicial review was whether or not the THA, having regard to the kind of transaction it entered into, whether it needed to seek the permission of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy first, having regard to the provisions of the law, and when that matter started the court considered the application and granted leave. When the two parties were joined, Milshirv and FCB, I took it upon myself, in light of the joint of those two parties, to consider whether the rights of innocent third parties could be affected, and could become entangled in the pending judicial review application.

As Attorney General, I have a duty to so consider, in light of the state of the law in public law, where innocent third party rights are a material consideration in judicial review applications. I also had to consider as Attorney General whether it will be detrimental to good public administration, and whether the public interest would be better served by carving out and excising the real core question upon which the State required guidance for the future, and that is the approach I took.

As a result of that, Mr. President, what happened is the proceedings were converted into a construction summons to seek the court’s interpretation as to the true extent of the THA’s powers, and whether or not the Minister of Finance and the Economy, as a prerequisite, his approval was required before such a transaction was entered into.

I pause to make the point that the case continues as between the THA and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. There is absolutely nothing to apologize for. In fact, if anything, the Office of the Attorney General, seeking the interest of the State, acted quite properly in this matter, by having regard to the intervening third party rights of Milshirv and the bank, who at the material time, would not have had any responsibility to seek any permission from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. The law was that the THA would have had to seek permission from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, not First Citizens Bank, not Milshirv; and it was in those circumstances that the matter has been converted, and the case continues. So, for the benefit of Sen. Cudjoe, the matter is very much alive and kicking [Desk thumping] and before the court, and there is no need for an apology, whatsoever.
Mr. President, there have been several matters that have crossed in the past year—my desk—many of which have severe implications and serious ramifications for the economy, if they are not properly handled. I have been charged with the responsibility to manage both the international and local litigation portfolio for the State, and there has never been a busier period in terms of international litigation for the State as we have had several international arbitrations, all at the same time.

The most important in the past year was, in fact, the GTL arbitration with respect to Petrotrin. Mr. President, that is a complex litigation between Petrotrin and WGTL, and it stems from the negligent mismanagement under the previous regime with respect to Petrotrin and the gas-to-liquids plant. In that matter, WGTL were to provide the gas-to-liquids plant, including the capital and the technology, and to manage the project while Petrotrin was responsible for providing the gas for the project.

And what happened? At the heart of the project was the provision of a BP catalyst, which is a highly advanced technical equipment, employing Fischer-Tropsch technology in which GTL represented, they were in a position to procure a licence to use. Without—

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, Standing Order 35(2).

Mr. President: Attorney General, insofar as there is a judicial decision pending in the matter—I am not aware of the particular proceedings—you can refer to the matter, you can state the status of the matter, but in terms of dealing with the actual merits or demerits, we will have to—

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Mr. President, I am grateful.

Sen. Deyalsingh: And facts.


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yeah. Mr. President, I am in fact reporting on a judgment that has already been delivered. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: Ah!

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: You see, they do not want the truth to come out.

Hon. Senator: “Because they fraid.”

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: I am reporting on a judgment that has already been delivered, and they can run but they cannot hide. They must accept the political paternity for the mess that they left Petrotrin in. [Desk thumping]
Hon. Senator: Point of order.

Hon. Senator: What is the point of order?

Hon. Senator: What is the point?

Sen. Al-Rawi: 35(2), whether the matter is under appeal in fact, Mr. President, because—

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: The answer is no, it is not.

Hon. Senator: Ah!

Sen. Al-Rawi: Has the time for it to appeal been expired?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: It has. It has, yes.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Right. Okay, well then proceed.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yes, thank you very much. [Laughter]


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: You see, Mr. President—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: When the damages have to get—[Inaudible]

Sen. G. Singh: Fifteen billion dollar paternity, take it.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Once it is not under appeal, talk about it.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: I could understand why my learned friends are so sensitive to this subject on the other side.

You see, Mr. President, this matter, there was an ICC arbitration in this matter, and I had to fight tooth and nail to protect Trinidad and Tobago’s interest and to protect Petrotrin, because the claim in this matter ran into billions of dollars. Petrotrin had advanced the sum of over $600 million, $600 million in this GTL fiasco; moneys which now having invested, GTL turned around and sued Petrotrin. That gas-to-liquids plant is being sold as scrap iron today, not an ounce of return from it. And, Mr. President, I am very pleased to say that, after 33 cost overruns, after over $600 million being spent by Petrotrin, we were able to save some face when the arbitrator declared that WGTL had breached their respective obligations and they were ordered to transfer 9,398,211 common shares of WGTL Trinidad to Petrotrin. [Desk thumping]


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: And they were also ordered to pay Petrotrin’s legal costs in the sum of $14.588 million. [Desk thumping] A comprehensive and
resounding victory for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. President. [Desk thumping] [Interruption]

4.35 p.m.

Thank you, Sen. Al-Rawi, for the “well done”. This is not an easy matter because, this matter, had it gone the other way, Petrotrin could have been on the verge of bankruptcy, because the claim made against Petrotrin is over TT $2.5 billion. We are still not out of the woods. We still have yet another arbitration pending in the London Court of International Arbitration which is to come up later. But the point is, none of this would have occurred had the matter simply been dealt with in accordance with the highest standards of corporate governance in an ethical manner with integrity. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Maharaj: “How dey quiet so?” [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: We also have the Hyatt arbitration that concerns the return of owner’s remittances in excess of $150 million. I have, in fact, been negotiating with the lawyers on the other side in this matter to see whether we could bring about an amicable resolution. Although the arbitration button has been pressed, I have been trying to find a solution to that problem because I am of the view that that arbitration will be an expensive arbitration that will take a very long time, and it is a matter that is ripe for resolution. I am pleased to say that we are very close to resolving that matter, [Desk thumping] and the Minister of Finance and the Economy will be most happy to have in his coffers close to $200 million when that matter is settled.

Hon. Senator: TT or US?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: That is TT.

Of course, arising out of the forensic probes, a number of court matters were filed, and today I wish to report on the status of those matters, without going into the details of the matters.

We first have the matter against the former chairman of UDeCOTT, Mr. Calder Hart, his Deputy Chairman Krishna Bahadoorsingh, the Chief Financial Officer, Ricardo O’Brien and his former CEO Neandra Rampaul. I am pleased to announce that in that matter the pleadings have been closed, discovery I think is completed and that matter is now at the stage where the next case management is obviously going to take us into the trial phase of witness statements and thereafter a trial date.
We have the matter against the former President of Petrotrin, Malcolm Jones, where we have sought to recover $1.2 billion as a result of the mismanagement and failed gas-to-liquids plant. A defence has been ordered by the judge in that matter. After several extensions were sought, a defence has been ordered by the judge to be filed by October 11, 2013.

In the matter of e TecK, where we are claiming recovery of some $30 million against the former board led by Mr. Ken Julien and Dr. Rennie Monteil, in that matter a judgment on a most significant and important preliminary point is due for October 11. That preliminary point has to do with the limitation point. It is a point that goes to the root of the integrity in governance in this country.

The limitation period in this country is four years. The life of a government is five years by virtue of the normal period of time. If you have a limitation period of only four years and you have the life of a government for five years, then by simple maths, if any government serves more than one term consecutively—if they serve two terms—then when that administration is changed or removed then you are outside the limitation period to bring any action against the wrongdoers because the limitation period is four years from the date of the wrongdoing.

This case is a test case because the State is arguing in this matter that that four-year period cannot be taken in isolation, in a vacuum, but it must be judged by reference to whether the wrongdoers were in charge of the company and whether or not it was possible to discover the wrongdoing. Therefore, a judgment is scheduled to be delivered on October 11. That judgment is going to be a very historic judgement and will have an impact on all of the other claims that have been filed, because a similar point is being raised.

Mr. President, people say a lot of things about this Government, about corruption. It has become a mantra that is frequently invoked by those opposite. I want to say something: if this Government and if this Attorney General had any qualms whatever about doing the right thing, for the right reason, at the right time, then these court cases demonstrate that we are about integrity in public life and we are about transparency and accountability. [Desk thumping] Make no mistake about it, no other Government has been able to file cases like these and no other Government would have taken the political risk to actually fight that limitation point on the basis that even if you are out of office the people of the country must have the right to sue the wrongdoers, even if the Government is out of office. That is what we are arguing. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, it is on that note that whilst people pay lip service to corruption, I found it rather amusing that in the September 14 Saturday Newsday the headline read:
“Calder hart, ‘our friend’”

The report went on to say:

“Keith Rowley apparently has a new friend, and his name is Calder Hart.

In a dramatic about-turn, the Opposition Leader yesterday praised the former UDeCOTT executive chairman who fled to the United States, shortly before the 2012 General Election, and who during the Patrick Manning-led regime, was roundly lambasted by Rowley.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: Who was being sarcastic!

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: The article continued:

“…Rowley who replaced Manning as PNM leader, following the PNM’s defeat at the general election three years ago, referred to Hart as,”—and I quote—“our friend’…”

Sen. Al-Rawi: Sarcastically! [Laughter]

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: “adding that the Canadian-born Hart had contributed to the PNM’s Vision 2020 plan for the nation.”

Well, he is trying to woo him back because he wants him to contribute to the Vision 2030 plan as well. [Desk thumping] You see, Calder Hart is the brain and nerve centre of the PNM and that is why they need him back. And they have the unmitigated gall and temerity to come here and preach about corruption.

Mr. President, Dr. Rowley said he:

“…listed Hart as among those who had contributed ‘meaningfully’ to…plan of development.”—for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senator: Very sarcastically! [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: The newspaper observes:

“It was a far cry from the days when Hart’s qualifications in finance were brought into question by many including none other than Dr. Rowley, during the Uff Commission…”

Could you imagine that today they point fingers at everyone about qualifications coming into question, and the newspaper reminds us that:

“It was a far cry from the days when Hart’s qualifications in finance were brought into question…” by their own PNM administration.

And today they say nothing about it and they pretend to be holier than thou.
Mr. President, the case brought against the former board of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for $12 million for negligence and breach of fiduciary duty, where they renovated a guest house in Aripo without verifying any ownership, any title, and they leased the land from somebody that apparently did not own it and spent $12 million to renovate it, and put Reverend Juliana Pena to stay in it. That case, a preliminary point again on the limitation point, has been set for trial on February 11 and 12, 2014.

With respect to the PHI pan, the percussive harmonic instrument, that matter, the State funded the research to the tune of $35 million. We are at an advanced stage in that matter with respect to determining the intellectual property rights for the PHI pan. We have joined the University of the West Indies because I am of the view that the taxpayers of this country, having refinanced the research for the PHI pan, it is either that the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago own the intellectual property rights for it, or in the alternative let the University of the West Indies own it, but it cannot be that taxpayers financed it and one man owns it to profit personally. That cannot be. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, we then had the Scarborough hospital. The contract price for the construction of the Scarborough General Hospital was originally $140 million.

Sen. Singh: Under the IDB!

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: In the end that hospital ended up costing some $500 million, five times more—$500 million. From $100 million to $500 million.


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Several complex disputes have arisen out of that, two of them are before the Court of Appeal and we are at the moment awaiting judgment in those matters.

I am very pleased to announce that after all the hullabaloo and all the erroneous reporting and doom and gloom predictions that we had lost the OPV matter, we have in fact received in this fiscal year a cheque close to $1.4 billion from British Aerospace Engineering. The Government has put that money to good use. That is the money that is going to be used by the new Minister of National Security to deal with the maritime wall for Trinidad and Tobago.

Whilst I am on that, let me put to rest a constant misrepresentation by the other side. It is bandied about time and again that we cancelled the OPV programme and it is put across as if we did so in a willy-nilly or some sadistic, malicious manner. Mr. President, it is a fact that this Government, when we were in Opposition, publicly
criticized the acquisition of the three offshore patrol vessels. We said as a matter of policy we did not agree with that decision, and we said so because all of the experts we spoke to that three was really a grandiose ambition. It was a delusion of grandeur, it had no merit and the money could be put to better use. So we objected on a solid technical basis.

When we assumed office in May 2010, as with any government, we had to pay regard and respect to our international contractual commitments. We therefore sat and assessed the position and continued to pay all the milestone payments for the acquisition of the offshore patrol vessels in accordance with the contract.

The reason that matter “landed up” in arbitration had nothing to do with the Government pulling the plug willy-nilly, or else we would not have been paid $1.4 billion by British Aerospace Engineering. [Desk thumping] The reason that was done is because there was a defect in the weapon’s firing capability of the offshore patrol vessels. It was meant to lock on a moving target and fire at a particular distance, range and speed. When they actually built OPV one and they tried it out, it fell short of its mark dismally.

Hon. Senator: Lemon one.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: It was lemon one. We then agreed on a potential rectification plan, and we said we will pay for you to start and continue on OPV two. So OPV two was being built whilst the defect in the weapon’s firing capability on OPV one, they were trying to remedy it and rectify it. By the time OPV two was completed, they were still not able to rectify the defect in OPV one.

I went to Portsmouth and I met with them, and I asked them, “Well, look, what guarantee can you give me that this defect which is manifesting itself now in OPV one, will not be replicated in OPV two, and what guarantee can you give the country that if that problem persists we as a country will have a right to reject those vessels?” They wanted that we must take it and they give us a little money back. But the whole point in having these three warships was that they would be able to lock on a moving target and fire. If you did not have that capability, then what was the point in having it? “You go ha man pelting apple and orange at people when dey smuggling drugs and dey pulling out big machine gun in open water?”

Mr. President, notwithstanding our fundamental disagreement with the policy decision of the PNM to acquire three offshore patrol vessels, we continued to service our contractual obligations as a responsible Government, but when the
deficiencies breached our contractual rights and position as a country, we had no choice but to take the matter to arbitration, and that is how the matter ended up there. [Desk thumping] So let us clear the air on that, once and for all, about this cancellation.

The termination of that was justified and it was in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why, at the end of the day, we did not have to pay any money—we got $1.4 billion.

Sen. G. Singh: Where is Hinds? Where is Sen. Hinds?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Apart from those matters, we have at the moment at least five matters arising out of the Clico bailout and the resolution to the Clico problem.

4.50 p.m.

The former administration completely misdiagnosed the Clico problem. They misdiagnosed it and they treated it as though it was a liquidity problem, when really it was, in fact, a solvency issue and a solvency problem. By virtue of their financial misdiagnosis, the prescription was wrong, the medication was wrong and the patient fell even more ill.


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Negligent doctor; medical and financial malpractice. [Desk thumping] But, Mr. President, I am very pleased to say that thus far we have been able to deal with all of the litigation. We are expecting judgment from the Court of Appeal in one. We are expecting judgment from the High Court in another, but all of those matters are presently being dealt with before the court.

Of course, we have the famous or the infamous section 34 case. You know, after all of the accusations about you want—section 34 was to help two financiers, and to help them to escape and so forth. Mr. President, I assembled a powerful legal army, and we went into court and we argued against that constitutional Motion and we came out on top and emerged victorious and the constitutional Motion was, in fact, dismissed. [Desk thumping] The State emerged victorious and more than that, we have pressed the court for an urgent and an early hearing of the appeal, and that appeal is going to take place on October 21 before the Court of Appeal. And I dare say I hope that the Court of Appeal will give us an expeditious judgment in that matter so that matter can be completed in record-breaking time.
Mr. President, by law, the Attorney General is the head of the central authority of the country, and the central authority is responsible for meeting our international obligations with respect to extradition and with respect to mutual legal assistance. We are responsible for mutual legal assistance to the Commonwealth and other territories, and this is one of the critical tools that is used to curb organized crime and to assist in the fight against transnational criminal activity.

Assistance over the past year has been provided in a wide range of matters including money laundering, drug trafficking, firearms and ammunition offences.

Only recently, Mr. President, you would have seen—and I put this in the context of what transpired in the aftermath of section 34. People went and started saying, you know, they painted an image of a rift between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America. They will not—people said that the judgment in the High Court, in that matter, will somehow now preclude us from extraditing anyone else because everyone will do the same thing and raise the same point, notwithstanding the fact that I was at pains to point out the factual and legal matrix was so different in that case. Mr. President, you would have seen recently David Miglore, a casino owner—[Interruption]


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—Miglore, Miglore, same thing—US $4 million for failing to file tax returns. Doreen Alexander successfully extradited with respect to the Balo Maharaj kidnapping together with nine co-conspirators. Gary Govindas was extradited in February to face charges in relation to the kidnapping of Videsh Mohan. It is alleged that together with one Hassenath, well they conspired to kidnap Videsh and Amit Mohan for ransom.

On August 05, 2013 after I extradited Mr. Gary Govindas, I am pleased to announce, Mr. President, that Gary Govindas pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit hostage taking.

Mr. President, Andy Nelson was successfully extradited on September 14, 2012, for drug trafficking charges in relation to conspiracy to supply and import cocaine. He pleaded guilty to both charges in the United Kingdom after he was extradited.

Last month Keron Pierre was extradited to the United States to face charges in relation to a triple homicide and an attempted murder. He had allegedly shot and killed three young persons with a semi-automatic gun outside a party in Boston, and the fourth narrowly escaped with her life. He has been extradited.
So the central authority has been extremely busy and our relationship with US Department of Justice and the US law enforcement authorities has never, in fact, been better; never been better. [Desk thumping]. Never been better before.

Mr. President, in terms of the human rights unit at the Ministry of the Attorney General, only recently I sanctioned a visit from a team of United Nations experts that are overseeing the implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. I requested and sanctioned that visit, and Mr. President, representatives from Argentina and Palau visited the office and we met—I also encouraged them to meet with all of the other groups: the Police Complaints Authority, the Integrity Commission and Transparency International. They met with all of the relevant stakeholders and agencies and our compliance report will be published internationally, and I expect and I am hoping that we will have a positive and successful review, and that will be announced by the United Nations in due course.

Mr. President, if I was afraid in the slightest bit about corruption, I would not have sanctioned and encouraged a visit from a high powered team of United Nations experts dealing with the United Nations prevention of corruption convention, but that is what I did.

Mr. President, this issue of corruption is one that I want to touch on because for far too long it has become a virtual—[Interrupt]

**Sen. G. Singh:** Pastime.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:**—political hobby and you know, they keep flinging it at everything and anything [Crosstalk] and you know, sometimes I feel as though the Government is swimming against the tide and the current.

It was, in fact, US President Benjamin Franklin who said, “believe none of what you hear, and half of what you see”. I want to add something to that; it is, believe none of what you hear, and half of what you see, and quarter of what you read. I will show—demonstrate—why. There have been a series of front page headlines—[Interrupt]

**Sen. G. Singh:** Which newspaper?

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:**—which carry—they have a subliminal effect and it is like a sledge hammer hitting you on the forehead, bam, bam, bam, it wears down the public psyche. It batters it into submission, into a particular mode of thinking against the Government. No Government is prefect, no Government is infallible and no Government will ever be able to govern without
having hiccups and problems, but that does not mean that you are—that it is open season to attack the Government and the country in a manner that calls into question the motives. [Crosstalk]

Mr. President, the Sunday Guardian on September 16 published an article: “Govt official under FIU probe… after spate of property buys.” And it read:

“At least one senior government official and an attorney have come under the microscope of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

The properties—worth millions—have been classed as prime property and paid for in cash.

…which lists the official, his wife and two other attorneys as directors.

The most recent residential purchase was made two months ago in … Maraval … where a condominium was bought, while a commercial building was also purchased in the St Clair area.”

So, Government official under FIU probe; front page headline. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Singh: Judy Raymond at work.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Then you have on April 14, 2013: “Bank raises red flag with FIU: Government official pays off $m loans in 6 months.” And the article says—and everything they do is somehow linked to the FIU. The FIU is the epicentre of these stories around which you construct this maze about corruption, this labyrinth of corruption.

“Republic Bank has alerted the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to the suspicious transactions of a senior government official. The bank, sources say, raised a ‘red flag’ after the official paid off two million-dollar mortgages within a six-month time frame. One of the mortgages was for a property purchased through the official’s private company in 2010 valued at $1.75 million, while the other was for a property purchased in September 2011 at a cost of $3.3 million.

Bank officials noticed that apart from the monthly payments, the government official was also making payments on a daily basis towards the mortgages. The daily payments, sources say, were close to $42,000 and were paid at different banks throughout the country. Banking officials, however, say there is a $60,000 per day limit on the amount of money which can be deposited in personal accounts.”
Well firstly, [Crosstalk] I do not know that there is any limit in terms of how much money you can deposit in a personal account. There is no such limit; that is a lie. You can deposit any amount of money you want into your account—[Interruption]

Sen. Singh: Once, you are—

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—once it is legitimate and you declare the source of funds, you can deposit any amount.

Sen. Singh: You can.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Sorry. [Crosstalk] Now, it said:

“Following investigations by Republic Bank, it was discovered that the government official also has accounts with other banking institutions.”

And no other money was withdrawn from those banks, et cetera.

Now this goes into details, details about Republic Bank and an investigation. Just look at the nasty picture that is painted. A Government official buys two multi-million dollar properties. He takes two mortgages from Republic Bank and he proceeds to pay off the two mortgages in six months’ time. Not only is he so stupid to pay it off in six months’ time, “he stupid enough” to pay it off by $42,000 a day in cash; in cash.

Hon. Senator: He should be fired for “dotishness”.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: You know? [Laughter] If such a Government Minister exists, he should be fired on account of stupidity. [Laughter]


Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Now, I mean, this is the kind—and this makes the front page of the newspaper.

Sen. Singh: Which newspaper?


Sen. Singh: Judy Raymond.

Hon. Senator: “Awwww.”

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: But now you have the following Sunday [Crosstalk] you have on April 16, 2013—Republic Bank, full page ad Republic Bank takes out [Crosstalk]

Sen. G. Singh: Forced to take out an ad!

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—forced to take out an ad and this is what the bank says. They said:

“A release from the bank yesterday described the April 14 article as ‘false and untrue’. and that the accounts described in the article are not held at Republic Bank Limited.’

‘…all other information provided in the report regarding alleged actions of Republic Bank is false.”

They say—the bank says it would normally not comment on these matters, but—

“…on this occasion, given the high degree of fictitious information in the report, and the fact that the bank’s good reputation has been severely impacted, we are obliged to assure the public and the authorities that this information did not emanate from Republic Bank and matters referred to in the article do not relate to Republic Bank Limited.”

“Dis aint make de front page, you know. Dis aint make de front page.”

What makes the front page are the two other articles damaging the Government, painting, in great detail, an investigation conducted by Republic Bank, even liaising with other banks—cash payments to pay off two million-dollar mortgages and the Government official is now under probe by the FIU. And it is a total fabrication. [Crosstalk] A total fabrication designed to do what? Paint the Government with a corruption brush. And it then sticks and it then starts to spin. [Crosstalk]

You cannot sue the newspaper because they do not name the Government Minister and that is the other point. I am glad that Sen. Beckles raised it. It is the first time in this country’s history you are seeing—without any name. Everything now is a source.

Hon. Senator: “Doubles.”


Hon. Senator: “Yeah.”
Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: “And you good to go. Nothing wrong.” It makes front page. Mr. President, as if that was not enough—[Interuption]

Sen. G. Singh: What did Williams say about the Guardian?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—as if that was not enough, on Sunday, July 07, 2013—all of this happening in close proximity—the headline reads: “$Billions in Contracts for UNC Financier.” Just listen to this. People read these things all over the world.

“An international financial investigative agency has information that a Government financier has amassed over a billion dollars in contracts over the three years that the People’s Partnership has been in power. This was revealed yesterday by forensic and fraud auditing specialist Stephon Grey.

Grey is the managing director at BDO Forensic Accounting, the world’s fifth largest network of auditing firms; a sub-contractor at Kroll UK Ltd, the world’s leading forensic and investigative group;…”

So the credentials of this man, Stephon Grey, is that he is, you know, a forensic and fraud auditing specialist, managing director, the world’s fifth largest network of auditing firms, I mean, “by de time I done read dem first two paragraphs, if anything da man say, I believe, because dey put he résumé up front. It have nothing bad yuh could say bout dis fella”.

Sen. G. Singh: What newspaper?


5.05 p.m.

“He is considered to be one of the leading forensic accounting consultants in the region.”

One of the leading forensic accounting consultants in the region.

And they then go on to deal with it and say about this financier getting over a billion dollars’ worth in three years. But when I read that, they called me for a comment—the reporter called me for a comment and I said well look, you know I find it very strange that this fella could know all this. If he knows all this, let him take it to the police immediately—[Interuption]

Hon. Senator: That is correct.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Right away, go to the DPP. I will give him the number. But something just was not reading right, because you see if that had happened, one would have expected that Mr. Stephon Grey would not have been
the first person to “buss dah mark”. And more than that, more than that, given how this Government is under the microscope, that matter “would have done reach Integrity Commission and police and all kinda thing.

**Hon. Senator:** “Al-Rawi might ah buss it up”.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** So I decided to find out more about Mr. Stephon Grey. So being as they said, one of the leading forensic accounting consultants in the region, I decided to write the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Trinidad and Tobago. So I wrote them to say, well, tell me about this fella. I mean, this man has to be—[Interrupt]

**Sen. G. Singh:** A world class.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:**—a world class graduate in accounts and so on.

By letter dated July 15, 2013, the Institute of Chartered Accountants replied to me:

Dear Attorney General.

Re: Mr. Stephon Grey.

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated July 10, 2013, and confirm that Mr. Grey is an ACCA student—

**Sen. G. Singh:** Oh my. [Laughter]

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** No, wait, wait, wait, let me finish.

We confirm that Mr—

**Hon. Senators:** [Crosstalk]

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** No, no, hold on, hold on.

We confirm that Mr. Grey is an ACCA student who has been suspended effective September 09, 2001. [Laughter] And accordingly is not a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountant.

**Hon. Senator:** But a member of the PNM.

**Sen. G. Singh:** Go back to the treasury.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** And I have copies of the letter from ICA for everybody who wants to see it. But let me go back to the newspaper article.

**Hon. Senator:** Send it to the Guardian.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** “An international financial investigative agency has”—gathered—“information that a Government financier has amassed over a billion dollars in contracts over the three years…
Grey is the managing director at BDO Forensic Accounting, the world’s fifth largest network of auditing firms; a sub-contractor at Kroll…the world’s leading forensic and investigative group…

He is considered to be one of the leading forensic accounting consultants in the region…”

“And dat man is ah suspended student who eh complete de ACCA degree. And what he say make front page against de whole Government of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Madness!

Hon. Senator: Shame.

Sen. G. Singh: What did Williams say about that?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Total madness. An ACCA student who was suspended, and that makes front page?

Sen. Maharaj: “That story sounds like once upon a time.”

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: “No, no I eh leave it there, because if dem kind ah thing happening in the Government I am a serious man about dem thing.” Very serious. So I then decided to try and find this Mr. Grey myself, because I had to see how grey this fella is. So, eventually Mr. Grey sends to me a letter that he sends to the media; a letter which has never been published until today. And Mr. Grey writes on his letterhead:

The Caribbean Institute of Forensic Accounting.

Well, I want to leave out the word “accounting” for now, if you do not mind. [Laughter] It is a cruel irony, I must say.

Sen. G. Singh:—we face in this country.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yeah, you see, he says:

Inaccurate reporting in the Sunday Guardian—the Sunday Guardian of July 7, 2013 carried an unfortunate front page article under the headline: “SBillions in Contracts for UNC Financier”. The accuracy and positioning of this article is unfortunate since I was never interviewed by the reporter nor was the content of my presentation reported accurately. I feel compelled to provide clarification with respect to such reckless reporting.

The following inaccuracies were printed in the article and I am taking time to outline these to you. Firstly, I never made statements of having information about a PP financier being awarded millions of dollars in contract over the government’s three-year term.
Secondly, I never indicated that our public officials feel as if they are smart or suggested that they are hiding money in offshore accounts.

Lie number two. And he continues he said;

the article is not an accurate reflection or summation of what was discussed during my presentation, and my client, the board of APEX, is vigorously considering their options to correct the erroneous reporting. Whilst I believe in the freedom of the press and wholeheartedly support the media’s role in a democratic society, I also believe that the media has a responsibility to the society that it claims to defend, to be prudent and accurate in its reporting.

Sen. G. Singh: That in front page?

Mr. President: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yes.

Mr. President: The speaking time of the Attorney General has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Thank you very much, Mr. President. [Desk thumping] And, Mr. President, notwithstanding that—and you know that correction which was sent, at no time did the media publish it. How unfair can you be to a government? The man is a suspended ACCA student. You put him across as a worldwide respected leading consultant and when the man writes you to point out that the whole article is a tissue of lies you “doh” even publish it. Not for the first time.

Sen. G. Singh: Guardian of democracy.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: And then, you know, months later in the Express Keith Subero in a column, he quoting from that same fella.

Sen. G. Singh: “Ohh, he is Mr. Credit Card.” He had the limitless credit card from Piggott.


Sen. Maharaj: He is a PNM, not apologist.
Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Now, you see, and that is how they spin this web of corruption and deceit and everything is—the latest is SIS, SIS. Mr. President, you know, I logged on this morning on the computer when I was preparing—let me just check and see something. I logged on to their website to see who is SIS really, because Sen. Hinds pointed—

Sen. G. Singh: Where is Sen. Hinds?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—he said they were on the verge of bankruptcy. And you know they get all this “wok” from the Government.

Sen. G. Singh: He hiding again.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: The idea is as if this is some “lil” rum shop outfitted in a village and when the People’s Partnership came in power they suddenly blossomed and became this huge massive company. I logged on to “this people website”, but you know what is striking? This same company that Sen. Hinds said is on the verge of bankruptcy and no good and so on, let me tell you what work they got under the People’s National Movement [Desk thumping] and I want you to hear how incompetent, how corrupt—

Sen. Maharaj: And who they bribe.


Sen. G. Singh: That is a PNM contractor.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: He is a PNM contractor, but now they want to turn it around and say People’s Partnership. Two thousand and five they did not—2005 EMBD, Caroni Lands Development Site Infrastructure, $18 million. EMBD 2006, Caroni Lands Development Structure, Beaucar Road, $15 million; and the most massive contract of all given in 2006 by the People’s National Movement to the same SIS, that they brand as corrupt, that they brand as evil and wicked and as they brand as incompetent and on the verge of bankruptcy. Today, I ask the question of Prof. Ken Julien, Dr. René Monteil, Mr. Brian Copeland,
Eugene Tiah and Sonia Noel, those were the members of the Board of Directors of e TecK Limited who gave a contract in 2006 to a company that Sen. Hinds claims was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the contract was from e TecK for site infrastructure construction for the Tamana InTech Park, for a whopping $173 million.

**Hon. Senators:** Weee. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** So today I ask the question, if SIS was so bad, and it was so poor, and it is so corrupt and it is so incompetent, how on earth is it that the PNM was giving them so much work? [Desk thumping] In fact, I now understand why they are complaining—because they are getting less work under the People’s Partnership. It is a PNM contractor it looks like.

**Sen. G. Singh:** “They getting PNM party card.”

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** You see, when you look at the website you will see that this company has been working all over the world with international companies and so on. You know, my friend Sen. Hinds—

**Sen. Maharaj:** He run away today.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:**—who is not here because he knew I was going to speak. He pontificates—[Interruption]

**Sen. Maharaj:** Where he is? He watching TV today?

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** He pontificates—[Interruption]

**Sen. Maharaj:** Sen. Beckles, I hope he—[Inaudible]

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** He pontificates about national security—[Interruption]

**Sen. Maharaj:** He watching TV today or what?

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:**—and makes wide sweeping statements about it. Let me quote from an article written by the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce on December 22, 2005. They say, the Chamber says that they are criticizing him for an interview he did, and they say:

“…the minister answered that his suspicion was that what one meant speaking about ‘results,’”—that the— “statistics on murder which have now crossed the 350 mark…the minister commented that one cannot really measure the success of police work purely by counting the number of murders in society.”

That was the Minister’s response.
Hon. Senator: Did he say that?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yes. He said you cannot measure the success by the number of murders.

Hon. Senator: “Nahh, he did not say that.”

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: When pressed by the reporter, this is the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, they say:

“Minister Hinds also indicated that a number of murders are related to domestic violence, that there are thousands of crimes which take place in that context and that it is ‘impossible for any Government or policeman to know which husband is going to kill his wife tomorrow.’”

Hon. Senators: “Nahh”.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Hinds then—no, no:

“Hinds then turned to the controversial blimp by stating that it works not only in the air. He does not rule out the possibility that it could”—also—“work on the ground.” [Laughter and desk thumping]

“He say he doh rule out the possibility dat the blimp could also work on de ground.”

Well. I want to ask Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds if he finished putting on the wheels on the blimp. “Ah want to see he driving it going down St James Street. Ah want to see he in the blimp.” You see, he says he does not rule—this is the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and it says Sen. Hinds, the Minister, says:

“...he does not rule out the possibility that it could work on the ground. When pressed by the interviewer as to whether the blimp could, in fact, operate on the ground, the minister replied that he suspected so but was not in a position to say so.” [Laughter and desk thumping]

And they go on to chastise him.

Now, you know, in his contribution, Mr. President, and Sen. Hinds has a way of speaking, and quite frankly I want to make a complaint about it, Mr. President. Listen to an extract from his contribution:

“I heard the Attorney General on the television, my television that I spent my little hard-earned money on…”

Hon. Senator: Yeah, right.
Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: “Yuh know, is like he sitting and watching ah lil black and white TV in ah corner. Yuh understand? He sit down behind Sea Lots there, in one ah dem lil shack, with a lil black and white TV, with a lil piece ah foil, and a lil piece ah wire from de clothes line, da is de antenna.” So:

“…my television that I spent my little hard-earned money on, calling children in Diego Martin underprivileged and he went there to give out school bags. ‘You see the mentality?’ I saw him on the TV. I saw him here for the last three years. He has put on a lot of weight; neck fat, face fat, looking well fed and talking about underprivileged…”

“I din know Sen. Hinds does be watching me so, yuh know”. [Laughter and desk thumping] For three years this man sit down here watching my neck. No, for three years this man sit down here watching “meh neck, meh face, meh belly” and God knows what else. [Laughter and desk thumping] And that is the level of this man’s contribution—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—as a former Minister, and they want to return to government—[Interruption]

Sen. Coudray: Junior, junior.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:—a former junior Minister.

Today, I want to pay public tribute to former Prime Minister Patrick Manning for [Desk thumping] the wisdom he had and the foresight he had in saying: “He is not good enough to be as a Minister and he is an apprentice and firing his tail.” [Desk thumping] And I want to say to him I intend a lodge a complaint to the Chief Whip in the Opposition in the Lower House, Miss Marlene Mc Donald, about his observations about me putting on a lot of weight, and I know that Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe will join me in that petition in that regard.

You see, there are some things that are unparliamentary and I say it facetiously to make the point that Sen. Hinds cannot continue to debate in that manner, to make observations about people like that, because if the shoe is on the other foot he might not like it. [Desk thumping]

Sen. George: No he wouldn’t. No, he would not.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: And then he says to the people, he says: “Reject all of them coming to you with gifts. They have no class, they have no integrity.” You know, all of a sudden they speak about the people in Laventille
and they speak about them in such a different manner. Let me remind Sen. Hinds and the country what he said in this Parliament on March 19, 2004, and I quote from the *Hansard*.

**Sen. George:** Remind him.

5.20 p.m.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** This is Sen. Hinds speaking:

“Morvant/Laventille is not fundamentally better off than it was eight years ago when I assumed office.”

Confession is good for the soul.

“Morvant/Laventille is not fundamentally better off than it was eight years ago when I assumed office.”—He said—Admitting…the task is humongous and made even more so by the lethargy of far too many…residents…”

**Hon. Senators:** Aaahh!

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** “He calling de same people lazy”, “lethargy”. He is saying they are lethargic—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Senators:** That is a colonial mindset.

**Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC:** That is his mentality towards his own constituents and that is a quote from March 2004 in the Parliament. “So he calling de people lazy and he want tuh tell dem, yuh know, doh boddert fit nutten.”

Mr. President, on July 15, 2010, an article appeared: “PNM Senator sued for trespass”. [*Laughter*] Sen. Hinds’ neighbour sued him for encroaching on “she” land. And this is what they said:

“…the owner of land at 12 Barry Avenue, Hillsboro, Maraval…”—Sen. Hinds—“McPherson accused Hinds of constructing ‘a very impressive four-storey house, together with a swimming pool, upon lands which the claimant estimates to be in the value of at least $7,000,000’. McPherson said both his land and property belonging to Hinds were…located in an exclusive”—residential area in the—“suburb where the average home sells for”—a minimum of—“$4 million.”

Well, I am reliably informed the house is worth around $15 million.

But, today, I want to ask Sen. Hinds, the same children I went to give out schoolbags, hampers and school supplies to—I want to ask him today, how many people has Sen. Hinds taken from Laventille to his posh four-storey
mansion to “leh dem bade in de swimming pool?” [Desk thumping] Has any child from Laventille ever been able to dip “dey toe in dat swimming pool? Yuh pretend tuh care so much. Not because yuh ha rasta dreadlocks mean yuh have Rastafarian principles.” [Desk thumping]

I want to ask him: how many without schoolbags from Laventille did he ever take home and give them a meal on his marble table and give them a schoolbag and say, “this is for you”? He is a mocking pretender, while he is living high off “de” hog! He is living high off the hog and wants to talk to the poor children to tell them reject the schoolbags.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mr. President, Standing Order 35(5), please.

Mr. President: I did not gather that there were motives being imputed to Sen. Hinds.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Mocking pretender?

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: I will withdraw the word “mocking” if he likes.

Hon. Senator: You are saying he is a pretender?

Sen. G. Singh: But that is a calypsonian—[Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: You see, I want to know—you see, when you paint yourself as the poor man’s champion and you paint yourself in this light like you “is de” Nelson Mandela of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to ask him—he tells the children in Diego Martin to reject everything we give them. Mr. President, the young people mobilized and raised money of their own accord to buy schoolbags, school supplies; they washed cars to raise money; they had raffle; they had cake sale, and they are going to help their brothers and sisters in another part of the country and they are giving it and he is telling them, with all the venom, malice and spite, to reject it. Reject it! But while he is saying “rejeck it, I eh hear one word from him about what he offer tuh de children dem. What he offered to de people dem?” Absolutely nothing!

“He say doh go into Diego Martin; doh give dem nutten.” I want to know, did he even ask the people in Diego Martin “tuh come after de flood tuh wash off de mud by jumping in de swimming pool?” And it is not the first time he does this. He is sowing the seeds of division. He said it before, on November 22, 2011. He said:
“Somewhere in Trinidad and Tobago, the Prime Minister two or three hours into a tour of flooding, maybe held six shovels and two pickaxes…and I saw an idiot little rasta boy kissing the Prime Minister’s palm. It made me sick. And if I had my way I would cut every dreadlock off him head!.. Every”—single—“one!...an idiot boy; yes, a rude little dreadlock.”

That is his attitude. The same people he brand too lazy to come in “he own house, who must not accept nothing from us, while he not giving dem anything. Belly-full man telling hungry-belly chirren, ‘hold strain, doh take nutten from dem’, while belly-full man living it high off de hog in ah four-storey multimillion-dollar mansion, living like ah king and pretending to care for the poor people in Laventille.”

Mr. President, they are not here to hear the truth. They cannot face the music. You see, Mr. President, in an article on Tuesday, September 24, 2013, this is what the Newsday reports his leader—the Opposition Leader—as saying, and I quote. He says:

Saying that the killing had to stop, Rowley said the Government only knows about the killing after it’s done, but some of you parents know about it before, and worse than that, some of you encourage it. Government looks after the externals, he said. What happens inside your homes was your responsibility. If you bring up young men and you let them believe somehow that all they have to do is lie down on your bed, eat your food, wake up any hour in the morning, look at some neighbour daughter, get she pregnant at age 14 or 16 without being able to support that child and not being able to discipline themselves in waking up, rain or shine, to have a bath, get dressed and go to work and stay there, if you don’t tell your boy children that that is the life they should lead, then they should take up the easier life and carry a gun. But of course, that only lasts until they meet the fastest gun. And he advised the mothers to tell their girl children, not even to smile at any man who has no interest in a day’s work for a day’s pay.

Mr. President: You will have to wrap up, Senator.

Sen. The Hon. A. Ramlogan SC: Yes, Mr. President. But you are not hearing that tune anymore. Those words, you do not seem to hear them anymore, Mr. President.

So, Mr. President, you know, during the course of this budget debate, a lot has been said about corruption and I hope I have demonstrated that you can believe half of what you see, half of what you hear and a quarter of what you read. The
Government is not without problems, but the Government cannot be condemned in the manner people seek to condemn it, having regard to the kind of fabrications, the kind of distortions and the kind of malicious lies that have been perpetrated, and the mantra of corruption that has been invoked time and again. When you see and you delve deeper and drill below the surface, you will see that there is more in the mortar than just the pestle.

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

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, it is now 5.27. I propose to take a tea break at this point and we will return at 6.00 p.m. This Senate now stands suspended until 6.00 p.m.

5.27 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

6.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. President: Sen. Lambert. [Desk thumping]

Sen. James Lambert: Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me to participate in this evening’s budget debate. Mr. President, before I get into what I really want to say pertaining to the budget, I have considered myself to be the voice of the small man, based on where I come from and the portfolio that I hold on the other side, notwithstanding I am speaking in the capacity this evening as a Senator.

Mr. President, I belong to the ground and that is where I deal with people at that level, throughout. I have observed, I have seen, I have read, several budget presentations over the many years since independence, and it is the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, where budgets are being presented, that I have not heard the anxiety among the small people from the ground. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I really find it strange that there is no anxiety, no one is anxious, nobody is out there—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “Fullin up dey gas tank—”

Sen. J. Lambert:—you know, lining up in gas stations, saying all sorts of things with the expectation, “what are we receiving?” It is the first time that a budget has been really supportive of the entire small people in this country. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senators: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Sen. J. Lambert: They are quite satisfied in the manner. And, Mr. President, no amount of praises is sufficient for the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the hon. Larry Howai—[Interruption]


Sen. J. Lambert:—the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and, by “de” extension, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, for really bringing and having stability and growth in the economy of this country in this short period of three years.

I really want to compliment the Minister of Finance and the Economy on his presentation, [Desk thumping] what he has delivered to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senator: Delivery.

Sen. J. Lambert: But, Mr. President, as I said, I have not heard anyone speak in terms as it relates to the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago, and I was very heartened when I heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated three things—four things that I would want to speak on: the education; partnering the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago, training and pension—those four items.

Mr. President, the foundation for education in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as commonly said, was laid by the father of our nation, the former Dr. Eric Williams, and was followed very strongly by this present Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar ever since she was made Minister of Education by the then United National Congress (UNC) which was led by the hon. Basdeo Panday.

So the sum that was really given to the Ministry of Education is a reflection on the emphasis that is being placed on education by this present People’s Partnership Government. No country in the world could survive sustainable growth and otherwise, if education is not the main pillar of growth within the country. And I really want to commend, while others would speak in terms of the large sums that have been given relative to the Ministry of Education, I think it is deserving. The question will arise: are we getting sufficient from the Ministry of Education relative to the moneys that have been spent? Because when you speak in terms of the crime in the country, it is the young people in Trinidad and Tobago that are committing the crime, who recently “leave” school and otherwise.
Appropriation Bill, 2013

Wednesday, September 25, 2013

[SEN. LAMBERT]

6.05 p.m.

And the type of education that had been meted out to them by way of the Ministry of Education providing the facilities, the teachers and so forth, when you heard the Minister of Education indicate over 100-and-something schools, 168 or something, were opened in time, but they make weather on the other side, of the few that were not opened. So, Mr. President, I am very happy to see that we continue, based on the foundation that was laid by the hon. Dr. Eric Williams, the emphasis, and taken up by this present Prime Minister to really ensure that education is on the right path in this country.

Mr. President, as I indicated, there are four concerns or four areas of the budget that have been mentioned, and I want to go straight into the partnership which was spoken about by the Minister of Finance and the Economy relative to the trade union movement. I was really happy to hear the hon. Minister say in his budget presentation that the Government will be partnering with the labour movement, to be more precise, the trade unions. One of the first things I would like to see come on board—it is what we have been bantering for over the years—the tripartite committee.

I was out of the country when the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development spoke. I am not certain, I have not read if anything of this nature was mentioned, but the time has come that we should ensure a tripartite committee which comprises Government, business and labour. It is of paramount importance that tripartism is the way to go. I was very happy earlier during the day, when Sen. Drayton mentioned: “What is happening with the tripartite committee that is supposed to come on board?”

Mr. President, the labour movement has continued to be a main component as it relates to the development and growth of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, the labour movement speaks on behalf of every worker, but most importantly, the small man and, by extension, the labour movement is the voice of the poor man in any country, including Trinidad and Tobago. The economy and the growth that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has intimated during his presentation, that could only have come about because of the industrial peace that presently exists.

Hon. Senator: Good point.

Sen. J. Lambert: While emphasis has been placed on CEPEP and URP, I am saying that they are doing a good job, but I am saying the organized labour force in Trinidad and Tobago, sufficient emphasis is not being placed on the organized
labour force in Trinidad and Tobago. Industrial peace only could come about when the trade union movement, through their leaders, is satisfied with what is going on and, therefore, there is a large measure of dissatisfaction relative to how the organized labour force is being treated, Government after Government.

You see, all that I have said “privy”, you have to praise this present Government, the People’s Partnership Government, because it is the only Government that appears to us, that has given consideration to the labour movement, and that is a fact. [Desk thumping] Because if it was not for this present Government, we still would have been in the problems that we have continued, where this Government has been able to ensure and resolve over 60-something negotiations [Desk thumping] in this country, and that is something that was inherited by the former Government. But I am still saying that plenty more has to be done.

Mr. President, I am saying that, yes, we have negotiations. We took the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Finance and the Economy before the budget was presented, that is, for 2011—2013, and whilst it will expire on December 31 of this year, come the 1st of January of 2014—2016, another negotiation is on the table. So it is of paramount importance that we do not find ourselves in what we have found it to be before 2010, to have this set of negotiations lapping over and over and it is not being resolved. But I am happy to announce that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has intimated to me quite clearly, based on the discussions that we had—We did in fact have one meeting with the CPO and, therefore, he is expecting that shortly we would meet with the CPO to ensure that we resolve the situation for 2011—2013.

But, Mr. President, it goes beyond that. It is not only the monetary aspect of the negotiations. We have to understand that a negotiation that is supposed to have taken place by way of collective bargaining every three years is a contract between the employees in the public sector and the Government and, therefore, there are units of Government that are responsible, and the Act provides for the CPO. Mr. President, if you allow me, I will just quickly read what is the role of the CPO, and that is the question that is being asked by all workers out there, the role and function of the CPO.

Mr. President, the role and function of the CPO as it relates to the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01, Act 23 of 1972, very quickly:

“For the purpose of this Act—

(a) the Chief Personnel Officer, referred to in section 13 of the Civil Service Act, shall be deemed to be the employer of any worker employed by the Government;
(b) where a person engages the services of a worker for purpose of providing those services to another, then, such other person shall be deemed to be the employer of the worker under a labour only contract.

For the purposes of this Act, the Chief Personnel Officer, referred to in section 13 of the Civil Service Act, shall be deemed of the employer of”—every—“worker employed by the Municipal…”—Corporations.

Mr. President, I read this particular part of the Act, just to emphasize the importance of the CPO’s office, CPO’s department. And the question arises: what sort of recommendation that the CPO is giving to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, which is the line Ministry, as it relates to the CPO’s office?

Mr. President, it was the very said CPO’s office that was there. Time and time again, why the negotiations that have been from since 2007—2010 were not resolved, only when the People’s Partnership Government came into power we were able to see some light.

Sen. Maharaj: “Dey wasn’t interested in that one.”

Sen. J. Lambert: Again, we are finding ourselves in the said situation and, as I have said before, it is not only the monetary aspect of the collective agreement, it also entails the social aspect of this agreement.

Mr. President, I have for example, the CPO deemed to be the employer according to the Act, but, yet, outside of that, the CPO is not aware of what is happening out there and I have a fine example. I am sorry that Sen. Beckles is out because she is from Arima. The organized labour force has not been expanded from since “Satan was a little boy”.

Hon. Senator: Satan! [Laughter]

Sen. J. Lambert: It continues to be this. This is serious. The prominent status of the organized labour force in the public sector has not been improved, it has not increased.

Hon. Senator: It gone down.

Sen. J. Lambert: The Arima borough came into being from since then, had started with 155 permanent workers when it was only one square mile. It has developed to four square miles, Mr. President, and it still remains 155 permanent workers. How on earth one could expect the level of productivity that is supposed to serve the burgesses in the area, that 159 [sic] permanent workers will be sufficient with a few regular workers to take care from one square mile to four square miles?
We have made every effort, Mr. President, through the CPO’s office, investigation, people went up, all sort of things, and to no avail. The Diego Martin Regional Corporation—there are approximately 100,000 residents living in Diego Martin, 255 permanent workers, but you hear on the other side, people speak in terms about the amount of flooding. While the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is responsible for the main watercourse like the river, but the attributes is the responsibility of the corporation—[ Interruption ]


Sen. J. Lambert:—and if the—[ Interruption ] Yes, the tributaries, sorry, is responsible—and if no one takes care of the tributaries, what would happen? Everything will flow and flooding will take place.

Mr. President, so I want to ask the question: what is the role of the CPO’s office? What sort of recommendation that is being made? They are commonly called [ Inaudible ], and oppressors, and the CPO’s department—I am not dealing with the persons; I am dealing with the department. The CPO—and that is something that we inherited. It is not something that happened today. It is something that has been ongoing over the years, and Ministry or the line Minister I am saying, ought to have a review in the manner in which the CPO’s department organize themselves, as it relates to the daily-rated workers out there. Because, Mr. President, the CPO speaks in terms as it relates to the municipal corporations.

Let me take the municipal corporations. Every three years, you meet with the CPO and you negotiate, but they are negotiating on something that they do not have a clue of what is going on out there. Not a clue. All that they do—you have grievance procedures, you have disciplinary codes and all those things are being brought there, but when you get there, all that the CPO will say, “No! No to this, no to this, no to that.” And I am saying, Mr. Minister of Finance and the Economy, look at something that has—

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I wish to indicate that this Senate do now sit until the completion of the business at hand.

Question put.

Hon. Senator: Aye!
Hon. Senator: Division. “Leh we check on the other side, nah.”

Question agreed to.

Mr. President: Sen. Lambert. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Senator: “Want to check. Whey Hinds and them? Time for division dey gone.”

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014) BILL, 2013

Sen. J. Lambert: Mr. President, look at even the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Sometimes I ask myself, that maybe the Parliament needs a trade union or they need trade union representation. Because you have to realize that the trade unions see after the terms and conditions of the employment of the worker, and everything that we do or does in this country, it entails labour. Sometimes it is very disheartening to know that you have to come here from 10.00 and sit to 3.00 next morning, and there are no conditionalities that take care, as I have heard Sen. Roach indicate the last time.

The remuneration package also, it is almost meaningless, from not only the Senators, but we speak in terms from the Prime Minister down. When the pittance that is being paid to Ministers, Prime Ministers, Senators, it is real ridiculous because they have no representation. So therefore there is need to have some amendment to the Constitution to take care of that.

6.20 p.m.

In the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, there are people who are working 25 years and they are not permanent, they are still deemed to be regular. What is happening? What is the CPO department doing relative to recommendation to ensure security of tenure?

Sen. Deyalsingh: Sen. Lambert, could I ask you a question, please? Sen. Lambert, the usefulness, or use, lack thereof, of the CPO that you are speaking of, is this an official government policy that you are speaking on that the CPO’s office should be reviewed?

Sen. J. Lambert: No, no, no, I cannot speak, I am not a Minister. I am not in Cabinet to speak in terms of officially if it is that.

Hon. Senators: “Ahhhh!” [Desk thumping]

Sen. J. Lambert: I am saying that we as a union—
Sen. Maharaj: Nice try!

Sen. J. Lambert:—the CPO has the rights to negotiate because according to law, the CPO’s office is deemed to be the employer, and the CPO is the one who has to make representation to the Government relative to the work that which they are being paid or the department is supposed to see after. This is on the basis that we always use Arima borough as the example.

When you go to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Sen. Terrence Deyalsingh, the first thing the Ministry of Finance and the Economy is after is the permanent workers. Moneys are being allocated first and foremost. The budget makes representation for this and it is only when there is something left, regular or casual workers will get. But the whole idea is: how could you have a department seeing after the affairs when you have a certified certificate where you are being recognized by an arm of Government, registration and certification board, that a certificate is given to the trade union to negotiate and operate as the representative of the workers in the public sector. Therefore, the question I am asking: what is the role? What are they doing?

Workers down in the Ministry of Transport, they are there 25 years, not permanent, as a repeat with Diego Martin and Arima—155 workers when it was one square mile. Sen. Beckles was the representative up there for years and she knows that. Therefore, the time has come when we should take the opportunity in this short space of time—what I am saying here now is not attributed directly to this Government, it is something—in three years, they have done so much. How much more can they do in that short space of time? [Desk thumping] Those who were there, years upon years, and “yuh come here to condemn the Government by ‘yuh getting flood in Diego Martin’, this is not happening”.

There is a perception in the country that the organized daily rated workers, “they lazy”. Mr. President, if you happen one day to be passing, take the time off, you might see some workers by the side of the road and ask the question: how it is I have been passing days upon days and you still the said place, what is happening? The female workers as daily rated workers in the public sector still have to go to the bushes to empty their bowels. No provisions, no facilities! How could one that has been working for the State for 20 years—and therefore you are not certain if you would be fired or terminated tomorrow—you have no facilities, no changing of clothes, nothing at all, but you speak in terms of they are not producing and emphasis is being placed.

When you walk on the side of the road, you go up the priority or elsewhere,
while the CEPEP workers “and them” would be working, you would see they have canvas protecting themselves, they have shirts, they have cap—they have everything. The organized labour force that is certified by Government and working for over the years, nothing, no expansion, no extension, and the time has come that I am appealing that something must be done. Something must be done with this department that you call the CPO’s office.

Mr. President, I am saying that the negotiations that we are about to conclude for 2011—2013 must be done expeditiously. Let us avoid having this unpleasantness of the trade union that is organized, because it is much easier for the trade union movement to motivate and mobilize people that could create unpleasantness. You would not get that in CEPEP and URP because they are not organized. What is being done with CEPEP “and thing” is contractual arrangement and the whole country and the world knows as it relates to contract that the contractors are only concerned about what profits could come to their pockets. But if you ensure that the tools and the equipment are given to the organized labour force in the country of which the State is paying, you will have better results. You cannot, by any stretch of imagination, continue to say that the people are not producing when there are no tools, no equipment, no facilities, nothing whatsoever.

Even in the very schools that the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and so forth used to be doing in the past, whenever the contractors go out there and do their job, it is the organized labour force because the type of work that is being done by contractors, it necessitates for the organized labour force to go and do remedial work on some of those things, but no emphasis is being placed.

That is the reason I said previously that I am anxiously awaiting, as has been tabled by the new Minister of Local Government, to ensure the reform of local government because the Ministry of Local Government ought not to continue to be a tool by any Government that is in power. Come and change the status quo and say, “Well, you will now operate with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure” because why? Local government is not inserted in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago; all the other Ministries are.

Local government plays a pivotal role as it relates to the communities in this country first and foremost. I would be fully aware of how they operate. I had been a local government representative for 10 years and I am fully aware. While with all due respect to MPs, Parliament representatives, the first line of defence is local government that the people see you on a day-to-day basis every minute of the day from in church to the school to everywhere; every problem that they have. Minister Coudray could tell you that. Every problem that they have lies on the feet of the local government first.
and foremost. So therefore, I am waiting anxiously to ensure that the reform of local government comes into being.

Mr. President, another aspect: the pension plan. I was happy also again to hear this Minister of Finance and the Economy make a pronouncement on pension plan for daily rated workers. How uncomfortable that it would be that you have given your entire working life to the State, and at the end of your working life is what the union negotiates, what we call severance. The difficulties that you have with the CPO’s department to get any improvement on that, what we just speaking about here, Mr. President, “it ent even good to mention”.

I have seen in 1994 when the PNM Government was in power, I was a local government representative, and I also was the second Deputy President General of NUGFW. They came in when the country was at the lowest ebb. The country was at its lowest ebb as it relates to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I was the one that arranged with the then President General of NUGFW based on the request of the hon. Minster at the time—he was not the Prime Minister but he was Leader of the Opposition—to meet and discuss. Then, he came—no, during the power of 1994, yes, he was in power and the point came in that the economy of the country was at its lowest ebb, and he requested from the President General of NUGFW to assist the Government by way of ensuring that the economy of the country have some growth as it relates to that and we agreed. I could never forget, it was a Carnival Friday.

The hon. Draper—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Gordon Draper!

Sen. J. Lambert: Gordon Draper was the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Senator: Administration.

Sen. J. Lambert: Administration, yes—and therefore we agreed that the retirement age for daily rated workers in central and local government and the Tobago House of Assembly should be reduced from 65 to 60 years. Therefore, the NAR Government had just come out of power and therefore if you may recall, Mr. President, there was a suspension of cost of living allowance and 10 per cent was taken away from public sector workers in Trinidad and Tobago. They had also promised—the PNM Government, notwithstanding we met at Balisier House, and they agreed that each and every worker that would have been 10 years and over at the time in 1994 would have been deemed to be permanent. The only promise that they kept was the 10 years and over by way of a supplementary permanent
Appropriation Bill, 2013  Wednesday, September 25, 2013
[SEN. LAMBERT]
cadre—everything else. So PNM Government is known for promises that they never kept, never! [Desk thumping] I will never forget.

Sen. Maharaj: Not Al-Rawi!

Sen. J. Lambert: It is only when the UNC Government came into in 1995 when the snap election was called, we were able to have a permanent cadre address resolved. We were able to get back the cost of living allowance.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “You was not a PNM then?”

Sen. J. Lambert: I was!

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Orrr!”

Sen. J. Lambert: I was a councillor, but the way how PNM operates is not like how I would be free to go to the Prime Minister of the People’s Partnership Government, rope used to be around the tent. [Desk thumping] “Although you is ah local government, yuh cyah see Manning.” Nobody—you will know. He was not the type of person that would listen to anybody, only his close friends “and them”, so you could not tell them anything.

Sen. Maharaj: Now the rope around the leader now.

Sen. J. Lambert: Now, you could go to any Minister in the People’s Partnership Government, go to the Prime Minister and she would listen to you.

Mr. President, the retirement age was lower—central and local government and the Tobago House of Assembly. But I am appealing today to the Minister of Finance and the Economy that is present that the workers in central and local government and the Tobago House of Assembly must be sent back for retirement purposes of 65 years. The reason for that is there is no equity as it relates to that. It is only the daily rated workers in central and local government that go home at 65. There are other daily rated workers, Amalgamated, contractors in San Fernando, cooperate bodies, WASA, “all ah them, they goes at 65”. “They goes at 65 years.”

Why it is that the workers in central and local government and Tobago House of Assembly must suffer, go home because, when you go to NIS and old age pension, notwithstanding that you go home at 50, you have nothing to get until you have attained the age. Not only that, the time has come that we must realize that the country has to continue with sustainable development and growth.

6.35 p.m.
I have just returned from Germany last week and “ah” took the time off to ask, in Aken, “ah” went to Aken, “ah” went to Düsseldorf, “ah” went to Cologne and, Mr. President, they retire at 67 years, and they are contemplating to go at 70. And because of the situation in—even the islands, even some of the islands like Dominica and elsewhere, we are part of the CPSA’s body, Caribbean Public Service Association and Public Service International, and up the islands most of them is 65. Barbados—

Hon. Senator: Sixty-seven.

Sen. J. Lambert:—who is close to us, 67. Barbados is 67, and because of our circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago where all the younger workers are dying out on a daily basis, we are asking, I think that you owe that to us—while you inherit it—but I do believe then that you have to so advise the CPO’s office that NUGFW in particular, that represents central and local government and the Tobago House of Assembly, should return immediately to 65 years. [Desk thumping] We need it, otherwise you would have nobody to work. You would have nobody.

So therefore I am saying that equity must be given because we were the only union at the time that had considered the downturn of the economy of the country, because we as a union always “is” willing to work with the Government of the day to ensure—

Sen. Bharath: And you are.

Sen. J. Lambert:—and that is what I am doing. While you would have had some other trade union leaders, some of them have lost their way, but I am saying when the time comes the membership would deal with them. But there are unions out there that “is” willing to ensure, first and foremost, the country.

Sen. Bharath: Responsible.

Sen. J. Lambert: Responsible trade union leaders are still out there. So I am appealing to you, Mr. Minister of Finance and the Economy, which falls under your purview or portfolio, because it is within the proposals that we have been sending to the CPO’s office for many years because we have realized that it is unfair to have—all of us are daily rated public sector workers. Minister Coudray, I always mention her name, she is very versed as it relates to local, she knows—they go to 65, everybody else.

If we had sacrificed to assist the State as it relates to the downturn in the economy why should we continue to suffer? And we have fine examples from within the region and within our own island, people that “benefits” that “goes” to 65.

Mr. President, the pension; how could one continue to operate without a pension fund for daily rated workers? Not all daily rated workers, because the corporate bodies
do have pension. Mr. President, allow me to just mention something, and I would start with the housing, "ah" just want to show the love that my friends on the other side perpetrate at times and purport that they so love the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President this is Act No. 24 of 2005.

"An Act to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation and for related matters

[Assented to 13th September, 2005]"

And hear what excerpts from the Act indicate:

"The Corporation shall, within two years of the appointed day, establish a pension fund plan.

All employees of the Corporation are eligible to be members of”—that—"pension fund plan.”

Mr. President, 2005. It indicates quite clearly in 39:

“Subject to the Industrial Relations Act, the Public Services Association of Trinidad and Tobago and National Union of Government and Federated Workers shall be deemed to be certified recognized majority unions under Part III of the Industrial Relations Act for the bargaining units comprising the monthly paid and daily paid employees of the Corporation.”

Mr. President, the People’s National Movement were the ones in Government when this Act came into being from NHA to the Housing Development Authority. The Act provides that since 2007, two years—it is quite clear; I did not write it, we did not negotiate it, it is in the Act—that they should have a pension plan placed in the fund. Mr. President, up to today, but before I even go further, when the then managing directors were there, nothing was done, nothing was done. They prepared something for the actuaries that relegated the daily rated workers from over 1,000—400 under the People’s National Movement, and each and every one, if the plan had come into being, “will go home by attrition”.

So we would have ended with no worker in the HDC. All that they would have had is contractual arrangement, but it speaks in terms of the love that they have for the people and the working class of Trinidad and Tobago. And they are seeing themselves as the incoming government—for whom—[Interruption]

**Sen. Maharaj:** Themselves.

**Sen. J. Lambert:**—but themselves.

**Sen. Maharaj:** Friend and family.
Sen. J. Lambert: Mr. President, it is only through the introduction of one Ms. Jearlean John who is presently the Managing Director of HDC, that when we approached her pertaining to the pension plan—because we took it to the court; we went to the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro-enterprise Development and it was unresolved and we took it to the Industrial Court—and when we saw the contents of what was done by her predecessor relative to that pension plan, she “says” no and she asked of NUGFW “let us hold our hands” and we “redo” or reviewed the whole thing and then the proper things were put in place, because we realize that we are presently in 2013, that should have taken place in 2007, and up to this day nothing has been done notwithstanding—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: Wicked PNM.

Sen. J. Lambert:—that the PNM came to Parliament and passed an Act on behalf. And the Housing Development Corporation, “I does say, outside of energy, is the one that is the brainchild with the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.” Never before in the history so many people in one period have gotten houses. [Desk thumping] When you get out there they would have had people that applied for 15, 20, 30 years—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: Cries of the [Inaudible]

Sen. J. Lambert:—and nothing was given. I had the opportunity of going to Pleasantville up there and when you see the quality of work that was done with all those houses, it is shameful, and it was done by contractors.


Sen. J. Lambert: Mr. President, after remedying the documents relative for the pension for those daily rated workers at the Housing Development Authority, it is now, I have been advised—and I spoke to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, “ah had a document that ah was supposed to bring, ah forgot”—that it is at inland revenue over a year. Everything was done by Ms. Jearlean John and her team of administrators there to make sure, because she knows, based on the Act, that “we have withhold the continuation of the court matter because we see there was a willingness, an effort by the MD to ensure that she put it in its perspective”, but it is on the desk of somebody in inland revenue over a year.

So how are we operating? How are we operating? Therefore, I am appealing to the Minister of Finance and the Economy again to do his utmost, I know he has plenty work at hand, to ensure that this goodly person who has the document up there, to please do what has to be done that we could take it out from the court.
Mr. President: Hon. Senator—the speaking time of Sen. Lambert 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.

Mr. President: Senator Lambert. [Desk thumping]

Sen. J. Lambert: Thank you kindly. Mr. President, I have the final one out of four: training. It is paramount, it is important that training must be done. You cannot continue to run an institution anywhere without proper training. Mr. President, when one goes for a particular job, whether it is a profession and so forth, you will always have a probationary period that they allow you to see what could be done, “how yuh does it” and how well you do.

Mr. President, daily rated workers in Trinidad and Tobago, all the bad things that you will hear about them, “has never been trained”. And when you go out there “you would surprise to see” the quality of work that is being done by the labour force. Yes, you hear Government upon Government will emphasize the quick spots and “dem”, contract, contract, contract, but contract is not the order of the day. Contract is for singular people. The person who is the contractor benefits.

Mr. President, I have just had the opportunity—“before ah go there”, in 2002—2004, the NUGFW, through the vision of the negotiator, which included myself at the time, saw it fit that we will put aside from that negotiation that took place in 2002—2004, $1 million for the purpose of training daily rated workers in the public sector. We took the opportunity, and I am happy the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training is here, he was the chairperson I believe or the director of the NTA. He had a visitation in our office preparing to have workers trained.

The CPO again kept this $1 million that was negotiated “and nothing wasn done”, absolutely nothing pertaining to the development of the human resource of this country. Mr. President, the greatest investment that any Government could do throughout the world is the human resource. “Doh matter how much buildings, how much roads”, if the human resource is not developed your country will not have growth and sustainable development; it will not. You have to develop the human resource.

Now I am the President General of NUGFW “ah put in the proposal since 2008, nothing wasn done.” We had two meetings recently and it was alarming, it was shocking to hear when we questioned what has happened to the $1 million that we
had put aside for training, to my amazement the CPO's representative indicate it has accrued to $7 million—$7 million!

So therefore, Mr. President, “ah just want to emphasize” because we are pursuing it vigorously in this collective agreement that we are negotiating there to ensure that the workers that we carry out there—because every job and every work in Trinidad and Tobago and the world is important. Because those who clean the drain and cut the grass and have the sidewalks and “ting” prepared, if they are not there—everybody cannot be lawyers, everybody “cyah” work in Parliament, everybody “cyah” be Senators, everybody cannot be there. Somebody has to clean the street out there otherwise epidemic will break out. We will not be able to walk the streets. So therefore they are also important.

6.50 p.m.

And I am saying nothing has been done, but we will do everything possible to ensure, through the NTA. As I have said, Mr. President, the emphasis in Germany is on training. The purpose we want to—BGE—“ah know ah cyah remember the first one but ah think it is” Government Education—so skills and training workers in Aken in Germany.

They are tied here, through the former government, with the MIC, Metal Industries Company up there. And, therefore, based on the training, in 2004, MIC and BGE signed a contract supported by the government. The reason I am saying that, the then Minister of Tertiary Education was in Germany and they had sent 45 in the first instance, in 2005; and in 2006, 15. So 60 people were trained in Germany, supported by the Government because I think the hon. Mustapha, I think, is his name—[Interruption]


Sen. J. Lambert: Abdul, right, was there. He did the feature address at the passing-out of those people there; and therefore, the question that I am asking: What has happened to those master craftsmen who were trained? Because this country is in dire need of people of this calibre: master craftsmen in the discipline of masonry, carpentry, mechanical engineering, construction, and, therefore, they are still here. The professor, Dr. Franz Condell is expected to visit the country at MIC on December 09. I am anxiously awaiting him.

I am of the view—because I think they met with the NTA and there is a connection but the point that I am making, how necessary it is that we should have the workers out there trained. The moneys that have been invested with
those master craftsmen where are they, PNM? Where are they? Where have you absorbed them? Where? The people out there in the public sector need that type of training. And, therefore, the importance of us—before we sit and we criticize, we must ensure that we put all the mechanisms in place that the people should be trained. Training is of paramount importance to us.

Mr. President, the negotiations I will get back on. It is important for the people out there, because, while we speak in terms of just a negotiation, people, the social aspect of it is of paramount importance to us. The workers out there, not only—you have NUGFW, you have Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, you have TIWU, you have postal, you have the other unions that have not concluded. You have contractors in San Fernando.

I have just been telling sister Coudray there that I heard the president for contractors is not well. She knows him well because they worked together. We need those negotiations.

The RHAs, the Regional Health Authorities. When Dr. Fuad came here you saw I went out there. It was to ensure, because it expires on the 31st. That contract between the employee and the employer is of paramount importance—[Desk thumping]—to enable peace to prevail for the continuation of the growth and development of this country. And I an appealing, Mr. President, with those few words and I want to thank you and thank the hon. Senators. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Marlene Coudray):**

Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity for joining this debate on the budget presentation of the Minister of Finance and the Economy for fiscal 2013/2014. In this regard, I offer by profoundest congratulations to our Minister of Finance and the Economy for a comprehensive and efficient job in this budget. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, while this might be my first contribution in this debate as Minister of Local Government, it is in no way my first contribution to the Ministry of Local Government. I have spent the greater part of my working life in local government, first as a practitioner and this was followed by two years as the Mayor of the City of San Fernando. So I come here fully aware of what Sen. Lambert just spoke, in terms of the issues, challenges and problems in local government from both sides of the divide, from the administrative side and certainly from the political side.

Mr. President, the Ministry of Local Government is tasked with the responsibility of coordinating 14 municipal corporations in Trinidad. There are
two cities, three boroughs and nine regions, but they are all referred to as municipalities.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Local Government has assumed certain responsibilities, in terms of some major issues in local government, and on behalf of corporations, because the Ministry of Local Government exists solely on account of the municipal corporations. And when we get into the debate about the modernization of local government, we will, more or less deal then with the role of the Ministry of Local Government and the autonomy of these 14 corporations set up under that statute, Act 21 of 1990, the Municipal Corporations Act.

The corporations provide the essential services and as we say, they are the first respondent in any issue involving communities and, therefore local government is essential and it is the de jure and de facto, the closest thing to the people of Trinidad, in terms of the municipal corporations.

Mr. President, the following pieces of legislation complement the Municipal Corporations Act, and they are the Public Health Ordinance—and I am specifically referring to these—the Litter Act, Malaria Abatement Ordinance, the Dogs Act, the Exchequer and Audit Act, the Highways Act, the Valuation of Land Act, the Country Markets Act, Burial Grounds Act, Crematorium Ordinance, Recreation Ground and Pastures Act, the Town and Country Planning Act and the Advertisement Regulations Ordinance. And within all these pieces of legislation, you will find some of the issues that confront local government and the people of Trinidad on a daily basis, with respect to local government service.

In addition to the 14 municipalities, the Ministry of Local Government has responsibility—or had up to September 06—for five special purpose state enterprises and these are: the Community Improvement Services Limited, known as CISL; the Rural Development Company, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited (PSAEL); Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL); and the National Self-help Commission Limited. The East Port of Spain Development Company was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government until July of this year.

Mr. President, if I am to read out the achievements of the Ministry of Local Government—over the last fiscal year—in terms of reporting on the actual expenditure—before we go into what we propose to do for fiscal 2013/14, we might be here longer than midnight. Within the short time I have, I would just say that the Ministry of Local Government, its core values, has been to commit its time and talents to creating innovative solutions that meet and exceed customers’ needs, with respect to municipalities in Trinidad.
The key objective of the Ministry, outside of its role with respect to the 14 corporations, would be to deal with deficient infrastructural systems and community facilities within municipal corporations. This is outside of their own budgets; providing structurally designed restraints to unnatural and disturbed lands. We are talking about landslips here; and some bigger projects that the corporations might not have the capacity to deal with.

Of course, one of the main reasons would be to provide the technical support and recommendations to regional corporations, in terms of the fiscal responsibility and the responsibility of the Minister of Local Government to the Cabinet and to the Parliament for funds issued to local government bodies.

Mr. President, in reporting on the major achievements of the Ministry of Local Government over the fiscal year 2012/2013, I must now commend my predecessor, the hon. Dr. Suruj Rambachan, [Desk thumping] who has exceeded the promises and projections made to this Senate, in respect of local government. Mr. President, so that I can only restrict—based on the amount of work done by my predecessor—my contribution to reporting on the major achievements, rather than the complete list of achievements.

The first item, the upgrade of infrastructural resources, and as promised, a lot of landslips have been deal with through the Ministry of Local Government community facilities, within regional corporations and the Ministry achieved the following, in terms of its work during that fiscal year coming to an end on Monday.

Under the Market and Abattoir Programme, the Chaguanas Market, the design, in terms of market and abattoir, the design for the Chaguanas Abattoir is complete at an approximate cost of $37 million, which has been recently approved by the Cabinet. Improvement works are complete on the Point Fortin Market, the Tunapuna/Piarco Market, Mayaro Market, Princes Town, Rio Claro, Penal, and the Arima Market.

The Ministry engaged the services of CISL to manage and subcontract architects for the construction and the outfitting of the San Juan Market and this work is approximately 97 per cent complete.

The Siparia Market is complete and it was officially handed over to the Siparia Corporation on July 01, 2013. [Desk thumping] That market was furnished with facilities like 170 provision stalls, with air-conditioned meat and fish stalls, administrative offices, food court outlets and a conference room that caters for the community.

Under the Landslip Restoration Programme, the Ministry obtained approval for this programme, at a cost of $740 million and tenders were invited and in some cases awarded for the implementation of this project to be completed over the 2012/2014
period.

Mr. President, areas where contracts have been awarded: Buen Intento Road, Mc Sween Road and these are in Princes Town; Warden Road, Upper Rio Grande; Carolina; Couva; Bhagwansingh Trace; Johnson Trace; and these are all to be completed, some of them are to be completed by the end of September. Some, the tenders are now being evaluated.

Under the Bridges Rehabilitation Programme, the Ministry has constructed bridges in several areas: Murray Branch Trace; Kelly Street; Katwaroo Trace; Soomai Trace; Coura Extension; Dove Trace in Hard Bargain, Princes Town; Worrell Road; Robert Village; Rampersad Trace in Penal, Ravine Road in Petit Valley; and Bunsee Trace among others. There are several others.

Mr. President, in terms of the administrative buildings to be occupied by municipalities, I heard the question in the other place being asked that—I think a statement was made: Where are the administrative complexes promised by the Ministry of Local Government? And that Opposition Member cited corporation headquarters in Diego Martin, Arima, Princes, Town, Penal/Debe and kept asking: Where are they? But I want to tell that Member that this Government deals with—there are issues that have to be dealt with, in terms of the—[Interruption]

Sen. G. Singh: The Vice-President.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Yes. There are issues to be dealt with—[Desk thumping]

7.05 p.m.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT in the Chair]

[Continuous desk thumping]

There are issues to be dealt with when one has to construct buildings, particularly buildings for public use, and this Government is very responsible. So issues that the PNM Government has been ignoring over the years in terms of buildings, there are processes like approvals, that is something that is alien to them; site acquisitions, there is Town and Country Planning approval. Therefore, this Government cannot walk in and just start to construct a building because sums were provided in the estimates or because it was approved in a budget presentation. So I want to inform the general public and that Member who asked the question: “Where are the buildings?” Mr. Vice-President, these buildings—in terms of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, that building was completed
Appropriation Bill, 2013

sometime ago, and the outfitting of that building is about 78 per cent completed.

The question was also asked about the Arima Borough Corporation, the progress is that their consultancy firm is on board, and work is continuing in terms of the pre-feasibility for that building.

The Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, tomorrow Cabinet will look at the proposal for that building; there had to be a site change—a change in location of that facility and the new site is now approved, and it will be taken to Cabinet tomorrow by the Minister of Local Government.

The designs have been completed for Princes Town Regional Corporation, Diego Martin Regional Corporation, as well as Arima. A Note is before the Cabinet for the approval of financing for these complexes. So to say that nothing has been done, the Ministry has been undertaking its work responsibly in terms of all these administrative buildings. [Desk thumping]

The Ministry of Local Government is also dealing with disaster management at its headquarters, and the Ministry has initiated the process for procuring special disaster management equipment. The Ministry also is coordinating the disaster management units in the 14 municipalities.

Rehabilitation work under the special purpose companies: road paving programme began, and approximately 797 roads throughout Trinidad, at an estimated cost of $310 million, were paved by the Ministry of Local Government this fiscal year. [Desk thumping] Mr. Vice-President, this is after years of neglect in terms of roads and landslips, restoration of landslip, this too, significant work was undertaken to provide access to affected communities under the landslip programme.

Integrated waste resources: the Government through the Ministry gave a commitment to modernize the waste-management system in Trinidad of all municipalities, while building a world-class, integrated, waste-resource management system. The Ministry has accomplished so far, and is in the process of revising, the waste contracts for 14 municipalities with the Solid Waste Management Company Limited. These contracts will now ensure that companies are OSHA-compliant and in accordance with international industrial relations practices.

There is the warehouse management, and a draft policy on warehouse management is under way. In terms of infrastructural development, pursuant to Government’s policy of standardized approach towards infrastructural
development, the Ministry has developed standards for markets and abattoirs, play parks, public conveniences, cemeteries and recreational facilities. So this will be done at the level of the Ministry to standardize the operations in all 14 municipalities.

Local government reform: Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry has been rolling out the new National Strategy for Sustainable Development under the Government’s seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development, of which good governance, people participation and people-centred development, form the main remit of local government. As you know, the draft modernization policy, the White Paper on local government modernization was tabled in this Senate about two weeks ago.

Municipal Investment Plans: the preparation of municipal investment plans for the 14 municipal corporations began, and this project is designed to develop a regional economic strategy for each corporation, supported by appropriate methodologies to aid the preparation of local area plans by councillors. Planning workshops have been held in this regard and a series of training modules were undertaken for councillors, aldermen and staff of municipal corporations, and these were all hosted by the Ministry of Local Government, using both in-house and external resources.

Mr. Vice-President, as I said, there are so many achievements under this Ministry—the Planning and Development of Land Bill. This Bill was being reviewed by the—we know it as PADL, and I think it is to be laid in the Senate, the revised version would be laid—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Sorry, it was laid.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: It was laid, today, was it?

Hon. Senator: Monday.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Monday? It was laid on Monday. There is a local government data centre that will provide support through iGovTT, outsource WAN, development consultancy, increase internal ICT service, assessment of the 14 municipal corporations, network infrastructure, to effect a local area network upgrade and several the initiatives under the local government data centre.

Mr. Vice-President, I now briefly move on to the 14 municipalities, and I will just touch on some of their achievements and I do so—I start with the Port of Spain Corporation in terms of the work they have done over the last fiscal: 573 metres of box drain; 2,700 metres of footpath, slipper drains, retaining walls, paved road; installation of exercise equipment, and I deliberately read out Port of Spain—backfilling and re-
grassing of an area at Knowsley Place, in preparation for a children’s play park; installation of two walk-in freezers at the central market; procurement of several vehicles; refurbishment of the Lapeyrouse Cemetery, the office there. And I say so against the background of the—I think the Member for Port of Spain South was complaining that not enough money is given to corporations, or PNM MPs and PNM corporations, and I refute this very strongly, in terms of the equity with which this Government has been providing funding for local government bodies.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to say that all the corporations have been doing similar work, in terms of the construction/rehabilitation of box drains; curb walls; culverts; pavement overlays; repairs to roads; refurbishment of its recreation grounds; improving the work environment for employees. So the 14 corporations—Point Fortin, similarly; Chaguanaus Borough Corporation; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, maintenance of roads and traces; paving of roadways; construction box drain; box culverts. Diego Martin Regional Corporation, Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, they have purchased 15 aluminium recycling bins, in addition to all the other works they have done as the corporations.

What I want to highlight here is that the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, they provided employment and they have highlighted in their report—they provided employment for 540 of their burgesses seeking employment. They have responded to 77 distress situations by their disaster management unit, and this is indeed to be commended, Mr. Vice-President.

The milestone achievement from that corporation: 17 persons were stopped from carrying out illegal logging operations within the Sangre Grande region. Three reports of kidnapping were received by the police at the regional corporation and one was solved. The two others were forwarded to Sangre Grande police. So I commend the police officers [Desk thumping] and indeed the corporation.

The San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation: paving of 18 roads; construction of 1,165 metres of box drain; 1,840 metres of curb and slipper; nine box culverts; 198 metres of retaining wall; 90 metres of footpath; completed work on 14 recreational facilities and play parks, and this work included earthworks and improvement to the outfields; establishment of car parks; construction and installation of washroom and play park equipment; repaving and refurbishment of hard-court services and pavilions; completed fitting works on the first floor of building No. 3, and this is the San Juan Market they are referring to, and the project completion date was January 2013.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the work is ongoing in every corporation: Siparia, Mayaro/Rio Claro, so that to say there is any discrimination in terms of the distribution of funds to corporations is indeed wicked and mischievous, and intended to mislead the
public and generate mistrust among the population against this Government and against the Minister of Local Government.


Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Princes Town Regional Corporation; Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, the list of achievements in terms of their roads, drains—so the 14 corporations are here, all accounted for, all accounted for the funding issued by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy for 2012/2013 fiscal.

The special purposes companies: Mr. Vice-President, they have done a lot of work in the 14 municipalities on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government, and cost of this work—$200 million. [Desk thumping] That work spanned across every electoral district: 8,214 metres of drains; 1,333 metres of sidewalk; 2,684 metres of curb wall; three retaining walls and 13 culverts; and this is in addition to the work undertaken by the 14 municipalities.

CISL contracted to assist corporations in terms of building, they have done—they do drainage works as well: road rehabilitation; building reconstruction; they have constructed the South Cocoyea—they have done the flood alleviation project in that community and that is San Fernando East, and the project has been successfully undertaken, including restoration to parks and public spaces.

PSAEL again: 500 metres of road crossing; 4,250 metres of curb and slipper drains; 5,000 metres of road rehabilitation work; 2,080 metres of box drain; 640 metres of sidewalk; 154 metres of retaining wall, and I can go on and on, Mr. Vice-President. [Desk thumping]


Hon. Senator: Local government at work.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Rural Development Company Limited: similarly 9,075 metres of road paving; 1,185 metres of box drain; 655 metres of sidewalks—all done by the special purposes companies, in the 14 municipalities on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government.

Under the Unemployment Relief Programme: the Ministry has an oversight responsibility for the URP’s core programme and the Women’s Programme and this is up to September 06, this year. During that period, last fiscal, the Ministry initiated a training programme to develop the entrepreneurial skills of interested workers who have the potential to become small-business owners. This is expected to be ongoing even though the programme is now with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Vice-President, URP provided employment opportunities for 27,000 persons from among the 38,000 registered under the programme. The Ministry of Local Government, through the URP, has undertaken the following infrastructure and Women’s Programme projects over the recently concluded—well, to be concluded on Monday, the last fiscal.

Infrastructure: 1,760 metres of box drain, and this was done under 155 projects; 11 projects to do footpaths, 1,019 metres of footpaths; 829 metres of curb and slipper drain, and this was done under 13 projects; 24 projects for retaining wall, 418 metres of retaining walls were completed; 12 projects for roadworks, 2,797 metres; they paved a panyard, that was one project; 18 metres of bleachers; 23 renovations; 65 bridges; steps; walkways; electrical insulations done under three projects.

Mr. Vice-President, under the Women’s Programme, training was done, 5,227 workers were employed in terms of that training project; and 1,517 persons also participated in three cycles of training; 1,200 persons under the URP, and we thank Minister Karim, they were assessed in National Training Agency standards and they are now awaiting certification; 1,200 persons from the URP.

The URP also facilitated a number of other persons to become facilitators in areas of food, craft, linen, drapery and floral arrangement; 20 women participated in agricultural training at St. Augustine nurseries and 10 women were involvement in seedling production in Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas.

Under maintenance: work crews were deployed in schools; public buildings; homes for the elderly; temples and churches; beautification programmes were done in a lot of other schools, and the URP played a pivotal role in terms of the clean-up exercise, both last year and this year, in terms of distribution of hampers and cooked food to the flood-stricken residents in the Diego Martin region.

National Self Help: they have been providing emergency repair/reconstruction assistance grants to several families and they provided grants for 635 homes and another 333 are being processed at this time. The commission provided materials for and monitored the construction of nine bridges in rural communities; four have been completed and five are in progress.

The National Commission for Self Help also provided material and technical support to repair and construct box drains in rural areas; 32 have been completed so far and an additional 30 are in progress; assistance was provided through the national self help to 1,090 elderly and underprivileged individuals to repair and refurbish their homes; an additional 452 are in progress.

The commission provided material for paving and lighting works and constructed...
25 retaining walls with an additional 35 retaining walls in progress. The commission provided materials, some skilled labour and equipment to pave 39 roads in rural and urban areas; an additional 11 are in progress.

Mr. Vice-President, as I said, I will spend the entire night reading out the achievements of all these different entities under the Ministry of Local Government. Solid waste: in terms of the—I had stated earlier the work they are doing with the municipal corporations, and they have launched a youth outreach programme, My Community, My Responsibility, and this was launched on February 25.

East Port of Spain Development Company: again, a lot of work in east Port of Spain and this entity was transferred to the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development in July of this year.

Mr. Vice-President, as I move to fiscal 2013/2014, I need to indicate the relationship between the Ministry of Local Government and the municipal corporations will undergo further paradigm shifts in this coming fiscal, in terms of autonomy. Many speakers have indicated the stranglehold that the last Government had put local government bodies under and, therefore, I want to say that in terms of our modernization of local government bodies, this will not be the case under a People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping]

7.25 p.m.

Of course, Mr. Vice-President, with greater autonomy will be the enhanced monitoring and evaluation by the Ministry with respect to each corporation. These shifts will not mean that the Ministry will stop implementing projects to these bodies, but it will therefore ensure that funds are spent in accordance with the mandate given by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, so that the Ministry will continue in the new fiscal—Oho, I said, Mr. Vice-President, I was referring to the charge made by the Member for, I think, Port of Spain South, in terms of the local government bodies that were not controlled or Ministries—constituencies that were not controlled by the Partnership were not given; nothing was being done in them and I say it is a lie and I want to say that this Government—I should say it is not the truth; it is so far from the truth.

I cited—I pulled some figures from the draft estimates for the years 2007—2009 and over that triennium—that was under the last administration, under the PNM—the 14 local government bodies got a total of $395,490,480 to run their operations for that three-year period. [Desk thumping] That was under the PNM Government—$395,490,480.

When the People’s Partnership Government came in from 2010, comparing three-
year periods from 2010—2012, the issues to the 14 municipalities, $646,682,851. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Senator:** Double up.

**Sen. A Singh:** It is doubled.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray:** Almost. So, Mr. Vice-President, when the Senators on the other side talked about the level of the budget and asking where the money gone and all that, I want to say that the money is being spent on the people of Trinidad and Tobago in communities. [Desk thumping]

I want to say, Mr. Vice-President, in 2007—and I am just pulling the first and the last—the allocation to the Port of Spain Corporation was $10 million to do its PSIP. Under this People’s Partnership Government, in 2013, the Port of Spain Corporation is allocated $20,600,000. [Desk thumping]

So that, the lies, the lies, we cannot continue to deal with; and fooling of the people, misleading the people, making the people feel that they are being oppressed by this Government, it is a dangerous thing and therefore we are putting on the record all the work that this Government is doing.

In all the areas that the corporations have operated, as I said—burial grounds, local government reform, waste management, public buildings—work will continue apace in this new fiscal year to serve the needs of all our communities in Trinidad.

But, Mr. Vice-President, the Government is committed to the modernization of the local government system in this country and we are serious about it and we are very much aware of what is being done and said outside there to discredit this Government; but I assure you that we will bring local government to the people in a more meaningful, friendly and timely manner.

I want to say that I sat in amazement listening to the Opposition trying to put fear in people’s minds in terms of saying that the Government is planning to reintroduce property tax in this country. In fact, they were so certain—they were saying it with so much conviction—that the Government has no alternative; the Government must introduce the property tax. I sat and I wondered why they were so convinced; why they were making those statements with so much conviction, and I threw my mind back to that period in terms of what was happening in local government to determine why they are so sure. I tried to retrace the sequence of events and then it hit me.

The PNM, somewhere between 2009 and 2010, arranged to seize the books,
the house rate books of every municipal corporation in Trinidad that had been collecting house rates under the mandate given to them in Act 21 of 1990. They seized the books, so by the time the Partnership Government came into being and the then Minister of Finance announced in the House that that Property Tax Act would be repealed, they knew that there were no records—well they thought there were no records in all the corporations, but I can tell you one corporation still has its records intact. When they came to seize books, I was still the CEO of the San Fernando Corporation and, to my mind, you do not wipe out 100 years or more of history and records.

**Hon. Senator**: My God!

**Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray**: So that the corporations were collecting house rates for properties. They have the stock of properties, the stock of assets and you come, you introduce a Property Tax Act and you come and tell people, “Give me all your books.”

The question was asked of them: when I give you—these books have records up to 2009. The law you have just passed starts in 2010, January 01, 2010, so people who have filed objections and all the records of people who have outstanding arrears to get back, after people file objections, the objections are determined by the Commissioner of Valuations and they tell you whether to refund or whether the people have to pay. All those records are in the house rate books and in the books and records of the corporation. They sent in people and they wanted all the books and they more or less seized them because you did not have a say.

I know in one corporation they were told you can make as many copies of whatever is there. It was an illegal act to take any records prior to 2010, so that I know one corporation that could restart, but of course, you would not want to penalize the people of San Fernando because their officers stood up to the abuse that was taking place in terms of, “give me your books”.

**Hon. Senator**: What they did with those records?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray**: Well, nobody knows, and corporations I know—with the repeal of the Property Tax Act—were trying to retrieve records and they were telling the property tax section they do not have them and all sorts of excuses were made.

I am saying this is why the Opposition could stand up there and boast that they have to go to that system, but I will tell you something about the system. Mr. Vice-President, everyone knows, from anywhere in the world that you are, that
removal of such a tax from local government bodies more or less will cripple them. That is what gives you your cash flow and allows you to collect your revenue in-house. From time immemorial, all corporations, all municipalities—that is how local government works. You rate properties and you get your tax, and this was taken away. This is a mainstay in local government bodies so it was the start of things to come for local government bodies.

In 2009, the level of motivation was so low, people were demoralized. They were hearing things, in terms of all these documents tabled in Parliament to transform and change local government, and all that was doing was removing the whole cadre of daily rated workers of which Sen. Lambert just spoke. They were eroding everything local government and we do not know what was left but we knew there was no governance in the model and people sat and wondered what next and what would happen.

So that they sat down there and they are now telling people that they must take it because they know those are the records they reconstructed. Mr. Vice-President, I want to put on the records of this Senate what was worked out for homeowners throughout this country. That Property Tax Act—and I am going to say it again; I am going to repeat it—it was really against the small man and benefited those property owners who had buildings to tenant. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Senator:** Like Al-Rawi.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray:** What that method of taxation sought to do, they went into areas—and these are actual rates based on what they were proposing—so in the area of Gulf View, La Romaine, Les Efforts East, La Romaine, that is an electoral district, what they did, they went into that community and they said, “Okay, all these houses there we are going to put a projected monthly rental value of $10,000 and you will pay rates of”—and they had worked out certain scenarios and I am using the lowest scenario they worked out, 3 per cent.

7.35 p.m

And on a 3 per cent of $10,000, a house owner had to pay $3,450 a year as the new property tax. But, Mr. Vice-President, this house owner, under the system used by the corporation, the annual house rate payable was $1,598.19. So it meant that that person who lived in their own house—owner-occupied property—the tax was increased, the property tax—[Interruption]

**Sen. Senator:** A hundred per cent.
Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Over 100 per cent—$1,640.

Hon. Senator: Umm.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: That is the increase, from $1,598 to $3,450. A resident next door who is renting out the house and the actual rent collected on that property was $21,700 per month—the total is $156,240 a year—that person was also assessed at a rental value, the $10,000 rental value, not the actual rent collected. So that person was paying the same $3,450. That is what is called commercial rates.

You are renting out your property, you pay 8 per cent of the rental value less any deductions you got for whatever you provided on the site, that person is paying the same $3,450 as the person who is living in his own house. So that person was paying $12,499.20 in house rates before, and that person’s house rate went to $3,450, decreased by $9,259. And, Mr. Vice-President, I can go on and on in terms of what was happening to the small family, the small man, the ordinary public servant, teacher who was—[Interuption]

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Mr. Vice-President, may I intervene, just at this point? I just wanted to get it clear—thank you, hon. Minister for giving way—from the hon. Minister, whether it is the policy of the Government that any property tax levied on the homeowner will be used to finance the expenditures of local government bodies, and local government bodies only, as opposed to being transferred to central government. Thank you very much.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Mr. Vice-President, local government bodies; the taxes, the property, the house rates stayed with the local government bodies. They are not transferred but, of course, it is offset against the subvention based on your total allocation. If you collected more than you proposed, these are measures that can be put in place to retain those earnings but you have to make the necessary applications. That can happen.

So, Mr. Vice-President, you look at the other end, Battoo Avenue and places like Pleasantville, where someone is an owner-occupied—there is a rating charged by the Commissioner of Valuations for owner-occupied properties—and for rental properties you were using the actual rent. So you had properties where it was being rented in a low-end area I took for $1,200 a month, and even that person with that low rent, their tax went from $1,632 because it was commercial and that went down to $787.32.

So, Mr. Vice-President, to come and fool people to say that we are bringing back this draconian law, this Government said no such thing. This Government has said that we will revert to what the house rates were and this is using the rating chart issued by
the Commissioner of Valuations and using the actual rents collected on rented properties—[\textit{\textbf{Interuption}}]

\textbf{Mr. Vice-President}: Senator.

\textbf{Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray}: Sorry.

\textbf{Mr. Vice-President}: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Minister Marlene Coudray has expired.

\textit{Motion made}: That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes.

[\textit{Hon. G. Singh}]

\textit{Question put and agreed to.}

\textbf{Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray}: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to just put the public mind at ease. This method is the methodology used under the property tax system, that was rejected by this Government and will never be implemented under this People’s Partnership Government. [\textit{Desk thumping}]

\textbf{Sen. G. Singh}: “Yeah man.”

\textbf{Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray}: So that records or no records, the municipalities will be allowed—to those who do not have any records—to collect the actual records, set back up their database because this is very important, you know. Mr. Vice-President, when you take away such records—those records are used per certain other—you have a register of ownerships—you have a municipality, you must know who are the owners of properties in your municipalities. Your house rate books, you know, the public health department, when you have to go out there and assess households—the number of households in your communities in terms of scavenging operations, in terms of water, any service you have to provide, you have to have an idea of the households and how they are configured and this is what that did.

People who have vacant overgrown lots, the house rate cards were used to find the owners, issue notices to them, and if they did not clean, the corporations would clean and put the charge on the house rate cards of the property. That is what local government is about. So just to remove it willy-nilly like that, local government ended up in a mess because nobody knew what to do, nobody told anyone anything. The staff was left in the assessment departments where they existed, and everything else was moved out. So that local government—so our Ministers, having taken office from 2010, have done remarkably well, in terms of restoring some semblance of local government, and some semblance motivating the employees of local government to do the job on behalf of the people.
So, Mr. Vice-President, it is a Herculean task for this Government to enter to restore all these records, and to allow the corporations to collect their house rates, and we will have to sit down—it will be—but it is doable, and we are going to do it. We shall do it.

Someone talked about, “And we are going to raise it”, but section 85 of the Act says in every triennial year, you do revaluations of all your stock of properties in your municipalities. So whatever the revaluation shows up—whether properties went down or up—that is a normal part of the assessment function. So to tell people this will go up and that will go up, it will only go up based on the revaluation of properties.

But in the few minutes I have left, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to say that this Government is very mindful of the concerns of ordinary citizens within communities, and in terms of the local government function. We were talking about structure in terms of we have all “kinda” nice words and everything in terms of putting structures in place to deal with the functions and all that, but we have to service people, ordinary people, in communities and we have taken on board the concerns of the ordinary citizens, the things that affect their everyday life. So while we do the structure, and we put things in place; we are mindful that in several communities, people are troubled by vacant overgrown lots in their neighborhoods that harbour insects and pests, and local government has to reconfigure itself to deal with these issues; they are abandoned, dilapidated.

Talk to anyone in any neighbourhood, there is some building next to someone—all the time—abandoned dilapidated buildings with overgrown bushes and where criminal elements gather. There are trees: there are several public nuisance issues in terms of trees overhanging on streets that pose a danger to passerby, to the public. People have issues with water and other effluents coming from one property to the next. These are things—these are everyday things that confront communities that local government has to deal with.

We have spray painting garages in communities—people with welding, furniture factories, machine shop—all these are in residential neighbourhoods and people put up with them and nothing—people seem to be helpless in dealing with them.

People burn: there are some people who burn garbage and waste all day, half the night, the resulting smoke that affects people—smoke-filled neighbourhoods for hours—and these are issues that are taking place without regard for the health and welfare of others, and we intend to address them in this coming year under local government.
I spoke about property tax just now. We have instances—and over the years I sat in local government in the system, and you have pensioners coming to you saying, “I cannot pay my house rate as small as it was”, and these people served this country—whether in the public service or privately—and they have retired and they are down in years. They own a house, and one of the examples for people in the north is the Diamond Vale Estate where the value of those properties skyrocketed, and that was a middle-class public service “kinda” neighbourhood and people can no longer pay property rates and taxes. And what is the Government—as a government, as local government—doing to assist these people, these retired persons who gave their life, who gave their service to this country, and we have to find ways and means, and we intend to find ways and means in terms of local government to deal with that. [Desk thumping]

People get ill, they “doh” sleep, they cannot maintain their homes and they cannot pay their house rates and they come to you. They come and they sit in front of you and say, “But do not put up my house for sale”, because that is part of the law. If you do not pay by the following year, after two years of unpaid house rates, the council can put up your property for sale and people actually get ill.

So, Mr. Vice-President, we intend to handle a lot of the bigger things, but we will not neglect the people issues and the things that affect people, the everyday people, to give them a better life. And this is when we say we are bringing Government to the people, we are addressing the needs of people in communities in terms of the local government system.

And, to this end, Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry will introduce a comprehensive real-time contact platform whereby persons in communities—no matter how remote these communities are—can call a three-digit number to access local government service.

Mr. Vice-President, local government services will be truly local under this Government. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity and I wish all my colleagues a safe flight home. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Beckles. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Pennelope Beckles:** Thank you very much, Mr. President—[ Interruption]

**Hon. Senator:**—Vice-President.

**Sen. P. Beckles:**—Vice-President. I join this debate in the Senate on our Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Bill, 2013. I think I am probably the third-to-last or second-to-last. It should just be a few—[Crosstalk]
Sen. Dr. Balgobin:—or last?

Sen. P. Beckles: Or last. [Laughter] No, I am not the last. There are a couple things that I would like to deal with. Some have been discussed before, but there are certain issues that I would like to raise. Now, there is really just one thing that I would like to comment on—on the last speaker—because some of the statements made as it relates to the persons from the last administration going to corporations and removing documents and things 100 years old and so forth, you know—[Interruption]

Sen. Coudray: Mr. Vice-President—

Sen. G. Singh: On a point of clarification.

Sen. Coudray: On a point of clarification, please. Mr. Vice-President, I never said persons from the last administration. I said under the last administration a decision was taken to remove the records.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yes, Mr. Vice-President, as I was saying, then the persons would have been persons who were working under the last administration. When such comments are made that documents and so have been removed with a 100-year value, there are certain things you hear that you rather not even comment on so, you know, because I know that is not a simple issue, and someone like yourself who knows how the public service operates that would be really a very difficult task.

7.50 p.m.

But having said that, the one comment that I would respond to is that the hon. Minister said that the PNM is making people feel that they are being oppressed, and you know, Mr. Vice-President, one of the things about Trinidadians and Tobagonians, we have the good fortune now of having a very literate society. People are very conscious about politicians, about politics; they are very conscious about what is going on in the society, and whether it be the PNM, the UNC, the ILP, the COP, the MSJ, nobody cannot make people feel they are being oppressed. If this Government is oppressing the people, they know that they are being oppressed. [Desk thumping] Right? Nobody has to make them feel they are oppressed.

So that when we see the results from Tobago in January, Chaguanas West recently, the local government next month, and St. Joseph, the people of Trinidad and Tobago will confirm that this Government has been a Government of oppression. [Desk thumping]
Sen. Cudjoe: Oh yeah.

Sen. P. Beckles: And to want to blame the PNM and say the PNM making the people feel they are being oppressed, the coalition—the UNC—has to come better than that, come better than that. I mean, they want to give the PNM credit for all sorts of things, and when they are ready they give us none.

But I want to start off, specifically, to deal with the health sector, and I want to deal with the health sector first, because the hon. Minister came to the House and, clearly he has indicated that there is a particular direction of the Government, and that direction is preventative. And I do not think that in principle that is a bad idea. It would certainly save us a lot of money if it is we are to get to the stage where people understand the importance of wellness, and we deal with the obesity and a number of things; but, Mr. Vice-President, whilst that concept is good, and it is a good direction, the issue of quality health care has to be dealt with simultaneously. As a matter of fact, I want to suggest that it has to be given much greater priority.

Now, the Minister indicated that some 2,000,500 patients are dealt with, I think, on a yearly basis, and you just have about 20 negative comments. Now, you know, that brings me back to the whole point about making people feel they are oppressed. That statement is making people almost feel guilty about what is going on in the health sector, and I must tell you that a lot of people were very happy when Minister Khan was appointed the Minister of Health. In some instances, people claim that when you are a doctor you may not make a good Minister of Health—I see people argue otherwise—but certainly when he stands up to speak, he certainly gives a good impression of a knowledge of what is going on in the health sector.

But those particular statistics that he gave us really caused me some serious, serious concern, because I think that if Trinidadians and Tobagonians listened to that analysis of 2.5 million patients being seen and only 20 negative comments, I think they would be in shock. As a matter of fact, if one were to probably call on a daily basis any hospital: San Fernando, Mount Hope, Port of Spain, Arima Health Facility, Sangre Grande, I am sure probably in each of those facilities and hospitals, you would get more than 20 complaints.

But having said that, I want to refer to a document, actually it is the Guardian of July 07, 2013, and this document refers to a recent study done by one, Randall Gooding of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The results of that study said that it takes four hours and 30 minutes—this is the average waiting time for a patient to see a doctor at the emergency department at Mount Hope Women’s Hospital—four hours
and 30 minutes. He went on to say—and by the way, Mr. Vice-President, this data was presented at the 23rd Triennial Meeting of the Commonwealth Medical Association, right here in Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that his study told him:

“…that there had been an increase in formal complaints by patients”—at Mount Hope—“in recent years”—and—“It is time we look at customer satisfaction…” The study found that it took more than one hour for a nurse or clerk to speak to a patient upon entry;—“one hour—“almost two hours for a nurse to take information from a patient; four and a half hours for a doctor to see a patient; and more than six hours for a patient to be discharged…”

The doctor indicated—that is the research, from his research:

“…that the major contributor to delays was an excessive patient load. ‘Services need to be streamlined. Emergency services should be for patients who have true emergencies’…”

So, you know, in the light of this, I am trying to find out how it is that we could arrive at 2.5 million patients being seen and only 20 negative comments.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, I had an experience quite recently, a relative of mine who had gone to the hospital two weeks ago, and as I entered the hospital a patient said to me, “Miss Beckles, I doh know if you could use yuh good office and contact the Minister of Health to see if we could get ah bulb in the toilet”. And of course it is a male ward that I went into—but he was very anxious to take me to the toilet to show me that there was no bulb, and, you know, like everything else I say sometimes here, because people love to say, “The PNM this”, they blame the PNM for everything. In this case, I am sure that if I said I blame the Minister of Health, they would be very upset, but the point about it is you cannot blame the Minister of Health for everything, if it does not have a bulb in the hospital, because there are people who are paid to do that job.

But I would say this, I contacted the Minister of Health, I sent him a text and to his credit, he responded very quickly and the next day he said to me—I saw him personally and he said, “Penny, the bulb has been fixed”. My relative left the ward and the bulb was never fixed, but you know what, Mr. Vice-President, they told the Minister that they fixed the bulb.

Sen. Singh: That is the way it operates.

Sen. P. Beckles: Right? And as my colleague, Sen. Ganga Singh is saying, that is how it operates. So then I got a call from the person—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: That is a management problem.
Sen. P. Beckles:—and he said to me, “Miss Beckles, I have a little problem because I know the Minister spoke to you and he was told that the bulb was fixed, but it was not really fixed because we did not know exactly where the place was”. I say, “Well, there is only one ward. I gave the specifics, and why would you all tell Minister that you fixed the bulb if you did not fix the bulb”?

So that the Minister would tell me that the bulb has been fixed and I, lo and behold, going happily to the patient—not my relative, the other person who complained—say, “Good news, the bulb fix”. Only to find out eight days later—eight days later, you know—Mr. Vice-President, the bulb “ent” fix. And, Mr. Vice-President, someone like yourself who deals with workers—[Interrupt]

Hon. Senator: PNM bulb, you know.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yeah, it is a PNM bulb, yeah, PNM bulb. [Laughter] So they took out the PNM bulb and they could not get a PNM bulb, maybe it was very expensive.


Sen. Singh: Oh, you are back. Oh my God. [Laughter] You went and hide?

Hon. Senator: The library far boy—[Inaudible]

Sen. P. Beckles: Mr. Vice-President, this is a very serious matter, and you know I want to say this “eh”; so you know when we talk about complaints in the sector, we have to be very, very careful, and, you know, recently a friend of mine his mother got ill and they needed to get an ambulance to take her to the hospital, and the driver said, “I cyah take her alone”. I mean, you know, I might be sounding like if this is Tom and Jerry; this is not Tom and Jerry you know, this is serious business. “Cyah take one person alone to San Fernando, I have to take more than one, more than likely two or three”, so that while she was there, you know, almost dying, and within minutes he had to arrange to get an ambulance from a private hospital, and then when he went for her they do not want to release, and all of that. But the bottom line is that his position is he signed a contract where he is not to take one person alone.

You know, Mr. Vice-President, we wonder sometimes what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago, and you know, Mr. Vice-President, I said this before and you would have heard me, that nurses who have qualified in Trinidad and Tobago are sought after almost everywhere in the world.

Hon. Senator: That is right.
Sen. P. Beckles: Dubai, United States, London, all over Europe. If they are looking for qualified competent nurses, they are coming to Trinidad and Tobago, and we ask ourselves what is it—I mean, you are in labour, you have dealt with employees at all levels. Is it the terms and conditions, what is it? Is it a lack of commitment? I mean, what is it that would cause us to have this situation? You see, because—work ethic? What is it? What is it?

You see, Mr. Vice-President, and I want to deal with this quickly because I have a lot of other things to deal with, but, you know, you see because recently there was a situation in San Fernando where an ultrasound machine valued $0.5 million disappeared. The Minister said that the guards have to pay for it, but I am sure they do not even know when that machine disappeared. And further to that, we had a recent incident in San Fernando where a mother made a baby, had her baby in the toilet. You know, and when you hear those things, you sort of wonder how it is people are boasting about quality health care.

You know, Mr. Vice-President, what was stated about this particular situation is that—I mean, the young lady went and complained, she said “Well, you know, I am not feeling well”, and the nurses said, “Well, you know, go, go, you know, go and sit down; wait, wait a little bit”, and she waited and then, lo and behold, she went to the toilet, had the baby—but I think what was worse is that after that finished, after having the baby you would think that they would probably find a bed for her, and they did not find a bed. She went and sat on a wheelchair for the next how many hours. You know, the allocation for health is $4.2 billion, and I could go on and talk about Sarah, who had a blood clot, you know, and died, and she waited for months to get the results of her blood test.

You know, we could go on to so many other women who are going to Mount Hope for just normal deliveries, and there are a lot of instances, both mother and child, you know, being found dead and nobody seems to be able to explain, but, more importantly, there is a lack of accountability and nobody seems to understand what is going on. People are frightened to go to the hospital in Trinidad and Tobago for health care. You know, last year you would remember that some $400 million was returned from the Ministry of Health unspent, unspent, and we are finding out there was another lady who sat 16 hours on a chair in Mount Hope, and it is very easy as we do, as has been by the last speaker and many others, everything is the PNM.

Even what is going wrong in this Government now, it is still the PNM. Okay, and people would not realize that there are some very critical issues and problems, some fundamental problems in our country that need to be dealt with, and unless we stop this thing about, it is the PNM, it is the UNC, it is the ILP, it is the this one, we are not going
Some of the workers even exploit that situation, when they listen to us as politicians keeping blaming this one, that one and the other one for it. Therefore, we as a people and those of us who are governing, would have to decide how long you want to continue with that excuse, because if you take the responsibility to govern—govern. They have moved one party, and you said you have the answers to deal with it. Deal with it and stop blaming those of the past.

Mr. Vice-President, I just have an issue to deal with quickly before I move off health. It has to do with the contribution of my colleague, Sen. Roach. I must say that I congratulate him, not just for his contribution, but for his frankness, because there are many people who are not brave enough and strong enough to talk about their challenges in the way in which he did. One would only expect that the time he spent and the passion with which he shared with us, that it is not one of the situations where it went in one ear and came out the next. I can only hope and pray that at some point in time we can seriously address what he stated, and that actually at some point in time he would be able to stand and say to us that, “I was able to leave here and go to my car without being assisted by someone.”

It is so interesting that many of us, who are fortunate enough to be healthy or think we are healthy, do not understand that today or tomorrow we can be in a similar position like him. It is only when we have to make policies for ourselves then we realize the important message he was giving to us.

You see, Mr. Vice-President, remember Mr. Myers who had to be lifted into the Parliament to attend the opening of Parliament, I think it was the year before, and I remember Eulalie James, deceased, who had lost her leg. It is only because we have moved to this building that we have the luxury of improvements. Had we still been in the Parliament, I do not know that Sen. Roach would have been able to come up the steps, because there was no elevator that would have allowed him that luxury. Credit must go, of course, to the Patrick Manning Administration and the vision to have had this building constructed—[Desk thumping]—even though so much licks were given about it—so that it could have been used and it is modern enough to accommodate some of the challenges faced by some persons who are physically challenged.

Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh and myself know Sen. Roach and know that he was one of the best performing athletes in the law faculty.
Sen. G. Singh: Since high school; the $6 million man.

Sen. P. Beckles: He had the name “$6 million man” because of his speed. I am sure when Sen. Singh and myself, not only see him, but listen to him, we are conscious of the fact of what he is trying to share. So, again, I make the point, let us see how long it is going to take for the powers that be to treat with his request. He did not just say it because he wanted it to be said. He is saying it because he wants something to be done, so the independence with which he could probably move comfortably in other places, he can move.

In Barbados, there is a Member of Parliament who is visually impaired, so they do the *Hansard* and everything by braille. She is able to move around comfortably. We have not probably even thought of that, but there are a lot of people who are visually impaired who want to access our documents and so, but like everything else I think we are going to wait until somebody who is so appointed and then we scramble.

The last part of the issue of health I want to deal with is the fact that recently the Government, through the House Committee, approved—there is a Cabinet Note that was passed with an executive medical package. That package allows for Members of Parliament to an executive medical not exceeding $10,000 every two years, and to be refunded the cost of medical treatment not exceeding $200,000. Mr. Vice-President, I would like to join with my many colleagues in extending acknowledgment to the Government and Cabinet for passing this package. This is something for which I have long advocated.

I know you mentioned a while ago. I do not even know if you are aware that this has been passed. It applies to Senators too, because very often for a number of reasons Senators are left out of pensions and a whole set of other things. I was not aware of it. I just heard about it because a colleague of mine accessed it and then found out that the Ministry of Health was not aware of it and that, in truth and in fact, nothing has been put in place for the refund of the persons who have accessed it, to have the money actually returned. So I ask the Leader of Government Business to look into it. I think that the package applies to persons who have served as far back as 2007. Am I correct, Leader of Government Business?

Sen. G. Singh: Yes.

Sen. P. Beckles: So I think that is quite an improvement.
Mr. Vice-President, I just want to move on to some other issues. It has to deal with the fact that part of the challenge I think for Trinidad and Tobago and this Government is the issue of the lack of consultation. I heard Sen. Hadeed say that this is a Government that cares about the people and consults with the people, but that is not the evidence to which we are accustomed. There may be some areas in which consultation takes place, and as to whether or not that consultation results in a decision with which the majority of people are comfortable is another matter. I will cite a couple of instances—the most recent instance being the policy on wildlife, to ban hunting for two years.

Those kinds of issues are very emotional. There are people who are very pro that decision, some are against it. You will find probably as much people in support of it as you might have against it. The problem I have with it is that—and if I am correct, and I am sure the Minister who is speaking after me would correct me—one week before the date that these persons are to apply for their hunting licence, it appears as though that is the time they found out that the Government—[Interruption] as I said, you will speak after me, so I am going with what is in the public domain.

Even if you say to me that you have had these consultations with the various hunting associations and all the different people, the point is that how many of us, in the Parliament even, were aware that that was a policy that the Government was going to take? Yes, Minister? [Interruption] Good, fine; if you say that you have had consultations, okay.


Sen. P. Beckles: So the Minister is saying that consultations have been had since—January—[Interruption]—January 28, 2013. But, you see, I want to make the point that it is not just the issue of consultation. It has to be a little more than that because, clearly, then we have to say that all these people who showed up and went for their licence at the Forestry Division have to be mad people.

Sen. Singh: No, no, no, they are not mad. They are part of the lobbying pressure.

Sen. P. Beckles: A lobbying pressure—I mean, that is to be expected. I do not know that we would be surprised that people would pressure the Government, they would lobby the Government. I am sure they probably lobbied some of the Independents or the Opposition, anyone who they feel might be able to convince the Government otherwise.

If the consultations started from January, the question we ask ourselves is: why
2013? Why not next year? Why not give them a year? Why not give them sufficient notice? I am hoping that the hon. Minister will give us the kind of data that tells us whether, in truth and in fact, you have had this stock depletion, whether he would provide us with information that tells us what is going to happen within the next two years and whether he would also tell us what happened on the previous occasion when there was a moratorium.

As I said, the consultation ought not to be exclusive to the users, the hunters and those. It should be the members of the public generally, who want to know what is the policy of the Government and how they arrived at that decision, because this is a matter that is dealt with all over the world. He talked today about the deer in Tobago. There are a number of our very indigenous species and unique species in Trinidad and Tobago that have disappeared over time.

I see the Minister has also said that he is going to increase the fine. I hope we recall that in this very Parliament, one of the things that we have been doing over the last three and half years, in almost every Bill that has come before this Parliament, is to increase the fines, and that increase has not in any way demonstrated that it has deterred any activity at all. You see fines moving from all “kind ah $10,000 to $500,000, and you see jail term moving from one year to five years and 10 years”, and at the end of the day the detection rate is now down to 20 per cent, the conviction rate is even less.

Sen. Al-Rawi: The detection rate is 4 per cent.

Sen. P. Beckles: My colleague, Sen. Al-Rawi, is saying 4 per cent. So the point is that I hope this issue of punishment and penalty that we have realized that that is not the answer. I am waiting to hear the Minister on that.

But I want to make the point as well that there are some other areas for which I have concern again, about the Government’s lack of consultation. It has to do with some sporting issues. The Government has indicated that they are going to construct some sporting facilities at Orange Grove, and it is causing no end of division within the community. Why is it causing this division? Again, lack of consultation.

Mr. Vice-President, I am sure you are familiar with the Eddie Hart Grounds. They say that some 1,400 people use that facility on a daily basis. It could be more than that.

8.20 p.m.
Appropriation Bill, 2013

[SEN. BECKLES]

Now, the residents and the users are not totally in disagreement with some of the projects; they are just of the view that this was literally sprung on them. The Government may have consulted with some of the people, but the majority of people want a concept where there is a certain freedom of movement, in terms of being able to go there, walk and the same wellness of which they speak is the wellness that the people in that area are benefiting from.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I know you know your sports and you are a sports lover, and again, similar to wildlife, culture and sports in Trinidad and Tobago, religion and politics are the ones that create probably the greatest enmity, discussion and a lot of other things. So, you have a lot of passion, people are upset, and you will always have a debate that if I give you a modern state-of-the-art facility it is better than anything else. The community may not always agree with that.

Mr. Vice-President, you would have been following that recently in Brazil—what did they have in Brazil again? Football?

Sen. Deyalsingh: Football, World Cup.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yes. You had football in Brazil recently—[Interruption]


Sen. P. Beckles:—thanks—the Confederation Cup.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Precursor to the World Cup.

Sen. P. Beckles: Precursor to the World Cup because Brazil has always—is going to have the World Cup and I think they are also going to have Olympics.


Sen. P. Beckles: Good. Right. Mr. Vice-President, you saw the people marching by the millions. They marched by the millions and they are saying, yes.

I had the opportunity to go to Brazil and I mean, football is played in every little space that you can in Brazil, but you know what they told the President? You are building all these modern structures for World Cup and people are poor. The transportation is bad. So many things are bad. Right.

They felt that here it is, World Cup is going to bring billions of dollars into Brazil, improve the economy, jobs and so forth, but you know what? People of Brazil say, “if we had our way, we would not have wanted all of those things”. We want better transportation. We want, you know, improvement in agriculture, we want improvement in education. Right. And it is always a very sensitive debate, it is a very complex
debate, but the point is that at the end of the day politicians learn the hard way that when you take decisions that the people are not comfortable with, when the time comes they will deal with you.

I am saying that the Government needs to be very careful because all the people are arguing is that you build these facilities, you enclose it, and then the community no longer has access to it, and that is the problem I think they have.

We think of Jehue Gordon recently who everybody is celebrating his success, home grown, and then you hear that recently when he went to the Hasely Crawford Stadium to practise, they turned off the lights. The difficulties he is encountering, not only just him, but several other athletes, in using the Hasely Crawford Stadium. I think that is the point that people are making. That when you—we understand the importance of managing facilities in local government and the challenges because we do not put in place proper management arrangements, and lights are left on and all sorts of things and people say well, “nah, now is not time, yuh cyar use it now, come back Sunday, then they cyar find de person with de key [Crosstalk] and all those sorts of things”. I am not talking anything out of the way.

Sen. Singh: It is not village council.

Sen. P. Beckles: Right? From the village council they decide you not supporting, you not from this party, and “dis one from de next party, and yuh cyar get de keys” and all those things. [Crosstalk] I mean—right? And it is how do we understand the importance of putting those things in place. So I just want to say that the issue of consultation is very, very important.

They talked about facilities that would comprise, in Tacarigua, six outdoor tennis courts, two clay courts, four indoor courts, one outdoor court with 1,500 bleacher facilities. The centre will provide competitive and recreational lawn tennis to the national community at an estimated cost of $144 million. The projected expenditure for the period April to September is $7.9 million from fiscal 2014, $50.2 million, and I was advised that they were told by the Minister that the Government agreed to it already, so you know.

The other issue, Mr. Vice-President, has to do with the issue of disaster preparedness. You know, one of my concerns is that—and I sat in on Independence Day and looked at this very, large, large, trailer that has been purchased by—what is the name of the organization for disaster preparedness?

Sen. Singh: ODPM.
Sen. P. Beckles: By ODPM. Right? Very, very impressive, and I wondered if and when anything happened similar to some sort of disaster, how would that work? [Interruption] Well not so much the turning, but just what was in it, you know, curiosity, because it is very long, probably as long as this room here. So that, lo and behold, I saw Diego Martin and I said, well, it is going to get into operation, and you know, I will see what is coming out of this now—because they took it. It was there parading on Independence Day, and I said, well—and then, I never saw it again. So I have not had the benefit of figuring out what is there.

But, you know, I have looked at the issue of the disaster fund, and I want to recommend to the Minister of Finance and the Economy that it is about time that we have a disaster fund for Trinidad and Tobago, and that we stop every time doing this thing piecemeal. So that local government has to beg for a little piece. All right? And Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has to give a little piece, and national security—they then have to go to the soldiers and the coast guard.

I mean, it is happening not just in Diego Martin, it is happening in central. You know, it is happening in San Fernando. It is happening in Mayaro. We are seeing now that the disasters, tornadoes—I mean we call them tornadoes, but you know, it is not of the magnitude of those that happen in the United States—but the fact is that in Trinidad if you see galvanize swirling and so, we are not concerned what happens there, it happens here. I just want to recommend the importance of a disaster fund.

People in Diego Martin who did not recover last year, you find that this year—and Mr. Vice-President, I am talking about an area for which you are very, very familiar. So therefore, you know what I am talking about, and I am sure you have represented the area, and therefore you understand the importance of it.

Mr. Vice-President, the other area that I want to talk about is the area of—I want to talk a bit about labour because that is an area that you were dealing with. You talked about an issue that I think we have never really addressed sufficiently in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the issue of age discrimination. We have had all these different policies and legislation of people retiring at 50 and 55, and 60 and 65. In many countries of the world that is not allowed. Okay? Age discrimination is something that has been disbanded a long time ago, in many places. Nobody has challenged it as yet in Trinidad and Tobago, but I am sure the time is going to soon come where people would challenge age discrimination.

Now, you talked about the successes of this Government, particularly as it relates to dealing with a number of industrial disputes and so on. I just want to say
that the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development—by coincidence, there is a department called OSHA Department attached to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and that is one of the agencies that have probably been “worst treated”, because there are persons there who have completed their contracts and they just would not pay them their gratuity under the contracts. I am amazed about it. I am amazed that, you know, that they will celebrate all these successes, but something that is right under you, they will not deal with it.

When they talk about the fact that we are trying to make people feel they are being oppressed—this Government provided information that since they have come into office it is also about 5,000 people whose contracts have not been renewed.

**Sen. Singh:** “Oh gawd.”

**Sen. P. Beckles:** Okay? Almost 5,000, and that was provided in the Lower House, and I wonder if that is because—what—as they say very clearly, is it because they were all employed under the PNM?

We, as you said a while ago, in relation to how we treat ourselves in the Parliament, for some strange reason we look after everybody else, we exclude ourselves. Even the people that work for us, who we love to thump the desk, we thank *Hansard*, and the Clerk and “de dis one and de dat one”, and the police officers who work very long hours, and the interesting thing about it is, Mr. Vice-President, “they doh get no overtime, yuh know”. They do not get any overtime. Right? There are many of them who come in the morning and they work right until one, two o’clock—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** And come back the next day.

**Sen. P. Beckles:** And they come back—they have to come back for eight o’clock—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Deyalsingh:** The next day.

**Sen. P. Beckles:**—and then they work four, five, six hours nonstop. I mean, we thump “de” desk, we tell them how good they have been, but I am sure for them the only good thing they want, to feel good about what we are telling them, is better terms and conditions. They are not concerned with anything else. So I hope we understand that when we have people that—*[Interruption]* Sorry?
Hon. Senator: “Yuh campaigning in de party?”

Sen. P. Beckles: I “doh” have to campaign for them. I have been Deputy Speaker, and I have seen how they work. So, I “doh” know that I am campaigning for them. I am just speaking the truth. All right? And I am sure that you agree with me, Sen. Maharaj, that what I am saying is true.

So, Mr. Vice-President, and the other thing when I talk about consultation has to do with the credit union legislation. The Minister spoke about the fact that they are going to bring credit union legislation in 2015.

They have been having discussions with the Central Bank. Those discussions have since collapsed, and clearly the Central Bank has a totally different view as to what is a credit union. They want to shift it from under cooperatives to under the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, and there may be some wisdom in that, but the fact of the matter is that the credit union movement—they have made their recommendations. They know what they want, and because things seem not to be going in the way in which they want to go, the discussions have just collapsed.

[Crosstalk] So I am hoping and I want to recommend—[Interruption]

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

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Beckles.

[MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair]

Sen. P. Backles: Thank you. So I hope that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy will deal with this as a serious issue.

There are a couple of other matters that I want to deal with. The Minister of Local Government talked about the various local government bodies, the construction of the various municipal corporations, and she indicated that the Government—a Note is being taken to Cabinet, and that Note is going to deal with the completion of—well, the design of the facilities at Arima, Princes Town and so on and so on.

Mr. President, if you go back to the Notes of the Government you would see that the four administrative buildings, Diego Martin, Arima, Princes Town, Penal
and Debe, they actually—this is the third budget that the Government has referred to constructing those facilities.

So I just need to remind them that they have made several promises over the last couple of years and they remain undone. This is the fourth year that the Government has failed to collect property tax. Right? So that was not done. They said that they would deal with it. They talked about NIS registration for self-employed; not done. They talked about establishment of 32 community police units; not done. They talked about removal of VAT on specific equipment and machinery for creative industries; not done. Duty-free importation of equipment for light-manufacturing sector; not done. Incentives for SMEs to be listed on the stock exchange; not done. Naval operation plans to combat drug lords; not done. The national security training academy—[Interruption]


Sen. P. Beckles: The four administrative buildings—


8.35 p.m.

Sen. P. Beckles: The Port in La Brea, not done.

Hon. Senators: Not done.


Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: And the two projects, the flagships, which is the Penal facility and the one in Couva which they are boasting about. Couva is now on a fault line, according to the seismic research in the University of the West Indies, and of course the whole fiasco with Penal. [Crosstalk] Okay? So let us—[Interruption]

Hon. Senators: Not done.


Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: The highway extension from Cocorite to Chaguaramas.
Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: And the dualling of the Rivulet Road to improve access to Point Lisas.

Hon. Senators: Not done. [Desk thumping]

Sen. P. Beckles: So I just want to say that when they come and blow their trumpet about all of these things, just remember that all of those things have been—[ Interruption]

Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: Now, you know—[ Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: They have to go and sell nuts.

Sen. P. Beckles: One of the challenges we face is the whole issue—[ Interruption]

Sen. Singh: Yeah, you will make a good “channaman”. [Laughter]

Sen. P. Beckles: And this is another thing that has not been done.

Sen. Hinds: “The man say nuts, which channaman?”

Sen. P. Beckles: When Minister Dookeran came to the Parliament some time ago he talked about this $7 billion in receivables. And he said that he was putting things in place, and you would have this amnesty to recover. Now, in the budget speech, the Minister referred to the fact that this whole issue of poor tax collection is unacceptable, and the question I asked, where are the—what were the outstanding receivables for 2012 and 2013, if there is no noticeable decrease and why? Are there huge write-offs in the inventory? If so, why not write them off the books and let the balance reflect through receivables? Is it that the compliance activities are raising assessments, reassessments which no collections are affected or is it that there is a need for additional trained staff in the debt collection area?

I want to say that the Minister having said that the leakage from the tax system is inaccessible, then it means that something has to be done. You did not want to accept the revenue authority as suggested by the People’s National Movement, well then, what have you put in place? [ Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: And the campus to housing.

Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: Right? So therefore this is a very important matter because you are talking about a deficit budgeting, you are talking about challenges in terms of collecting revenue, and the truth is, is it that the Government is serious about collecting all these outstanding taxes or is it that it is not a matter that requires urgent attention? Mr. President, I wait urgently on that.

Now, of course, the other thing is that the Government talked about these five growth poles.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Greasy pole.

Sen. P. Beckles: Greasy poles. And having been on the drawing board for at least two years, all the Minister announced is that the pilot study for the central growth pole was completed and the other four are still under development. Again, not done.

Hon. Senators: Not done.

Sen. P. Beckles: You know, Mr. President, one of the things that we have to look at and I would say this “eh”, many people have—the budget is called: “Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity”—that having regard to all the things that are not done, I will say that the theme for this budget should have been, no plans, no programmes, no progress, no prosperity and for local government, soon we are going to have no PP. [Desk thumping]

Now, I must say that I was pretty impressed when I heard the Minister of National Security yesterday, because I—you know, I think as a young person, and sometimes you get in trouble for saying these things but, you know, I want to congratulate him on his appointment and I want to wish him the best. [Desk thumping] I hope that a lot of what he said that he is serious about it. All I do is caution him, because there are many of us who have sat here in these hallowed walls and see some of our colleagues as they have said to Minister Sandy—because you started off with Minister Sandy and Minister Subhas Panday who are both gone. Then you went to Minister Warner and—[Interruption]


Sen. P. Beckles: And Minister Partap, who are also gone. That is four. Then you have Minister George recently who is also gone. So he is really the sixth. So that, be careful of those who come and tell you, you doing a great job, too quickly. You decide for yourself and do what you think is best. “Doh worry with
those who blowing your trumpet.”

As I said, he started off very well until he decided to justify Resmi. “I cyar understand that, you know Minister,” you cannot justify Resmi. Right? And there are certain things—a wrong thing could never be right. A wrong thing could never be right. If people are not qualified for a job they are not qualified for a job. And you know we are getting comfortable in Trinidad and Tobago where people are unqualified for a job and we are comfortable to say they are qualified for a job. And you know what has happened? As a result of that, the EMBD board members, a lot of them had to resign.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Why?

Sen. P. Beckles: CAL members had to resign.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Why?

Sen. P. Beckles: Chaguaramas Development Corporation—either resigned or fired.

Sen. Deyalsingh: Why?

Sen. P. Beckles: And there are several members of this Government, persons appointed by this Government, they had to be fired very, very quietly when it was found that they had been issuing false certificates and claiming to be competent when they are not competent. I mean, whatever you say, Mr. President, you cannot agree with that. So I want to tell the Minister of National Security, please, “doh go down that road. You start off good, doh go down that road and justify ah wrong thing as being right.”

And you made a point yesterday that all these gang members who are involved in gang warfare, who are gangsters, they are not going to get any contracts. But I want you to check as Minister of National Security that just last week the hierarchy of the police service met with a lot of gang members, and they are gang members, they are persons who control gangs, who presently have contracts. There is one who is repairing a police station. So I just want to know—[Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: You serious?

Sen. P. Beckles: I just want to know whether your statement applies to gang persons who have existing contracts. You see we have to be careful about talking—[Interruption]
Sen. Deyalsingh: And who give it, PNM?

Sen. P. Beckles:—before we actually get facts, because it is not as simple as you think. It is a complex matter and more importantly, Mr. President—you see the question we ask ourselves, yes, you take the decision, okay. You are a gang member, no work for you. Right? Fine. So, Mr. President, they have their families to feed and so forth and “so fifths”. So what do they do? I mean, I do not disagree in principle with what he said. I am just saying that you need to be very careful with the speed with which you take the decision, and more importantly you also need to be very careful because you are not the one who is dealing with the tendering for the contracts.

A lot of us make statements, we may have the responsibility for certain things but we “doh” have the authority to make the decisions. So when you are saying that no contracts for X, you are not signing no tender, you are not participating in no tender, you do not know anything. You wake up one morning and you go somewhere and you realize the policy you want to implement, the decision you have taken, you do not have the authority to say yes or no. And therefore we—all of those who want to jump quickly to the conclusion of saying, as of today, as of today, it will not happen. And then you find that you are embarrassed because you do not have the authority. So I just caution the hon. Minister, be careful about what people are telling you because it is not that simple.

Mr. President, there are just a couple of other things I want to talk about and it has to do with the issue of a famous statement that this Government makes which is gender—gender sensitive. And you know, I am beginning to believe that the Government does not know what they mean by gender sensitive because I have not seen any evidence of gender sensitive budgeting. As a matter of fact, I have not seen any evidence of any implementation of anything that gives me the impression they understand what that means. And I see the Minister mentioned it in his statement and I would really like for him to tell me how has it been working and what real policies have been adopted for this gender sensitive budget. I know they have been offered advice from international circles to treat with it and that has not happened.

There are a couple matters in relation to Arima that I want to treat with. And again it has to do with community centres. I went to La Fillette yesterday, and, Mr. President, there is a community centre that is—well, should have been started there three and a half years ago, a contract was given. Since this Government came into office they have cancelled the community centre contract in La Fillette
and in Arima. A community centre that was 60 years old, demolished, contract given, this Government comes into office, they cancelled the contracts and there is a building adjacent to the La Fillette Centre that is going to collapse, if they do not treat with that.

What is interesting, the one in Arima that was demolished, there is now bush. Those centres were costing, I think, $5 million and probably $7 million respectively. And you know what I find painful, I find painful that they would spend almost $7 million to bring up a fire truck. Okay? Seven million dollars the Cabinet approved to bring up a fire truck from Blanchisseuse in the same Arima constituency, but they say they have no money—[Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: To build a community centre.

Sen. P. Beckles: To build a community centre for $5 million. That is logic. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] It appears as though the people of Arima are going to have to pray and fast to get their community centre in Arima and in La Fillette because that seems to be the way that things are working.

Sen. Hinds: And then they end up in the Cabinet.

Mr. President: Senator, you need to wind up now.

Sen. P. Beckles: Yes. Mr. President, I want to say that we have seen where the allocation has gone substantially to certain Ministries—education, health and a couple of other things. And the bottom line is that we have to ask ourselves, are we really seeing benefits for the amount of money that is being allocated to those Ministries? I would want to suggest that I do not think the people of Trinidad and Tobago believe that that is the case.

Now, in the budget statement there are a number of laudable things that we have seen in terms of infrastructural projects that I think Trinidad and Tobago is waiting patiently for, and when you see $60 billion-plus we understand clearly that the intent at least is to do a lot of work, as we have seen last year and the year before. The only problem is that we are not actually seeing it happening. So I just want to say that whilst I have seen all of these projects year after year being mentioned, I have not seen it being materialized.

Finally, Mr. President, I just want to say that there is one particular project that I have seen the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment mention, and that is the port facility at Sullivan Island. And just to say to him that the figures he used was 31,000 vessel voyages. In truth and in fact, under the Department of
Transport, Maritime Division, of the United States, the current research talks about 94,000 vessel voyages. So I think that it is three times the figure and he is given the benefits of employment and things.

There is one area I did not get to touch on and that is Mr. Maharaj’s agriculture, because you know he accuses the PNM of not talking about agriculture. I did not have time today but I will have another opportunity to deal with it and, Mr. President, I therefore want to thank my colleagues kindly for the opportunity to make this contribution. [Desk thumping]

8.50 p.m.

Mr. President: Sen. Balgobin.

Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin: Thank you, Mr. President, and good night to everyone here. I rise to speak on this budget of 2014 and to join what, to my mind in large parts, is a discussion about where this country is going, what we are doing and what we ought to be doing. I say “discussion”, because in some respects the engagement has been lacking and we have, at some points, stood up and talked at each other. Of course, if that were our intent, perhaps we could have done it a little faster.

Hon. Senator: Take your time.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: But here we are. I therefore was a little concerned about some aspects of the debate, or discussion. Call it what you will. And this is why I chose, on this occasion, to speak as late as possible, to see in full how this Senate treated with this budget—what our thinking, our thought process was; how this coalesced into something that the population can get its hands around to say, “Well, yes, this Upper House of the Parliament has addressed this budget in a clear, concise but comprehensive way and I am now, as a citizen, much the wiser by virtue of the contributions that have been made.”

One of my concerns with our treatment has been that this budget has not been assessed as a point in a journey. Many of our efforts appear to be trying to judge a horse race from a photograph. A photograph does not tell you a lot about the process of the race. In the same way a single budget does not tell the population everything the population needs to know about where we are coming from or where we are going. So I think it is not reasonable for us as a country to continue to hang all of these expectations on a national budget.

So, what I propose to do in my short contribution is to take a different and,
hopefully, deeper tack, not by addressing individual allocations per se, but by trying to speak to some aspects behind those in an effort to bring out more fully some of the things which I think we, as a Senate, should take cognizance of and, by extension, the people.

To pick up where Sen. Beckles left off, from her excellent contribution—always is—there are many things that have not been done. Unfortunately, our record on what has not been done versus what has been done appears to be lost in the political domain. Everything is politics: what is done; what is not done; what will be done. And so we have entered a kind of calloused zone where a citizen really is not very clear at all, on what exactly has been accomplished and what we propose to accomplish in the very immediate term, and I will give you an example of that in a moment.

But I want to recognize, in bringing balance to what Sen. Beckles was saying, that a number of things have also been done, and I am pleased to witness some of those things and I pay particular attention to what is happening in tertiary education, and also in the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, and to see for the first time in several decades the beginning of an understanding of the importance of manufacturing to an economy.

We are seeing encouraging signs in agriculture, in energy, in water resources, in local government. We are seeing the signs. [Desk thumping] And of course, the Minister of National Security has acquitted himself well. Of course, we ought to tell him that the track record of many, many, many of his predecessors has not been good, and I wish to come to that a little later on in my talk.

So a jumping-off point for me would be—as we have spent so much time in the last few days trying to assess—how has the Government done; how has the country done; how is the economy doing? And how do you answer those questions when you are up against a culture that defies measurement? So we lack a measurement culture here. The PSIP, the Public Sector Investment Programme 2014, is an excellent example of this. It is on a page without a number. Bless the poor table, it has no identity by way of a page number, but it is immediately after XIV, roman numerals, and just before page one. So this would be—I do not know.

But it says here:

“National Performance Framework.”

And in this framework, the largest section is devoted to a column which says:
“National Outcomes.”

And here is what that says, just by way of example, Mr. President. I know you would have seen this document before, but there have been many thousands of pages put before us. It says here, for example, as a national outcome:

“More effective law enforcement.”

Or as a society free from poverty, an outcome would be:

“Access to adequate and affordable housing.”

There is not a single measure; there is not a single quantifiable detail here which would allow us to know when a government has done well or when it has done badly.

Of course, a big part of the problem is the Central Statistical Office—and Sen. Tewarie did speak to that. I am not persuaded yet about what he has said about the CSO. We are not getting anything out of them. And the census, for example, this big document that took—came in several years late, being, I think, constitutionally due in 2010, turned up in 2013 or thereabouts. We know that the population statistics are, in some respects, wrong, not because you could not just go into some high crime areas, but also now people have gravitated to gated community living where they pointedly will not permit a census taker to enter. So you basically wave your hand at a very tall building or a very large space and say, “Well, this is my estimate of people who are living there.”

So we have to ask serious questions about the data that we are using to make decisions about the economy, and a first step would really be to say that we need reliable, accurate data on time. That is the part I did not hear—“on time”. This country—and I would hope to hear it in the Minister’s winding-up, if he does have that courage; I am sure he does, he is a courageous man—ought to publish critical data to a schedule.

The International Monetary Fund, the IMF, has standards for this. It is called a General Data Dissemination System and there is even a Special Data Dissemination Standard. And these standards tell us when we should publish what data by. You turn on CNN, Bloomberg, anything like that, it says, “Well, next Friday, unemployment statistics are coming out”.

**Sen. Singh:** In time.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** Absolutely spot on. So you are making decisions with
current data. We do not have that here. How do we have a discussion on a budget and—you know, you could poke holes in any of the numbers that we put forward. And so, then—[Interuption]

**Mr. President:** Sorry to interrupt you. I just needed to let Senators know that dinner is available, and therefore those wishing to file out individually, not reducing us below a quorum, might do so now. Sen. Balgobin.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** Thank you, Mr. President, and so Senators must choose between me and dinner. *[Laughter]*

**Sen. George:** No contest.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** It is no contest. I guess they are all going for dinner. However, I am minded to know that there is a television in the tea room and so I am sure that I will be heard, and if not, that is okay. I will listen to myself.

**Hon. Senator:** “We staying. We staying.”

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** Thank you. I am touched.

Either the policy is wrong—because the data is wrong, do we know if the policy is wrong or some specific aspect of data is wrong? For example, if we look at unemployment data, if you believe that there is full employment—that is, if you believe that there is a labour shortage, there is no logical reason to grow CEPEP. If you believe that the economy is at full employment, you would question seriously why and to what extent you wish to stimulate the economy further, unless we really do not believe that we have a 4.9 per cent unemployment rate.

So what is our true rate of unemployment? I have not heard, and I would like to, because these things ought to inform public policy. So if the numbers are wrong for unemployment, well, it is either the unemployment numbers are wrong or the policy is wrong.

If we turn to trade data, trade data is over a year late. Customs and Excise is a black hole for data. And so, the last Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago report says that they are using “mirror data”. Mirror data, Mr. President, is where I cannot find out what is going on in my own country, for example by way of imports. So what I am going to do is, I am going to find out what you—say, the United States—are sending to Trinidad by way of your export data. I then gross that up, pull out some additional number, because, of course, they would calculate by a free-on-board, (FOB); we need it here, CIF, Carriage, Insurance and Freight. So I need to add insurance and freight to that number, and that is my estimate of import business with the United States of America because I cannot get that
information right here.

That is what is happening here right now. So we are, at best, swinging, perhaps not in the dark, but in the dusk. Light is fading. It is very difficult to see. How are we supposed to make the right decisions as a small country, a small economy, where you make the wrong policy decision and it can have a tremendous effect on the well-being of the population for generations to come? So I say that by way of positioning my understanding of what is happening in this budget, and my uncertainty about certain aspects of it.

Now having said that, and put that aside, I wish to make an observation about education, the domain that has received the largest allocation at $9.8 billion. Most money allocated there—most money—yet after 50 years of independence this census says, on Chart 1.14, that 38.7 per cent, which would be this long bar here—38.7 per cent of nationals over 15 years old have no qualifications whatsoever; not one O level; not a school leaving certificate; no qualifications whatsoever for 39 per cent of our population aged 15 and over. If you look at the population aged 50 and over, our census says that more than 50 per cent of the population has no qualification whatsoever.

After more than 10 years of schooling—10. After more than 10 years of schooling, more than 70 per cent of our students on average cannot pass math. Only about 60 per cent pass English. Violence is rampant in schools and if you go on YouTube and type in: “Search for school fights in Trinidad”, you will see fight, after fight, after fight on the Internet featuring our school children. They are stars; modern-day Rambos and G.I. Janes. And what is particularly disheartening is to note how many of these fights are girl on girl. Our girls have become as violent as our boys.

9.05 p.m.

It may have escaped our notice, but in our public libraries there are metal detectors. What do you think those are there for? We do not make books out of metal. The metal detector is not there to prevent the theft of books, of knowledge. They are there to prevent children from carrying weapons into a hall of learning, in a school, in a library. That is where we have reached and we take this for granted. So something is very wrong with our education system. And if we roll that up and we look at what happens to these children as they enter the late secondary and tertiary system, what do we find? I am sure the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training will speak to it, if he speaks. Many of our graduates are unfit to enter the workplace. We have a crisis of availability of tradesmen.
You cannot find a good plumber, electrician, mason, carpenter, anywhere.

So, Mr. President, I am left to wonder about the extent to which, education is too important to be left to educators. Other stakeholders in our society need to adopt schools, school children and graduates, in order that we may expose them to the economic system. We can manage and cushion that entry. We are spending money to prop up an inefficient system, tinkering at the edges or, I suppose in some respect, wetting outhouses. What do I mean by that? Your house is on fire, you call the fire brigade and what do they do? They wet the dog kennel and something irrelevant outside. Something radical needs to be done with our education system.

Turn to housing and you see exactly the same thing. Housing got what, $2.7 billion? But, Mr. President, people living in HDC apartments cannot afford them. The HDC’s receivables must be a big joke, because too few tenants meet their obligations, and so, really, low cost housing becomes no cost housing. That is where we end up. But the HDC and the Ministry of Housing are critical because there has been a tearing of our social fabric over the last two decades. Familial and community ties are no longer strong. It is every man for himself. If you do a simple calculation, Mr. President, and say that a man is working for three times the minimum wage—and I set the minimum wage at $5,000 a month; not really $2,500 which is what it would be if you really pay the minimum wage. But I set that at $5,000 because that is the point at which, well beyond which, one starts paying income tax.

So if I set that at $5,000 a month and I gave someone three times that salary, or I put three people together at $5,000 a month—so three people working together are earning $15,000 a month, they cannot pay a mortgage. They cannot pay a mortgage. This is what makes people desperate, because the value of our properties has gone up to such an extent, a basic starter home would not cost you much less than a million dollars. You take a million-dollar mortgage at seven, seven and half per cent—even six per cent if you got it—you cannot pay the instalment. At $15,000 a month in income, they cannot pay the instalment. What they are going to do is pay only the instalment. And so, we need to find more innovative approaches to create a land holding and a property holding, a house holding class in Trinidad and Tobago.

I fully support the views expressed on the Independent Bench earlier that says, “We cannot continue to have a nation of tenants.” How are we going to do that? [Desk thumping]
Hon. Senator: We cannot do that.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: All this wealth we have and we have people who are so desperate for houses. I have absolutely no influence whatsoever. I cannot tell you how many people run up to me, and once they hear that you have anything to do with this Parliament, they say, “Can you help me get a house?” Desperate! And so, what is the fate of these people? Are they destined to prop up the investment hopes of people who have a little more money and can buy these things and cut them up and rent them out as apartments? Is that it? They are supposed to prop up the investment income of people who have more money? We must find a way to usher them more safely into the economic system.

We are creating a system where people are desperate to pay bribes, and that is exactly what is happening. Anybody can print a fake letter or something and say, “I have contacts in the HDC. Give me $15,000 and I will get a house for you.” That has been happening and it continues to happen. Anyone who props up—you know, two weeks ago someone approached me and said, “Can you help me to get a house?” I said, “I really doh know, yuh know.” And the first thing the person said after that was, “Well just tell me whatever I have to pay, you know.” That is where we reach.

So, it is not true to say that these people have no ambition. They just do not see a way out of this cycle of tenancy that we have locked them into. It is an indication that something is very wrong with our economic system, and that the richer are perhaps not being taxed enough or they are not paying the tax they should by paying. That is, our taxes are not being levied effectively enough. As for the poor, the poor are not being prepared to improve their productivity and, therefore, their earnings potential. And so, this is extremely worrying because a large section of a small wealthy country, a large section of the population cannot afford shelter. Why is that worrying? Because they just happen to live next to people who are demonstrating obscene levels of wealth.

I have not paid attention to neck dimensions and so on—[Laughter]—but when you have the very poor rubbing against the very rich like that, separated only by a wall or a fence, you could build that wall higher and you could make that fence stronger, but sooner or later they have to meet outside and it is what happens when they meet outside that is of concern to me.

The expansion of the capital market is very desperately needed. If I look at the Central Bank Monthly Statistical Digest of August 2013, Public Company Shares, the volume of shares traded in 2008 was 135 million. In 2012, it was 50 million.
If I look at the summary economic indicators of the Central Bank for June 2013: in 2008, the number of listed companies was 34; in 2012, 28. So, yes, we need the expansion of the capital market, but Government poisons the stock market and I am not a fan at all of Government retaining any measure of significant control of a company once it is placed on the stock market. You have enough evidence that that does not work. Look at PLIPDECO. I do not know what is happening with that now. The documentation is not clear. Look at TSTT. And so, you ought to seek these companies, start these businesses, develop them and leave. Staying destroys value and impedes governance especially with political boards.

You can have a change of Government and Government can dither and dither and dither and take very long to appoint a board, and then when they do appoint the board, it can be an incompetent board. Until we get those things figured out—if you are going to put something on the stock market, let it stand on the stock market on its own two feet. Do not have it pretend to be a publicly traded business when, in fact, the Government is still using its hands inside of there, sometimes invisible, sometimes all too visible. The reason why I am saying that is because these companies in Trinidad and Tobago learn the wrong competences. By the wrong competence—you see, if you were in China and you had a logic for state capitalism, then it is fine. China has seeded many significant state companies—Huawei amongst them—and they do not interfere in the governance, but they understand why they are there and what the objective of having the state enterprise is. But in Trinidad, what happens in our state enterprises, especially the ones that have a significant separate income, is the executive talent and the boards learn the wrong competences, the chief of which is political management. That does not help you with profitability. That does not help you to be more competitive. It does not improve your marketing. All it does is it reinforces a cycle of boards and executives kowtowing to the interest and the needs of whoever their line Minister might be.

It destroys value, and shareholders should be aware of that, because, ultimately, it makes these companies uncompetitive. If we turn to competitiveness and public policy for just a moment and we look at how we have done, we are ranked 47th, according to the IMF, in GDP per capita in the world. There are only 46 countries that have people in it that make more money per capita that we do. That is what the IMF says; not me. But we are ranked 92nd in the world in the global competitiveness report. Income up here; competitiveness down here. What accounts for the distinction? What accounts for the gap? Well, the things we did
not work for: chiefly, oil and gas.

I think that we need to have the courage to explain to the population that many of us are enjoying a standard of living we do not deserve because we have not created the wealth which is being redistributed through the economy. Governments are always very bad redistributors anyway. But what is worse is that they are redistributing wealth to people who really have had very little hand in the creation of that wealth. And so, there is a kind of latent unproductivity which has become a defining characteristic of our workforce. So this is why I am not of the view—well, I am not of the view that we can just as easily tax gambling and so on, and improve the lives of poor people just like that.

I think that we need funding for interventions which will improve the productivity of our people. When you look at the top five factors—I will take four—that have affected business in Trinidad and Tobago for the last 10 years, the top five—well, let us say, the top four factors are: crime, inefficient government bureaucracy, corruption, and poor work ethic in the nation labour force. And those four factors have not changed in 10 years—10 years, three Governments, no change.


Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: Nothing has happened. We have not addressed the fundamental issues which are affecting competitiveness in our country.

Hon. Senator: Across administrations.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: Yes, it has been two administrations and three Governments. It is extremely deep and, therefore, to what extent can we hold a single Government responsible for performance or non-performance, I really do not know. To me, we are so deep in it, it is clearly a problem that we all have a hand in and we all must help to fix.

9.20 p.m.

Sen. Singh: I am sure you are a realist.

Sen. Ramkhelawan: Politicians trying to outdo one another.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: We have to be careful not to look like we just want to spend money. We ought to impose on ourselves greater evaluations for projects. We are building a $7 billion highway from Debe to Point. Okay, no problem; well, let us evaluate it. Let us decide as a country if this is what we want to do, not
as an administration but as a country. Is this better than a mass rapid transit system, or worse? Or should we build a boat or a monorail or a train? I do not know but let us have an open and transparent conversation. This needs to be bigger than a Cabinet—any Cabinet, not just this one.

We have to have a more inclusive discourse on projects especially big projects. First past the post can no longer be allowed to mean “winner take all” and especially should not mean “devil take the hindmost”.

Sen. Singh: So you are supporting PR then?

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: When we look at growth poles and the logic of growth poles, what is our strategy there exactly? I would love to understand better the concept of growth poles as put forward because in a small island, to my mind, this is a questionable concept. How do you justify who you are leaving out? And if the “growth poles” is based on a model of economic clustering, it is very easy to see why it is probably not wise to make the kind of distinctions in the geographical areas we are.

More importantly, nowhere in here have we had a discussion in this debate so far—have we had any sort of engagement—on what sort of growth we should have. We heard a lot about the growth that we had, or we think we had, but what sort of growth should I have? If I own a maxi taxi and I have a man driving it for me and he comes to me and says, “here is $5”. Should I be satisfied with that or should I be clear that what I wanted was $50? If we have got 1 per cent growth or 2 per cent or 10 per cent, should we be satisfied with that or should we be looking at—and holding ourselves up to—a long-term standard that says this is what we targeted, and therefore we hit or we under- or we over-performed?

How much of my GDP should I be investing?—not, how much have I invested? What is my justification for my classification of spend? How much investment is coming from the private sector and how much from Government? Will these two together give me the rate of investment that I am looking for, that I need? We need to know, we need to have these things be made explicit and we need to compare those things. That is how we are going to know if we are doing well or not, because you talk to different people and different people have different opinions.

What is the Central Bank’s target for inflation? I do not know, I really have no idea. They tell me what inflation is, they do not tell me what the target is, but they are in charge of monetary policy. I would like to know. How can I sit down in
Trinidad and Tobago and know what the inflation target is of the Fed in the United States or the Bank of England or even the European Central Bank and I do not know for Trinidad and Tobago. “It is a secret?” No, you know, we have to be more—we have to seize the opportunity to limit ourselves and be more transparent. If we know what targets are, it can help us to decide whether something is outlandish or whether something makes sense.

We heard mention earlier of the extrication of a fire truck from a ravine or something like that for $7 million. Is that too much or too little? Well, I have no idea. I went looking and what did I find? Just this year, they managed to lift a Dornier Do-17 World War II bomber off the seabed in the English Channel—[Interruption]

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** Price?

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:**—77 years old, the cost was about TT $5 million. [Laughter] So you are lifting a plane off a seabed that is 70-something years old and it is costing you that. Well, okay, now I have something to compare it with, I know if it is outlandish or not. It cannot be that I accept the contractor’s price. On what basis am I beating him down?

Mr. President, there is a kind of latent imbalance in our democracy. The Executive has too much power and its control exacerbates a vulnerability that we have in our democracy. What is that vulnerability? It is extremely difficult for a society as small as ours to support all of the mechanisms required for the effective running of a modern democracy. That is the problem that is exacerbated when an Executive has too much power. Therefore, to fix that, proper governance demands that the Parliament and the Judiciary have their own budget. Sixty-one billion dollars we propose to spend between now and 2014, the Judiciary got $350 million, the Parliament got $141 million.

If I look at the Chief Justice’s address at the opening of the law term, if you will permit me to just make a small quote. The Chief Justice said:

“I am of the firm view, that one of the biggest hindrances to Public Sector efficiency and productivity is the way that monies voted by Parliament and for which expenditure is therefore legally authorized are allocated and released. Procedures are lengthy and cumbersome, and in the case of the Judiciary sometimes offend against the principle of judicial independence.”

That is the Chief Justice. How long are we going to continue like this and pretend that this is an appropriate arrangement? It is not and we should have the courage
to know that and to fix it. It is not a big fix and it should be done and done now!

In the absence of a state of the union address, I think that a national budget should have the courage to chart this course. You see, we do not have an address like that—a state of the union address where the Prime Minister comes and sort of stands there and tells us what is happening with the country as a whole. We do not have that and this is where this excessive reliance on the budget comes in and we ought to put in place something like that. And until we do, our budget should chart this course for us, it should speak to these things and it should address these anomalies and these imbalances. It should take more responsibility for the evolution of our democratic system of governance.

We should put things like these in place rather than have to depend on a budget to tell us where we are going. Because when we do that, what do we end up with? Name changing or game changing. We end up with name changing when the Minister of Finance and the Economy came in. The first word he said was “austerity”. Then, of course, “austerity” was redefined to be—well, not what we would ordinarily associate the word “austerity” with. I do not know—continuation?

Property tax is now land and building tax. That is a property tax! Land and building are not property anymore? Are they not synonymous—those things? But, you know, we have been doing that for decades—Exhibition exam became Common Entrance became SEA. Do you remember the Minister of Education who said, “Well, we have abolished Common Entrance and so children will no longer have that stress. It is SEA and the children are carrying suitcases to school, they cannot even tote it. It will probably make them more efficient travellers. [Laughter] DEWD became LID became CEPEP and URP and so on.

So by my calculations, a name change will get you another 10 years of doing exactly the same thing except that you get to spend some money changing stationery and the signs on your vehicles and so on. That is what is going on here, but it does not fix anything. In a sense, a lot of this stuff does not matter. Why? We are looking at a budget that is prepared on a cash basis and we need to have a serious conversation about whether that is the appropriate basis on which [Desk thumping] a national budget should be done and presented. That is cash-flow budgeting alone and that means that I can manipulate a deficit or a surplus just by paying or not paying somebody.

Sen. Ramkhelawan: Well done!

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: Easy as that! It does not tell me enough about the fundamental performance of the economy or the Government’s management of the
economy. So the word “deficit” really means “little or nothing”. To take a deficit and say, “We have a deficit of $6 billion or $7 billion” is a crass oversimplification because if I am the Minister of Finance and the Economy, I can fix that quite easily.

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** Withhold payments!

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** Just pay you next year!

We have an Infrastructure Development Fund—the operations of which are not entirely clear to me—once funds are appropriated there though, I do not think that they go back to the Consolidated Fund, so it is sort of out there in la-la land. So now to understand what is happening, I cannot look in one place, I must look at the Consolidated Fund, the development fund, the Infrastructure Development Fund, and so on and so on, which is why the budget documentation now is as voluminous as that which appears on the table at the centre of the room.

Is this process transparent enough so that people understand what is going on? I think that is a question that we ought to consider and to answer. The Ministry of Finance and the Economy has been given an allocation of $10 billion. We have removed the subsidy from CAL—the fuel hedge rather—I do not know how much of that $10 billion is earmarked for CAL though; I am sure some is.

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** Four hundred million.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** If I have taken a fuel hedge of value of what—four, five hundred million but I give you development funds for transformation of $400 million then—

**Sen. Ramkhelawan:** It is $400 million.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:**—you know. I do not know. I do not know what that all means. I have saved $100 million perhaps, if so much?

What is the extent of the stimulus that the Government is providing to the economy? This is what we need to know and we need to understand. If I am spending more than I am earning, I have to do that because I want to stimulate the economy in some way. That is the only reason I would do it. But a deficit for a budget as a percentage of GDP is misleading. It is not the correct measure and we knew that since the 1980s after the oil shocks, we recognized that we should look at the net domestic budget deficit, not just the overall budget deficit, because of the structure of our economy and where we earn our income from.

So we ought to be looking instead at domestic revenues versus domestic spend. A true measure! This is what it is—a true measure of a deficit or a surplus,
and it tells us the extent to which we are stimulating or contracting the economy. What exactly are we doing inside of there? When we do not disaggregate this information, when we present it as a big lump, we have no idea of knowing for sure, for example, if inflation is under- or over-represented.

Mr. President: Senator—the speaking time of the hon. Sen. Balgobin has expired.

Motion made: That the speaking time of the erudite and untautological Senator be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. S. Ramkhelawan]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin: Thank you, Mr. President. I do not know what all those big words mean so I hope he was not insulting me. I shall check up on the dictionary when I go home. All in all, Mr. President, all I am saying is we should not institutionalize spending more than we earn and we should be measuring and reporting on these things appropriately so that we know what the true state of play is. There must be a coherent strategy for our spending.

9.35 p.m.

And as I am on the topic of spend, I wish to make the point that we really have to get away from these allegations of corruption which have injured Government after Government so very badly. I was somewhere having a conversation with some people and one person said, “You know, on that project this person made $1 billion”, and what was surprising to me was not the sheer stupidity of the allegation, but that everybody “kinda” believed it. And this is not new, and this is not a problem that this Government alone has to deal with.

This is why this Government is here because the last Government also was a victim of it, and the Government before that. And so there is something in our psyche, the psyche of this nation which leads us to believe that our leaders are thieves. We have gone into a very, very bad place where somebody could hear a billion—it is no longer a million—and perhaps believe it.

If I turn quickly to security in some of the time that I have left, I would say that our security system, Mr. President, is extremely precarious. Our intelligence is limited and when we do build on intelligence capability our history has been that the temptation is too great for us to spy, not on criminals, but on political opponents. I think it is absolutely scandalous that three years into a new Government, we still do not have a full, formal appointment of a Commissioner of Police. [Desk thumping] I think that ought not to be allowed to stand if crime is the number one challenge facing Trinidad and Tobago today.
And then of course, I always get my daily dose of laughter—because we killing people like flies here every day—when I turn on the TV and I see these scary people dressed in white plastic head to toe, checking what, I do not know, because on the TV right there next to them there are people who are in civilian clothing contaminating the crime scene—you know, in tassa they have a term if you stood there with a drum and you sort of moving but you are not actually playing anything, they say “yuh fooling”—these people like they “fooling”.

We have not, to my knowledge, caught very many people, if anyone at all, using this kind of approach. And so “it is show: dead man in the street,” some policeman in sneakers or boots walking all around contaminating the site” and then you have these people standing there in a corner measuring and sampling all sorts of things. I really do not know what they do. They call it CSI. Maybe it is like the TV show except that the crime does not get solved in an hour. In fact, it does not get solved at all.

When we do arrest somebody, here comes the Chief Justice again and he makes the observation, if I may, from his opening of law term address:

“…I regret to inform that as I speak there are 575 persons in custody awaiting trial in respect of 468 murders. With the length of the average murder trial running into several weeks, we could have 10 judges assigned to try nothing but murder cases for the next 5 years and we still will not have cleared the backlog…”

This is what the Chief Justice is saying.

“This is not a new problem, it existed when I assumed office and it resists efforts to address it because up to now we have not been able to effect comprehensive reform.”

He goes on to say:

“This cannot go on! No civilized society should tolerate the lengthy incarceration of persons whose guilt has not yet been determined. It is inhumane. Additionally, public confidence in the system of justice is eroded and the all-important timeous connection between commission of offences and punitive consequences, which is a major deterrent factor, is lost.”

And therefore, how do we talk about a death penalty and these sorts of things when we have this kind of gap. Our arrest rates are extremely low. Our focus has been on suppression and prevention and even that has not worked.

How many cases before the courts the Inter-Agency Task Force has? Not very many, if any at all. The TTPS has lost, in large part, its ability to make cases long...
appropriation bill, 2013

[sen. dr. balgobin]

ago, and in the state of emergency we saw that they were reduced to arresting people for outstanding traffic tickets. traffic offences accounted for as much of the arrests as anything else. that is what we came to; we saw it.

one minister said, you would recall i think it was 1995 or 1996, “crime would be a thing of the past by the end of the year”. another one says “the rate of murder increase is decreasing”—[interruption]

hon. senator: “it increasing at a decreasing rate.”

sen. dr. r. balgobin:—which might be technically correct but perhaps not the thing to say in the public domain. another one fired—looked to me like he fired a commissioner of police and then came here and stood right in the back there and said he does not know anything about that. it happened right here. and so it is no wonder in the face of such ministerial brilliance that we have what we see here. machine guns are here; what people are calling ar-15s, “that is bushmasters”. that is what they killed all those little children in the school up in the us last year, a bushmaster firing .223 rounds.

you have people now being routinely held with ak-47s firing 5.56 rounds, and you even have people being held with machine guns and so on firing 7.62 millimetre rounds. that is a round that will blow in hole in you the size of a grapefruit or bigger. and all these police that feeling safe in their bulletproof vests know that those vests are not stopping those kinds of rounds. that is what we have on our streets right now.

if at some point these bandits start pointing these guns downward at other people instead of just shooting up in the air as they do in basketball courts now, the instant those muzzles lower, this budget would not matter. we are locked in a cycle therefore that we have not demonstrated we fully understand. i have said here before i do not know who “mr. big” is but i know a number of big misters. who would i tell? the police know about them too.

i would say this, and i am fully consonant with the views of the minister of national security, one of the biggest misters in crime is the state. the state funds crime and a lot of violent activity that we see is around state contracts, not just drugs. to support the level of criminality we have, if it was drugs we would be inhaling the whole of peru. it is not just drugs. the demand for drugs alone is not what is driving this. and so we have this noxious practice of using state funds for political advancement. that should be a crime! that should be a crime! “if you serious about crime, criminalize that.” stop giving contracts to criminals. and i
do not want any Minister of National Security to come and tell me he is going to do it; I want him to come and tell me he has done it. He has done it.

Understand this: while I understand the points raised about these people have children to feed and so on, understand this, you cannot buy peace, you are merely arming them for war. And by the way, while we may import our guns, the Minister is well aware that there are people in Trinidad manufacturing ammunition. "So yuh doh have to import yuh bullets anymore. Yuh could buy them locally."

**Hon. Senator:** Machine shop.

**Sen. Dr. R. Balgobin:** So let us confront the elephant in the room, Mr. President, and let us check the role of the State and change it. Let us move away from piecemeal changes and instead take bold steps to build a better nation. Too many of us, too many of us are not conducting ourselves as we should. And that is profoundly disappointing for me to see, even in the Senate. Our egos are looming large even as our country desperately needs us to come together. We have work to do and so we must keep it real. We have to work together to take this country forward.

We have lived for years, for years, as ethnicities and religions and have scored points at each other’s expense. We must instead now rediscover our commonality. Our discussions on budget should serve as an example to the wider society of what we here together are capable of doing, working together and not just throwing stones. I thank you, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. President:** Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. [Desk thumping] And “leh” me thank you for the opportunity to join the debate at this time on the budget presentation 2014, and immediately as well to join with the rest of my colleagues in congratulating the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, not only in terms of her contribution to the debate that happened in the Lower House, but I just got a message that she had just completed addressing the United Nations in New York. [Desk thumping]

I want to also take this opportunity to congratulate Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai for another excellent budget [Desk thumping] and one that I will describe
for him as being purposeful, pointed and prosperous, contrary to what others may say. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, before I go on to some substantive discussion, I am sure you will all in this Senate join with me in extending our deepest condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Bismath Ramrattan and family, the parents of “Ravi” Ramrattan an Open National Scholar who was unfortunately killed in a terrorist attack in Nairobi, Kenya, and was the relative of my colleague on my right, Sen. Vasant Bharath.

Mr. President, I also take this opportunity to join with the hon. Minister of National Security as he extended condolences to former Brig. General Joe Theodore.

Mr. President, as I continue, I just want to make a few opening comments but to thank as well all Members of the Senate who would have made remarks or contributions with respect to the tertiary education and skills training sector.

I want to begin with Sen. Dr. Edwards who asked the question in her contribution about what was the purpose of the laptops. And I am sure it might have been a rhetorical question too because she would have known that answer, but for the record, Mr. President, I just want to remind the hon. Senator about the remarks in the Budget Statement 2011, presented in this House in the other place, on September 08, 2010 by the hon. Winston Dookeran, at that time Minister of Finance. And I quote under the section Closing the Information Gap:

“Addressing the information gap is important in fighting poverty. We must close this gap.”, he said. “Mr. Speaker, the Government will provide a laptop to each new secondary school student this month. This will ensure that our children can compete in a world where knowledge is currency.”

Mr. President, Dr. Balgobin just spoke about competitiveness and in fact in alignment with competitiveness is the whole notion of innovation, and that is fuelled and driven by the knowledge society, that is fuelled and driven by technology. One just has to look at the Global Innovation Index, a report actually, which was produced by Prof. Soumitra Dutta of one of the world’s best business schools, INSEAD, and you might want to google that. And in 2012 he said that among the top three countries in the world, in terms of innovation, were Switzerland, Sweden, and guess who?—Singapore.

9.50 p.m.

I make reference to Singapore very often because we are—Trinidad alone, and if we add Tobago, with 116 square miles, is seven times the size of Singapore. Recently,
in terms of the top countries in the world for competitiveness and innovation, we see Finland being added to that. And Finland, like many other countries, they are very high on the education sector, the success story of Finland, and we would have seen as well what is happening in the world where, even in the United States of America, the No Child Left Behind policy exists, even in terms of Chile as well—one laptop per child.

Mr. President, we are convinced on this side that the People’s Partnership Government, led by the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has made the correct decision in equipping every child in the secondary school with a laptop. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, if I had my way as well, and in fact I am now contemplating what I am going to do in the tertiary sector—for the benefit of all our students, where they would have completed secondary school and the CAPE examinations—to see what kind of technology we can have infused in that system to assist all of them to become globally competitive as well, although we are doing very well in the world market.

Mr. President, I just want to say as well to my friend, my colleague who comes from Toco, Sen. Prescott, that he spoke about the fishing industry and, in alignment with what Sen. Balgobin was saying, he wanted to know what was this real-time information that we were supposed to have. Well Sen. Balgobin will recognize, and I am sure he is aware, that for the first time in the history of this country, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, through the Ninth European Development Fund, which incidentally we would have lost to the extent of €22.3 million or TT $180 million, and we would have lost that money because of the fact that the previous administration failed to produce a policy on tertiary education.

We did it and we acquired that money and part of that money is used and was used to construct the Centre for Workforce Research and Development on the St. Augustine Campus [Desk thumping] and that is going to give you real-time information on employment statistics.

And I agree with him; he mentioned Bloomberg. As a matter of fact, if you look at CNN2, the very first week of each month, you will see that through the US DOL, the US Department of Labour, that the ticker tape tells you how many jobs were created in the month before, and I am talking about the week following. And I have said, and we have done that in Trinidad and Tobago, for the first time the jobs report was launched through this Ministry by the National Training Agency and every first week of every month you are going to get a report from the job market. [Desk thumping]
I was saying that to my colleague, Sen. Prescott, because the first one we did was on fish and fish processing and we are going to do that for every one of the important sectors, as we have been so advised—the priority sectors—whether it is energy, creativity, tourism, hospitality, ICT, manufacturing, all of them, labour market information system and the report, will be real time.

I want to tell my colleague as well, Sen. Balgobin, I know he is very much aware of this institution, that the University of the West Indies had signed an agreement with the world famous Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce that will match that Centre for Workforce Research and Development. So it is going to be internationally benchmarked. And guess what? We are ready to open. And guess what? We have a Trinidadian, a former student of UWI, St. Augustine, who worked in the economics department, Dr. Nicole Smith, who is assisting us from the Georgetown end. That is not a promise, that is a delivery. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I also want to acknowledge the comments of Sen. Helen Drayton, her very kind remarks about the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. Sen. Drayton always has a passion and a desire to ensure that our youth are not left behind or they do not fall through the cracks, as we say. I want to assure Sen. Drayton that we have now, under this Ministry and through the NESC, the National Energy Skills Centre, started a programme called NEET, N-E-E-T. What NEET means is: Not in Education, Employment or Training and we are using the strategy and the initiative and the innovative one, if I may so, of the WAC to address the N-E-E-T.

And what is the WAC? I am sure Sen. Balgobin will be very happy to hear this as well because he said, lamentably, you cannot get skilled tradesmen. And the WAC is the Workforce Assessment Centre. What they will effectively do; they are almost like walk-in centres for persons in our country who have skills and competencies but no credentials—persons who have these qualities, but not the qualifications, whether you are a plumber, a mason or whether you did the stylist hairstyle of Sen. Cudjoe, or you are a cosmetologist, and you do not have these qualifications, we can assess you against the national occupational standards of competence, which are approved by Caricom and upon assessment, you can be awarded the CVQ, the Caribbean Vocational Qualification.

And what that will do, in terms of what Sen. Balgobin asked, is when you look at the foreign television, the cable as well, you will see Angie’s List and Angie’s List, really, is a database of all the persons who have been certified in the vocational sector. But what is important as well about Angie’s List is that when
you are found and you are invited to perform that duty, you are also being assessed by the person to whom you are rendering that service. And, therefore, we are going to launch—immediately, I would say within the next couple weeks as well—our own database here in Trinidad and Tobago, where all of those persons who are certified will be listed. So that, if you live in a particular area of Trinidad and Tobago, you can get into that database, you can find this person and you can invite them to perform that duty. All of these are important developments that are taking place in our country.

But while I congratulate and I thank some of the Senators for their comments, lamentably, I want to join with some of my colleagues who had to make mention, unfortunately, of some of the unfortunate comments from one or two, and particularly one of our colleagues from the Opposition Bench.

Sen. G. Singh: About three of them there.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: You know, what took me by surprise—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: The main offender gone.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—is when you could describe, when you take the work of so many public servants and technocrats, so many people in this country—[Interruption]

Sen. Maharaj: Gone again?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—who give devoted, dedicated, technical support and services to the construct of a national budget for the benefit of all the citizens of this country and you call that “a bandit’s charter”. [Desk thumping] You know—[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: Organized madness.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—you go on to say that people are issued and getting laptops for a contract to know how much money they could take and “tief”.

You know, Mr. President, I want to tell you that this evening, we are very fortunate now, we have two medical doctors in our midst and earlier on we had three. You know, I could not help looking at what was said and therefore deduced. I am sure our medical doctors will agree that that fits the description of psychosis. Psychosis is defined; it is a medical word used to describe mental health problems that stop the person from thinking clearly, telling the difference...
between reality and their imagination and acting in a normal way.

Mr. President, if you think that psychosis alone was it, schizophrenia is an outcome or another situation that arises from that situation of psychosis. And schizophrenia is defined as a long-term mental disorder. [Laughter] You know, when you could just throw things on people—[ Interruption]

Hon. Senator: “Yeah boy.”

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—without any substance—when the hon. Attorney General had to come back here and defend, and this is the only place we could do that because it is in front of us. Schizophrenia is defined as a long-term mental disorder of a type involving a breakdown in the relation between thought, emotion and behaviour, leading to faulty perception, inappropriate actions and feelings, withdrawal from reality and personal relationships into fantasy and delusion and—guess what?—a sense of mental fragmentation.


Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. President, I want to just remind some of my colleagues in this Senate—[ Interruption]

Sen. Ramlogan SC: That is an erudite contribution, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—about a “fella” called Mahal. And if you call that person Mahal, after you would understand why I am referring to Mahal.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mahal was known to everyone everywhere in Trinidad—[ Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: He used to drive the car.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—since he walked through the entire country, fantasizing that he was driving a bus. He changed gears. Mahal changed gears. Mahal made the appropriate sounds while doing so and sometimes Mahal would stop and pick up passengers. [Laughter] Mahal slept wherever night—[ Interruption]

Sen. Ramkhelawan: “Where he from?”

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I will tell you where he is from just now. Not too far from where—there was a Mahal not too far from where you live, Senator. And Mahal slept wherever night took him.
One time, as a matter of fact, he did not know where he was, and he got up in the night because he heard a sound that was threatening to him in a remote area. “he take off with a speed.” So the bus was no longer a 48 or a 49; it was a 50; non-stop.

Mr. President, I want to tell you that Mahal might have been the person who may have been driving a bus number 2020 and he may pretend to stop and pick up 10 passengers more to get the bus number to go to 2030. [Laughter]

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Well said, man. Well said. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** I am not saying that Mahal might have not had vision—[Interruption]

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** But Hart was always the conductor. He remained in charge. “Doh worry.”

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** But you know, Mr. President, when you listen sometimes, unfortunately, to some of my colleagues, it reminds us of the records of the past. “If yuh is ah 45 RPM, yuh finish quick.” [Laughter] “If yuh is ah 78, yuh take ah lil longer. But when yuh is ah LP with six songs on one side—” [Interruption]

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** “Oooo, papa”!

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:**—it really is a tedious task sometimes to take this punishment.

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** “De way dem fellas do, like dey go convince you yuh have ah afro.”

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Mr. President, mention was made—and while we are talking about Mahal and Sen. Ramkhelawan asked where he is from. Mahal might have originated from the sugar cane area.

Reference was made to the sugar cane workers by one of the Senators from the Opposition, I think—[Interruption]

**Sen. G. Singh:** Hinds.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:**—it was Sen. Hinds. Mr. President, I just want to remind all of us in this Senate, that year after year he said: “You come here and we speak about the Caroni (1975) Limited workers.” He said we give them money, we give them land, we give them training. But I say to Sen. Hinds and all
of those who are responsible, that was after you destroyed their livelihood and their lives. [Desk thumping] You have destroyed an entire industry because it was the base of the United National Congress.

**Hon. Senator:** Coalition.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** I want to ask all of my colleagues and particularly Sen. Hinds—[Interruption]

**Sen. Maharaj:** Who is absent again!

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:**—not to forget Viktor Frankl in his book: *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

**Sen. Ramnarine:** *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** You may imprison a person physically but you will never imprison their mind. [Desk thumping]

I also want to remind him that many people before have imprisoned many other people but it never stopped them from changing the world. And as Sen. Balgobin said, game changers. Whether you had a number in prison 466/64—[Interruption]

**Sen. Ramnarine:** Mandela.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:**—and whether you stayed in Robben Island for over 17 years, or whether you stayed in captivity for 27 years and six months like Mandela, or whether you were like Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks, or whether you were like Mahatma Gandhi, you can imprison them physically but you cannot imprison their minds.

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** “Awww.” Well said man, well said. [Desk thumping]

10.05 p.m.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Therefore, I want to tell you that the people of Caroni (1975) Limited, while you give them a pittance of training—and I am coming back here to Dr. Balgobin’s point—it was never responsive to the economic development strategy and the labour market. It was never aligned. It was, “come and take some training”—and you know, one day I will tell you the numbers and the figures and who got a lot of money out of that, but another time—they got short courses to keep them busy and quiet, and many of them had no jobs after that—[Interruption]

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Pappyshow. Pappyshow.
Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and that is why we are talking about this mismatch of skills and, therefore, as I continue to speak about the investment in education and training, and Sen. Balgobin as well made reference to the fact that this is the largest budget in education, but it is really the largest budget for education and training: $9.8 billion or 24 per cent of the budget allotment of $61 billion. But of that amount, I want to tell Sen. Balgobin as well, of that amount, 3.3 or $4 billion went to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training or 5.55 per cent of the entire $61 billion. It also went to the Ministry of Education, and it also went to the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development through the Cipriani college, and also to the Ministry of Public Administration through scholarships.

Therefore, as we speak about training and education, I want to indicate and to advise—and I know Sen. Dr. Edwards also asked that point about the GATE programme. Let me say categorically here again, I do not know how many times I need to repeat it, but I will repeat it. The Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses—let me say the T is tuition. There was a Motion brought by the Opposition at one time and I had to come and reply in the other place, and the Motion was Government assistance for tertiary expenses. I almost said that we did not need to debate this Motion anymore. But the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, the GATE programme, if you read the manifesto of the People’s Partnership, the 120-day action plan, item No. 2 says as follows: We will secure and expand the GATE programme to vocational education. [Desk thumping] And I want to say that was “ah done”, a tick.

Mr. President, as we speak about the mismatch of skills, I want to tell all Senators in this honourable Senate that what I propose to focus on, is not to finance failures in our system, but to promote success. I want to say that what I propose to focus on as well in this Ministry is, number one, the enrolment rate; secondly, the graduation rate; thirdly, the employment rate. If you look at what is happening in the world today, you will see that by 2030—and it is not about the vision 2030—if you read McKinsey Global report, you will see that by 2030, there will be a shortage of 75 million people in the skills sector, and we must ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is prepared as well. And I will talk about some of the investment strategy of my Cabinet colleagues, Minister Bharath and the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

If we do not focus on that, what we will be doing is that we are going to be contributing to what I call, the graduate glut, or the discouraged graduate. How do you define the graduate glut? The graduate glut is defined as someone—I am contributing to the graduate glut—who pursues a programme or a course of study at the invested
dollar of the taxpayer through the GATE programme, 100 per cent at the undergraduate level, at the end of which there is no hope of a job. The discouraged graduate is one who sends out letters, frequently, of applications for employment and does not get a reply.

As matter of fact, in one institution in Trinidad and Tobago now, we have approximately 300 students doing a course called: Agri-Business Management. I do not know how many of them will get jobs after that. That is why we are saying, we have to ensure that we have a directional plan for those persons who are accessing Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. If we do not, we are going to continue to have this phenomenon of the mismatch of skills. If we do not, what is going to happen, we are going to put more pressure on the social infrastructure in the country. If we do not, we will have to spend more money on the On the Job Training Programme to ensure that we can take people for approximately a maximum of two years to have them do some gainful work.

And let me just say that right now, we have over 7,500 persons in the OJT Programme. And for the first time again, in the history of this country, we have launched—for example, Minister Devant Maharaj is a beneficiary of that. I am going to talk just now about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. For the first time we have launched OJT sectoral, never before. So we were having OJTs and you were sending them all over the place, many of them were glorified coffee and tea makers, photocopiers.

Hon. Senator: True.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: What we are doing is in the medical faculty—because you do not have the capacity now—if you have a deferred approval/acceptance for next year, I am taking all those medical students and I am putting them in the OJT medical programme. Go and work in the hospitals, the health centres, the clinics. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]


Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I am seeing the nod from my dear colleague, Sen. Edwards, they might be even better students when they enter. You know something, we are talking about giving back to Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. President, when I tell you, those who are accessing the GATE Programme under the new contract, you have to get somebody to sign as a guarantor. You will return the investment of the taxpayer dollar to serve Trinidad and Tobago for a period of two years. [Desk thumping]
Sen. Ramlogan SC: “Yeah, yeah, man.”

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: And we are going to enforce that. In fact, if you read Minister Howai’s budget speech last year, he will say and he would have told you there that he is tightening the GATE Programme.


Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I want to also tell you that we are going to be looking carefully to see how fees are being charged in this country for identical courses by institutions. It cannot be exploitation, it has to be equity and we speak about equity all the time; equity and equality and fairness and opportunity.

I want to just tell people, if you read the literature recently, Barbados has now said to all of their students going to any University of the West Indies—any campus in the Caribbean—you will pay your own fees, and the budget has been cut by Bar. $42 million to the University of the West Indies. To the contrary, and I repeat, the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses in Trinidad and Tobago under the People’s Partnership is well secured. [Desk thumping]

And I want to tell you as well, we are advising our students as to what they should be pursuing. You know what is happening as well, Mr. President? We are finding a bothersome phenomenon again, of people doing two first degrees. So you do a first degree and you graduate. You go back to do a next first degree and the question, when I ask is, why are you doing that? “Dey say well, you know wah happenin, we not getting job for de one we did.” “Ah say and any other reason?” “Well, dah was not de one ah wanted to do in the first place. Dah was de choice they give me.”

So we have developed again through the jobs and career coaches two mobile facilities, and through the OJT offices, and through the National Training Agency and through all the institutions of the Ministry, like we have the World of Work in UWI, how do we advise our students before they even commence their studies. And if they have to change in the first year, normally they have to apply to change faculties, they can do so on advisement.

We are also inviting, for the first time again, for the first time in the history of this country, the Ministry of Education, my colleague, Dr. Gopeesingh and our Ministry, we have gotten together and have career guidance seminars for over 53,000 students in the secondary schools, [Desk thumping] in all the education divisions, including Tobago. That is how we are going to change the system.

Hon. Senator: Fifty-three thousand, “yuh say, yuh know”.
Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Fifty-three thousand students and these come not only from the public schools, “eh”—private schools and students wherever they are. It was well advertised and attended.

Hon. Senator: They talk, we deliver.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: You know, as I am talking about GATE, let me just make a comment about GATE. I am listening to some of the commentators and lecturers and directors in different institutions who are talking about GATE is not reaching the poorest in our society.

10.15 p.m.

Well, Mr. President, if it is not reaching the poorest, then it is reaching the wealthiest then. You look at our institutions—those in the top echelon of our society, see where they study, see which countries they go to. I want to tell you. You look at the doubles vendor—in fact, I had one the other day tell me that he was so proud of the GATE Programme that his son was now going to medical school and he would never have been able to afford that if he had to pay for it.

We will take a survey of the taxi drivers, of the domestic workers, of the single parents—ordinary people—they are benefiting from the GATE Programme. But not only that, for the first time as well, they are benefiting—from those persons like Sen. Balgobin talked about, of the 39 per cent, 15 years and over, who have no qualifications—because many of them are going and pursuing programmes that are GATE funded in the vocational sector.

I want to tell you about the vocational sector. The vocational sector, I describe sometimes as that sector that is seen as the less than parity of esteem. What does that mean? The less than parity of esteem in terms of academia because we tend to focus so much on academia.

We have now a student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Civil Engineering Department, pursuing that degree, who came through the vocational rank with the CVQs. I am advised now that he is on his way to obtaining a first-class honours degree in civil engineering. [Desk thumping]

I want to tell you as well of another young man who went to a junior secondary school; went on to a senior comprehensive school; went on to John S. Donaldson Technological Institute. Incidentally, I just want to tell my friends on the Opposition Bench, we have done for UTT what you have not done as yet. Look at UTT campuses—[Interruption]
Sen. Singh: Beautiful!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and it is not only how they look, but in terms of how they are performing and how they are structured. UTT will be 10 years old in 2014 and we will celebrate that in a grand way with all of them. That young man who went on to John S. Donaldson Technical Institute did Mechanical Engineering Technology, MET, and during his internship was placed at the BWIA hangar at Piarco and he decided, “I was not only going to learn to fix this plane, I want to fly this plane”. That young man sits on the right side now of the Boeing 737. [Desk thumping] “Thas what we talkin bout.”

Hon. Senator: Success.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I can go on and tell you a lot more, but let me just say, in the context of what Sen. Dr. Mahabir said. He said. “One cannot solve a problem without knowing the nature of the problem.” And he was making reference to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Draft, Third Five-Year Plan, 1969—1973. Well, I just want to tell this honourable Senate what are some of the things that we found and the problems that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy has to grapple with.

What we met as a legacy of the past was that during the period 2007 to 2010—and these are issues that were revealed by the Auditor General’s Report for that period of time on public accounts—that for the year 2007, outstanding commitments—that is, goods and services ordered but not delivered—to the tune of $66 million. For that same year, 2007, the Auditor General’s Report on public accounts revealed that cases of theft and losses reported—139—to the value of $3.5 million.

In 2008, outstanding commitments went up—that is, goods and services ordered but not delivered—$748 million; in that same year, 146 reported cases of theft amounting to $4.1 million.

In 2009, outstanding commitments totalled $20 million; 154 cases of theft, $2.2 million; and in 2010, just before that period—we are looking at the fiscal period—outstanding commitments totalled $76.7 million; 108 cases of theft, $2.3 million, totalling for that period, 2007 to 2010, a total of outstanding commitments—that is, goods and services ordered but not delivered—$910.7 million.

Mr. President, that is what we faced when we entered office in 2010. They say you must not go back to the past, but if you do not go back to the past, how will
you correct the future? We were left with a decaying Treasury, a mismanaged economy, a broken public service and untold D-E-B-T.

What did the Auditor General’s Report of 2010 say? Public debt of $32.3 billion; outstanding loans repayable to the Government of $1.8 billion; overpayments to the tune of $93.5 million; outstanding balances on BOLT projects, $611.5 million, and I can go on and give you the details of all of these, but I think, given the time I have remaining, I want to say some more things about the sector.

Mr. President, I want to also say that sometimes you hear comments that we are emptying Port of Spain. You hear comments that institutions are leaving Port of Spain and going central and south. I want to tell this honourable Senate that that is furthest from the truth. For very many years and continuing, certainly in my Ministry and I am sure other Ministries, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, COSTAATT, UTT, MIC, YTEPP, HYPE, MuST, Retraining—all of them have been here on the Corridor for many years.

I want to tell you what was here on the Corridor for many years and never moved, but it has moved now—the MYPART Programme. The Military Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training was based at one place, the former teacher’s college, Mauca, and when I took over that—it was realigned to my Ministry—I decided that we would not leave it only in one location in Trinidad. We are going to increase the access for the rest of the students of this country. I spoke to, at that time, my Cabinet colleague, Minister Coudray, who was Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development, under whom the YDACs came—the youth camps, that is—and I asked her whether I could use the underutilized facilities, the dormitory facilities in the youth camps. We had a site visit and we agreed.

Mr. President, I am pleased to tell this country that the National Energy Skills Centre has the responsibility for the vocational trainer and we are not compromising and we have not compromised the integrity of the MYPART Programme. It is still a residentiary programme and we are using the dormitories of the Presto Praesto Youth Camp and the Chatham Youth Camp. So now, for the first time, it has moved from one location in the north to central and to deep south, free of charge, and they are being paid a stipend.

Mr. President, I also want to indicate that the El Dorado Nurses Training Academy—and I want to thank as well here and put on the record of the Senate my gratitude to the Minister of Sport—at that time he was Minister of Sport and
Youth Affairs—Minister Anil Roberts, and the former Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development, Minister Coudray.

The El Dorado Nurses Training Academy was formerly called the El Dorado Girls Youth Camp. It is a 200-bed facility that was sitting idle for years and the only thing that that facility was being used for was a music class of 10 persons from the community. That former youth camp is now the training centre, which is co-managed by the University of the West Indies and COSTAATT and will turn out thousands of nurses in the years to come. We have started training already.

Mr. President, as we are talking about training and access, I just want to say that sometimes we talk about disrespect, but there are some other Ds that we need to remind ourselves about, that we inherited, and that is “disregard” and “disdain”.

There was a centre in the south called the NESC Debe Technology Centre and that centre was closed down by the former administration—[Interruption]

Sen. G. Singh: Really?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and all the students from there had to go UWI, Ste. Madeleine at the MIC NESC facility. Mr. President, I want to tell you that centre has been reopened and I want to invite my colleagues to come to graduation functions there. [Desk thumping] Taxpayers would have footed a bill of $6.65 million, but you know, we hear from the contributions the same old, same old. I want to tell you what was the same old, same old for a number of years: the Biche High School—same old, same old for a number of years.

The Seismic Research Unit confirmed no increase in seismic activity in that area. The geophysical studies revealed no land slippage. The environmental studies revealed good quality fresh air. Three independent firms, CARIRI, ROSE Environmental Limited and Geotech Limited confirmed that the air quality met acceptable standards and that construction was consistent with earthquake resistant designs; but the former administration had a commission of enquiry which resulted in a 72-page report that found that there was nothing wrong with the Biche High School. Yet the Biche High School was derailed, another D, for a decade, another D.

That is the policy of some of our friends opposite—inequity, discrimination, abuse and mismanagement. Hundreds of students suffered and hundreds of families paid a high price for that. Children had to get up four o’clock, 4.30 in the morning to go to school 20 miles away.
I say all of this in the context of the national debate on the budget because it is about investment in education and the return of the taxpayer dollar for the investment in the education of our boys and girls. [Crosstalk] Parents suffered transportation costs of $30—$40 a day. Taxpayers suffered, too. The Biche High School cost taxpayers $6 million in security and $30 million in substructure works and repaving, a total of $36 million, when you could have opened the school 10 years before that and make it functional.

This is the legacy that we have inherited. This is how you put people first and, therefore, I am saying that this Ministry and this Government we are preparing the workforce of the future.

I made mention earlier on of my Cabinet colleague, Minister Bharath, and that we are looking to see how we can prepare our students in the maritime sector. As a matter of fact, much would have been said about the new Panama Canal which would have started at US $5.2 billion and expanded and that we have to prepare our human capacity here, through UTT maritime campus and other infrastructure facilities for education and training for our students to benefit from the expansion of that canal and the services in the maritime sector. Therefore, our vision is for an expanded and equitable sector; is for a rationalized and diversified sector; and, very importantly, for a sustainable sector.

Mr. President, I also want to indicate that we are well on the way to the construction of the University of the West Indies, Penal/Debe campus and I am pleased to announce to this honourable Senate that all the buildings there are off the ground and into structural frame—all. [Desk thumping]

I want to remind Sen. Cudjoe, which was reinforced by Minister Alleyne-Toppin this morning, that the UTT Education Campus has been established in Scarborough, Tobago. I want to also remind my friends that for the first time the people of Sangre Grande, the north-east area and the eastern seaboard are benefiting from a new COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande. [Desk thumping] That has an intake of 400 students.

I want to also indicate that we are constructing, through the NESC, YTEPP and MIC—and the facility is already in construction—a state-of-the-art, automotive technology centre in Chaguanas. That is in conjunction with the Automotive Dealers Association. I want to thank the Automotive Dealers Association for their contributions and for their input and to say that we expect in the first quarter of the calendar year of 2014, that facility will be opened.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Tertiary
Education and Skills Training has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Minister’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. President, [Desk thumping] and thank you colleagues. Sometimes you really hear the hallucinations of Mahal, [Laughter] but Mahal will be with us only for a little while.

I just want to mention something again that I am sure my colleagues will be impressed with.

Sen. Hinds: Mahal, he had a mop.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mahal, Mahal, my friend Mahal here, and any time you see them walking around and going house-to-house and having meetings and throwing these words of hallucination, you will remember Mahal, our friend. Any time you see him, remember Mahal. Do not forget.

Hon. Senator: Taj Mahal.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: But not the Taj Mahal.

Therefore, I come to the aviation industry. I am pleased to say that arising out of the launch of the aviation institute—and the aviation institute compromises a consortium of Caribbean Airlines, the Metal Industries Company Limited, the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the Civil Aviation Authority—all of them and, for the first time, we have launched an avionics programme and we are about to graduate, within the next few weeks, the class of 16 persons. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, that programme is costing each of those students TT $8,000, but if you had to do an equivalent programme in any FAA-approved institution in any other part in the world and particularly in terms of the United States of America, students would have had to pay approximately US $25,000 to US $30,000 and, therefore, we are very proud of that accomplishment.

As a matter of fact, I want to also say that—I just want to mention very quickly the impact of that aviation training and to say that my Cabinet colleague, Minister Bharath, brought a note to the Cabinet for the development of an aviation park, the Camden Air Park, which will really expand the services for technology training, maintenance training and also, in terms of the very many types of programmes that will be required, whether it is in terms of engines, piston and gas turbines, electrics, ice and rain protection, landing gear and wheel-braking systems, emergency units, any of those.
Mr. President, I just also want to make mention—I want to thank my Cabinet colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, that for the first time again, we are going to be responding in a very significant way—a deliberate intervention strategy—to the return of the trade school concept to be called the Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme.

We are going to train, in the next seven years, approximately 700 persons who will spend approximately two years in apprenticeship training with the NESC and on the estate in Point Lisas with rotations of six months each in each of the plants on the industrial estate. We propose to launch this programme within the next month and again I thank my Cabinet colleague for his assistance in that regard.

10.35 p.m.

Mr. President, as I conclude, I just want to give you some highlights on the accomplishments of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. In April 2013, the NTA entered into an agreement with the Institute of Technical Education of Singapore to support curriculum review and technical teacher development.

In May 2013, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago entered into a memorandum of cooperation with UK NARIC to share good practice and support the recognition of qualifications internationally.

In May 2013, again, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago entered into a memorandum of cooperation with the Council for Adult Education and Learning to promote experiential and lifelong learning.

In July 2013, we entered into partnerships with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association; the Trinidad and Tobago Local Content Chamber, the ECA; the Coalition of Services Industries; the Chamber of Industry and Commerce; the Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce and the Point Lisas Energy Chamber, all towards assisting us in gathering information for the jobs report.

Mr. President, much would have been said about some of the other institutions, but let me also make reference to the fact that much has been said about the whole aspect of innovation, competitiveness and research, and now we have a research fund under the Ministry as opposed to designated only to one institution before, so that there is a wider net of persons who can apply for the use of that facility.

Mr. President, I wish to also tell you that Cabinet has approved the UTT main campus in May 2007 at a project cost of $1.8 billion, and that was expected to be completed in December of 2010. It has not, but we are continuing that project. We are going to manage that project and we are going to deliver that project by 2015.
Mr. President, the Tamana project is going to continue. I also want to make mention of the fact that recently we signed an agreement with the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, AIST, of Japan and the University of Trinidad and Tobago, that will support research activities into the uses of DME, dimethyl ether, which is a colourless gas that can be used in diesel engines, petrol engines and gas turbines. This will act—and I am sure the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs supports this as well—as an alternative fuel source and reduce the nation’s fuel subsidy once proven to be commercially viable. Mr. President, this is where the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is heading; this is where we are going as a Ministry.

I want to also indicate that very shortly we expect to receive a drilling school that will be located and housed at the National Energy Skills Centre. As you are aware, we are currently conduct training, not only upstream and downstream for those nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, but we have trained over 200 persons from Nigeria, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the National Energy Skills Centre, has been receiving payments for that. So that is really a profit export centre, in a sense.

We also will commence, in the new year, activities on the Mayaro Skills and Technology Centre. We will expand the Palo Seco centre and the Skills Technology Centre in Moruga; we will complete the Diego Martin Technology Centre so they would not say, “It is only skewed development in one part of the country”; we will commence with the MIC Advanced Skills and Technology Centre in Clarke Road, Penal; we will be rebranding the MIC as the “MIC Institute of Technology” and we will be establishing a mobile welding caravan.

In addition to that, YTEPP, as I indicated before, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year as a World Bank success story, and will be opening across Trinidad and Tobago 20 PALS—P-A-L-S Public Access Learning Centres or “assistance” which is very much like the project of Dr. Sugata Mitra from India called the “high well project or “the hole in the wall project”, where it is simply placing a computer in a wall and allowing the children to engage in discovery learning, and to be accustomed and competent in the use of the technology.

Mr. President, we are also preparing, soon after this budget, to commence construction of phase one of the main campus in Chaguanas of COSTAATT, Connector Road. [Desk thumping] Right now, we are paying approximately $1 million a month in rent for the COSTAATT campus in Port of Spain and we cannot expand that by one foot. Mr. President, I also want to indicate that we propose to consider launching learning centres of COSTAATT in Siparia, Princes Town, Fyzabad and Rio Claro, and to increase as well the training of nurses in Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. President, the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus and, particularly, the Faculty of Medical Sciences, was threatened with deaccreditation—

[Interruption]

Sen. Deyalsingh: Say that again.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—was threatened with deaccreditation, the Faculty of Medical Sciences, because one of the quality assurance requirements was that they did not have a student activity centre. We have since—this Ministry has since assisted and financed the construction of that centre. It is now complete and ready for opening, and we are ensuring that the accreditation of the medical school is well in hand and continuing. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, as I conclude, I just want to indicate that we will continue to revisit the trade school concept to engage in apprentice training, to ensure that we have the tooling and retooling of our society, and that the retirees in our society will not be forgotten—that they too have skills and competencies—and will be invited to return to the workforce as we prepare for the future.

I want to also indicate, that as I mentioned before, that the Minister of Finance and Economy said in his budget last year that we must tighten the GATE Programme. We have engaged in a government-to-government arrangement with Singapore through IDA International for the implementation of the GATE e-services programme where we will have real-time data on the 59,000-plus persons who are accessing the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses.

In addition to that, we are going to ensure that we look carefully at the GPA of every student for articulation into the next level. But, very importantly, in the vocational sectors, as we have witnessed, the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, the e-services, we will be able to track every individual student to ensure that we reduce, if not, eliminate completely, again, that phenomenon of programme hoppers—those who go in a programme in the day and go in another one in the evening, simply to become a professional stipend receiver.

Mr. President, we continue the industry scholarship programme. I want to say, as I conclude, again, that the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training is indeed very grateful for the amount, through the national budget, that has been given through the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and the hon. Prime Minister. I want to say that we are well on the way to preparing the workforce of the future. I thank you, Mr. President. [Desk thumping]
Hon. Senator: Well done. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: You have to do a novena for that one.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. President, I would like to thank all Senators of the Senate for the contributions made over the past few days. I know it has been a long debate; it has been long. Actually, for me, it started on September 09, even before that time. [Crosstalk]


Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah. So it has been long, and I know the hour is late, so I would seek to be as brief as possible.

Sen. George: Take a whole hour.

Sen. Singh: “Yeah man.”

Hon. Senator: Take the full hour.


Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: The contributions were all very useful. In many instances, there are several recommendations which I think we can take on board, and we certainly would want to consider as we move forward towards the Finance Bill and the debate on the Finance Bill which will incorporate the initiatives that we are putting in place in this budget.

Mr. President, I would say that the cut and thrust of the debate is certainly the spice or perhaps the sauce of the liveliness of the discussion that takes place and of the debate itself. And certainly, you know, it is important, but I think what is even more important, of course, is that in the course of this debate that we engage in constructive dialogue and constructive contributions to enrich the entire process which would have started on the Government side, but which when all of the contributions are taken into account, would certainly enrich the contribution to the country as a whole. I think the purpose of the debate is really to result in a richer and more focused budget and, certainly, a much fuller budget for the country as a whole that would result in the continuing process of nation building.

Certainly, in listening to my colleague, I do recall you know—he did mention Mr. Nelson Mandela, and I do recall the process by which Mr. Mandela started the construction of his own country—after decades or perhaps centuries of apartheid—was by way of embracing the diverse views of all positions, all parties, all races, within the republic and I think that has certainly set the republic
on the course to becoming one of the more vibrant nations in the world—part of what we call now the BRICS where they used to be the BRIC countries and now they have added “S” to include South Africa.

So, certainly, I have to say, Mr. President, it has been a philosophy which also has guided me in terms of what I do, and how I go about the process of building value, whether it is here in Government, whether it was previously in the bank where I was located.

I have to say, in passing, that one of the initiatives we had in place for the last year was the listing of some of the shares of First Citizens Bank. And, you know, if I go back to 1996, I remember the then CEO of the bank, Mr. Leonard Busse, an international consultant who had been brought here to be CEO of the bank, I remember on leaving—when he was leaving the bank—he had written to the Central Bank and said that you should really just sell out the portfolios of the institution—the deposit portfolio and the loan portfolio—to other banks because really you could not make very much of this, you should really sell it as scrap, basically. And I think it was, therefore, very fulfilling for me to see that even though—we had been able to move this institution from what someone termed as “scrap” to an institution that would have been valued at $5 billion. [Desk thumping] In fact, the market actually valued it seven and a half billion [Desk thumping] because the shares which we list at $22 are now trading at about $34 or about 33 per cent.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Well done Larry; well done Larry, well done. [Desk thumping] Fantastic!

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: So I think, you know, it is a question of having a philosophy and identifying how we can implement this approach to everything that we do. The point I was trying to make is that approach to receiving and looking at the contributions of all parties towards the achievement of a greater objective is what we should be seeking to achieve and, therefore, I was very pleased to get the contributions of Senators on the opposite side which have been very helpful for me. I would come back to that in a little while.

One of the issues, of course, that has been raised time and time again in this debate has been the question of the data to support growth. I have to say that we do share the comments and disappointment that, in fact, we have not progressed with the CSO in the way that we should and we accept that, and I think it is something that we are working to accelerate that process and to achieve—to get to
where we want to be.

I want to say though that, notwithstanding the difficulties which the CSO has experienced, I want to congratulate the staff for continuing the work [Desk thumping] and continuing to try and to use the information [Desk thumping] which they have had to produce. I did look at the data that they had presented, and I made the decision not to use the data because I was not comfortable with all of the assumptions that went into it. And, in fact, the estimates which they gave us was, basically, I thought quite—

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Quite reasonable. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah. Well, certainly, it was optimistic. The growth rate that had been projected for this year—


Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—was 2.8 per cent which, when we looked at it, you know, I felt uncomfortable. I thought more work needed to go into it.

10.50 p.m.

So we have used the figure of 1.6 per cent, which is in keeping with our own estimates that we used together with the data which we have received from the Central Bank, and the numbers we have used is more or less in line with the data that the Central Bank has put out. So we have sought to be as conservative as we can and to use the data that we felt comfortable that we could rely on, and we feel fairly comfortable with the numbers that we have.

What I have said is that we are projecting, or I have made mention of the fact that we have had four quarters of growth, and in a sense, in going back and looking at the four quarters, the numbers for the four quarters would certainly be better than the numbers if you use calendar year 2012, and calendar year 2013, because I am crossing—I am saying from July to June of this year, which is “a four quarters” for which data is available, both from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, as well as from the Central Bank.

One of the things that I have to say though is that we have to be careful in identifying the macroeconomic initiatives that we are going to put in place to move the economy along. The non-energy sector is moving at a rate that I feel comfortable, based on the initiatives that we have in place, should see a continuing expansion of the economy, a continuing expansion of employment
without a significant uptick in inflation. But we have to be careful because I think it is right at that level where we do not want to push it too much further, and the data that we are seeing overall for the economy could be misleading, in the sense that a big part of the economy—40 per cent of the economy is the energy sector—and the energy sector is not showing growth simply because of the maintenance work that is going on in that sector, and therefore one does not wish to introduce a macroeconomic policy initiative to deal with what I have described before and elsewhere as an engineering problem.

In other words, we do have a situation where economic stimulus is not going to increase output; increasing output is a function of dealing with the maintenance issues that exist in the sector, which we expect to finish by the end of this quarter, certainly not later than the first two weeks of October. So that we expect that going into next year, the combination of return to growth in the energy sector, coupled with the momentum that is taking place in the non-energy sector, should see us getting to a rate of growth of employment that is sustainable, in the sense that it matches the inflows of foreign exchange, it does not significantly deplete foreign exchange, and it does not significantly result in increases in inflation.

So we therefore need to be mindful of that and, therefore, how we evaluate the growth that is taking place in the economy needs to take that aspect of it into account. I also want to say that growth is not necessarily synonymous with development. Development signals, or says, that we are speaking to sustainable growth and balanced growth in a diversified economy, and we are not at that level yet. And therefore, again, when we speak to growth and while we have taken steps to ensure that the economy continues to grow, so that we can expand incomes, and continue to create meaningful jobs, I want to say that we are also conscious of the fact that it has a high import content without a similar generation, an increase in the generation of foreign exchange as the non-energy sector continues to grow. And the diversification which will see the growth in foreign exchange earnings over time will take some time for us to actually see it come to fruition.

Our strategy has been to continue—to make sure that the growth momentum continues into the future while we continue the diversification efforts. I am pleased with the results we have seen this year, and I know, I am very confident, that based on the initiatives we have, based on our capacity to execute which improves as we go forward, that we will see a continuing exponential growth—probably exponential might be too strong a word—but certainly a continuing growth in the non-energy sector, particularly in the diversification of that sector. I
would not go into, again, all the details which have been discussed before about how the economy has been diversifying.

There are few initiatives which came up and I want to certainly—I would like to invite Sen. Dr. Mahabir, for us to have some further discussion on his very innovative and creative ideas that he had put forward. [Desk thumping] Certainly the idea of the index link pensions and retirement bonds is something that I think we need to explore, and we need to [Crosstalk] understand what are some of the initiatives that we need to take into account.

Sen. Al-Rawi: We have that in the 2030 plan.

Hon. Senator: Ah!

Hon. Senator: “Yeah, right.”

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Right. Okay, give me a copy so I could read it. [Laughter] I will not bother to speak to Dr. Mahabir.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: Because they would not be here to implement it.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah, thanks. And certainly, Sen. Roach, you know the issues on the programmes—that greater thrust that we need to develop programmes that create more friendly outcomes for the differently abled in our society is something that I think we need to speak to. I do not think we have engaged that community in the way that we should have. Certainly, I have not, maybe my predecessor may have. We did increase the grants for the disabled last year, based on some representations that were made, but I cannot say that it was based on a comprehensive evaluation and engagement with the community, with the differently abled. [Interrupt] Yeah, thank you.

So I think that those are some discussions that we would want to have, and, similarly, Sen. Lambert made a recommendation which I am not quite sure how well it would be received by all—[Interrupt]

Hon. Senator: Via the CPO.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—yeah, by all constituencies, but certainly the increase in the retirement age to 65 is something that—certainly on our side, given some of the fiscal challenges that we face, we think it makes sense, but of course there are some issues in terms of how one implements this generally, but certainly if the representative union would like to engage in that discussion we are ready and willing [Desk thumping] to take on that conversation.
And, of course, the tax incentives for contributions to the NGOs, Sen. Drayton, we would like to have some—I had a preliminary discussion with my technical staff who seem to have some areas of concern, and I think we would want to engage in that discussion, leading into the preparation of the Finance Bill, where all of these things would take effect. So these are the things we certainly will take on board as we move forward, and we will engage in that discussion.

The public debt is an issue that has come up, and we will—in fact a question has been tabled in the other place, which we will discuss. The total debt has increased, but so has GDP; so the debt to GDP number has remained the same.

**Sen. Ramlogan SC:** Ah! [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** There were some questions raised about the question of the inclusion of contingent liabilities, and the numbers we have without waving the books around and so on, but certainly in the monetary policy document which Central Bank has put out, there is a detailed list of what comprises the debt. And for these purposes we do not include open market operations—open market operations are excluded, so we deal with the net public debt.

We also have not included the sinking funds; we have about $4 billion in sinking funds which we have not included by netting off, we have not netted it off. We have shown the gross figure without netting off the sinking funds that we have, and we have not also taken into consideration the funding that we expect to recover from the sale of the CL Financial assets, which eventually will come up for sale over the course of the next 12 months or so.

So the numbers that we have at 45 per cent seem reasonable. I am concerned though that, as we continue, there is the possibility of that build-up of the debt which we need to be very, very conscious of, and we need to manage very closely. You have heard Minister George speak of the fact that some of the projects which had been identified, for example, the court, some of the courts we have deferred. We are not saying that we are not going to build them, but we are not going to build them right away. There are some priorities that we have put in place, and that has happened not only in this Ministry, but I have engaged other Ministries in that discussion. It is not that we are not going to do things, it is just that I would like to see some of the cash flows from the disposal of assets and so on starting to materialize so that I could see how things are being matched, to ensure that we do not have an unsustainable build-up of the overall debt profile of the country.

So that process has started, and I think one or two Ministers also mentioned a
couple of projects that might be deferred a bit, and that is as a result of those
discussions that have been going on. There was a mention of the disaster fund,
and I would just say—-[Interuption]

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Senator—


Sen. Dr. Mahabir:—just a brief point of clarification. I really do not wish to
interrupt, but I need clarification on the Clico debt. Is the Clico debt included in
the $72 billion gross debt stock of Trinidad and Tobago?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah. The $10 billion and a previous $5 billion
were included. There is $4 billion that was taken straight out of cash flows, rather
than out of borrowing; so that there is about $15 billion in the debt stock, $10
billion of it was actually added last year when I came on board, and we launched
the CIF, where on launching the CIF, I had to issue bonds to Clico to take the
Republic shares and put into the CIF. So some of it was out of cash flow, and
some of it was out of actual borrowings.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: So as far as you are aware now the gross debt stock that
we have in Trinidad and Tobago is what is contained in the Review of the
Economy, $72 billion, as far as you are aware with the information you have?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah. That is right.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Okay, thank you.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah. In terms of the disaster fund, Sen. Beckles,
we do have a Contingency Fund of $100 million, which we have topped up now,
and I have that in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. So we have $100
million there, and even before I came in—and it may have preceded even this
administration—there was a special insurance fund which was established
together with other Caricom countries. I have agreed to continue the fund and our
participation in the fund, and that also gives an independent cash flow, in US
dollars. So the $100 million is TT, and then we have this insurance fund which is
in US dollars. So those are two funds that do exist right now.

With respect to Tobago, I just needed to mention that I did check on the
arrangements for the allocation to Tobago, and Sen. Cudjoe is correct. In fact, the
allocation is the 4.03, and we are not supposed to include the eight whatever,
$800 million. [Desk thumping] So I want to say to Sen. Cudjoe that she was
correct, and we will ensure that in future we arrange the language to reflect that.
There are a number of other issues we need to deal with as far as the allocation is concerned, and what happens, because what happens in the case of Tobago, is where they do not spend money, unlike other Ministries it comes back to the Treasury, in the case of Tobago it does not, and therefore you have a build-up of a fund that one needs to determine how we are going to deal with that.

I would say though that—and there have been a number of complaints by the THA concerning the fact that they did not get their full allocation, but I think it is a normal complaint that I have from all Ministries. The total that I get at the start of the budgeting exercise is about close to $120 billion in requests, including Tobago, and my job is to bring the $120 billion down to some figure that is closer to the revenue figure that we have for the country as a whole. So my job is to knock about 60—[Interruption] Yeah—$60 billion or so out of it, and everybody complains that I am going to shut down the country, and the whole place will come to, you know, everything will come to an end. The world will come to an end as a result of this, and that is just par for the course when you are the Minister of Finance, so we deal with that.

11.05 p.m.

So, yes, Tobago complains, but local government is telling me about their thing and the AG is saying—I have to thank the AG. The AG actually came to me and said, “Look, I have a building to build and I know you are talking about cutting back on some of the expenditures”, and the AG volunteered that if it was necessary he was prepared to put his building on the back burner to allow us to do some other things. [Desk thumping] So I want to congratulate the AG for being the only proactive Minister. [Laughter, desk thumping and crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: PNM will add it to the list of not done, so be careful.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: I should add for Tobago—there was a point made about the CEPEP for Tobago. Actually the allocation is in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development because that Minister was responsible for the CEPEP programme, and there is an $8 million allocation in there which is for the CEPEP programme in Tobago. So it was said that there was a figure zero, but there is not a figure zero, it is a figure of $8 million. So I just want to also clarify that as far as Tobago is concerned.

There is one change that we are proposing to make to the budget and that is—well, two changes—one we have already announced in the Lower House regarding the gaming and amusement industry, but the second one which we did not announce, is that following a further meeting with the New and Used Car
Dealers Association, we have agreed to an extension of time for the introduction of the 25 per cent increase in customs duty. The measure will now take effect from January 01, 2014. Mr. President, that is the one change that we have decided to make as far as that is concerned.

In closing, in my opening statements last Friday I described Trinidad and Tobago as a “small, open, commodity-based economy”, we continue to be that. Our journey is to take us to the place where we will develop a more diversified economy and one that is much more sustainable, where the earnings come from many different points and therefore allow us the flexibility to manage the risks associated with an economy, in what is a very uncertain global environment, which would allow us to manage the risk in a much better way.

We are seeing encouraging signs in a number of sectors. I would like to thank my colleague, Minister Bharath, for the initiatives that are taking place in that particular area. I know that we will start to see the results taking root going forward in the next year.

Our goal is to see the economy continue to expand and to progress as we go forward. I think generally there is a greater feeling of confidence by the business community. I feel the feedback that we have has been very good and, therefore, Mr. President, I think I would want to say in closing that I am delighted to bring this debate to a close on a high note of confidence and progress. We are growing once again. There is a return of confidence generally by the business community and by citizens at large, and we are well on our way to achieving our desired goals and objectives. [Desk thumping]

Mr. President, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** 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.*
The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. President, after this marathon three-day session, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.11 p.m.