

Appropriation Bill, 2014

Wednesday, October 01, 2014

SENATE

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The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2015) BILL, 2014

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 30, 2014]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Vice-President: A list of those who spoke previously: Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, mover of the Motion; Sen. Dr. Lester Henry; Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin; Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie; Sen. Helen Drayton; Sen. The Hon. Raziah Ahmed; Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe; Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir; Sen. The Hon. Embau Moheni; Sen. Dr. Victor Wheeler. All Senators wishing to join in the debate may do so now. Sen. The Hon. Karim. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, and let me welcome you once more in the Chair. Mr. Vice-President, it is my pleasure to have been afforded this opportunity by you to join in this very significant and historic debate this morning, and I want to immediately join with the rest of my colleagues in congratulating our hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for her leadership role in steering our economy once again as a success story.

I also wish to take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, and I know that he will also add to his congratulations my colleague to my right, Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath and hon. Rudranath Indarsingh. I think that the hon. Prime Minister, our dear Minister of Finance and the Economy and our colleague Ministers deserve a tremendous round of applause. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Vice-President, before I get into the substance of my contribution this morning, I was taken aback yesterday by a comment made by my friend on the other side, Sen. Dr. Lester Henry. When he commented on the presentation by our Minister of Finance and the Economy, he said, and I want to quote him. He said that the presentation is like: "How to Mismanage an Economy 101."

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I want to tell my dear friend, very good friend, from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, that what in fact we have witnessed from Minister Howai and which I just approved as the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, there is a course entitled: “Prudent and Responsible Fiscal and Monetary Management of Trinidad and Tobago’s Economy 101,” [*Desk thumping*] and the lecturer is nobody else but Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai. [*Desk thumping*] I want to advise, because it is important that they understand what I am going to go to next, that this course will be available online, face-to-face and blended methodology.

Sen. G. Singh: Aye-Ya-Yaye. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I just want to repeat as well that this course is GATE approved. I am saying that in—

Sen. G. Singh: Tongue-in-cheek.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Tongue-in-cheek. And as a matter of fact all are welcome, but the priority registration will go to my friends, the PNM Senators. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, yesterday my colleague, the independent Senator Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir made a comment about—that we should prepare ourselves in the time of peace and the time of war, and he made reference to a book that was kindly given to him by my colleague, Minister Hadeed. And that is, that we should be prepared, and I think the terminology, “*The 33 Strategies of War*”. But I want to also advise that there is another publication which I would like to share with Dr. Mahabir, and it deals with war as well, but in a different context. It is: “*The Coming Jobs War*”. This *Coming Jobs War* is a book published by the Chairman of Gallup, his name is Jim Clifton, and he was focusing on the global financial crisis, and in particular, the US economy. And he says, and I quote:

“A global jobs war is coming, and there’s no time to waste.”

It will be like World War II, a war for all the marbles.

“Cities are crumbling for lack of good jobs.”

Instability can set in.

“The cities and countries that act first—that focus everything they have on creating good jobs—are the ones that will win.”

And therefore, Mr. Vice-President, when I see how we have managed this economy, how we have created jobs and opportunities to the extent where for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and I have the evidence to show, that while we had set a target of the participation rate of 60 per cent in the tertiary sector, we have surpassed that to 65.2 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

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But, you know, when my friend talks about “101 How to Mismanage an Economy”, I wanted to remind him about the lessons of the past, and people say we should not go back to the past. In fact, there is a medical, psychological, neurological disorder called psychosis and that is defined as, where you deny the reality that is around you, you are out of touch with reality. But for those who want to talk about mismanagement of the economy, let me just remind us and the national community of some of the things that that course may have been invented for.

A Tarouba Stadium that went from \$275 million to over \$1 billion. The Tamana Park that went from \$1.1 billion in December 2007, recall the date, to \$2.4 billion in 2010. Three million dollars worth of drapes in a \$240 million palace for the then Prime Minister. A \$30 million mystery Guanapo Church. A \$50 million blimp that went to limp. A \$154 million of delinquent rent moneys at the airport. [*Desk thumping*] A \$368 million contract to the brother-in-law of a gentleman who has absconded. A \$650 million incomplete legal affairs tower. A \$700 million incomplete Chancery Lane Complex. A \$500 million incomplete South Academy for the Performing Arts. A \$2.7 billion gas to liquids plant at Petrotrin that is now, that could only be sold for scrap iron.

I could go on, but all of these would have been for that course that he talked about, that they were familiar with, “How to Mismanage an Economy 101”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to deal substantially now with the allocation to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. As a matter of fact, this Government continues to place heavy emphasis on education and training. And consistently, you would have seen that the percentage of the total budget in 2011 to 2014 has been maintained around 16 per cent. And in fact, we are proud to say that in 2011 the budget was entitled: “Facing the Issues: Turning the Economy Around”. In 2012 it went like this, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”; from 2013, “Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity”; 2014, “Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity”. And in 2015, the theme is, “Empowering our People through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity”.

And in all of these we would have gotten a substantial amount of money, and in any event what I am indicating is, while people may feel that \$10.1 billion went to two Ministries, that is not entirely correct. It went to the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training; the Ministry of Public Administration; even the Ministry of National Security; and many other Ministries that are involved in educational training. I say that to make the point that we continue to focus on the human resource development of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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And that brings me to the point of the GATE Programme, the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. Let me say categorically, in spite of comments that I am hearing from my colleagues, the position and the policy of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is as follows: We have kept our manifesto promises, and in particular, the one [*Desk thumping*] I am going to tell you about, you can locate it in the 120-day Action Plan of the People's Partnership Manifesto, which is entitled "Prosperity for all," not some or a few, prosperity for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and the item number two said, we will secure and expand the GATE Programme, and in this case, to technical and vocational education and training.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to repeat that, the policy of this Government is that we shall not and will not discriminate to any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. All shall be available and exposed to the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. [*Desk thumping*] We have a total enrolment in 2009/2010 of 53,639 students, but, Mr. Vice-President, many are talking about the GATE Programme. I want to tell you and I want to say proudly that the GATE Programme that they speak so highly of and we have inherited and improved—we improved it because we were the creators of that initiative under Minister Ganga Singh. [*Desk thumping*] Let me say that it was Minister Ganga Singh who was the Minister of Youth Development, Human Resource Development, and as a matter of fact I think at that time the Permanent Secretary was Sen. George—

Sen. George: That is right.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: And that was the inception of the "Dollar-for-Dollar Programme", an innovation that came under the UNC administration and we are here again to innovate. [*Desk thumping*] You had the "Dollar-for-Dollar Programme" from 2004 to 2010. We have spent \$4.5 billion of taxpayers' money to support the GATE Programme, and you did not have the vision, you did not have the innovative thinking and the strategy to know that you cannot build a society on academia alone—you left out entirely the vocational sector. We did that. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: That is not true.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Well, as a matter of fact, I want to tell you something, for the first time, and I will show the figures of how much money we have spent in the vocational sector compared to what you call vocational education and training. What you call vocational education and training is that you close down institutions and schools—[*Crosstalk*] you close down the NESC Debe facility—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senators: Yes, yes.

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Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: You send it to Ste. Madeleine. I will show you today—

Sen. Robinson-Regis: You close down the campus—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I close down nothing—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, if you wish to ask the Minister to give way to rectify something or clarify, do come through the Chair, please. Allow him to—I will not accept the crosstalking that is going on presently. You could ask him and I am sure he will politely allow you to do. Thank you—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: I am not sure.

Mr. Vice-President: He will.

10.15 a.m.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I would like to answer any question from anybody on that side. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to say that contrary to what is being whispered from across the Opposition Bench, this Government has improved the YDACs. And in case “yuh doh know what de YDACs is, that is youth camp”. [*Desk thumping*] And since you are speaking about youth camp, I want to tell you, they left an abandoned El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp. You are talking about female development. It was there with 200 beds doing nothing. Mr. Vice-President, you know what they had there under their administration? They had a music class from the area with 10 people. Go and do your research! I took that. [*Desk thumping*] We took that El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp and today we have 1,200 nurses being trained there! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Yes! Yes!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: When you have the opportunity, deny it and produce the evidence to the contrary! You all have allowed it to be abandoned. I will tell you something. We could not have reached 65 per cent participation rate if we did not have access and opportunity. And I want to tell you how we are opening—I want to put away “meh” speech?

Hon. Senator: Yeh, yeh, throw it away! Throw it away!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Yeah. I want to put it away, “becor ah want tuh tell yuh” what you did not do and you discriminated against the people of this country. We have opened up centres even in La Brea. [*Desk thumping*] We opened one in Palo Seco just recently for Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey. That is not

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discrimination. That is the way how you all run the country. That is why I say that is 101 for you, and I will add the new course: “How to Discriminate Against the People of Trinidad and Tobago 102”! [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] Yeah, 102. And I want to tell you as well, we will teach that course for you. And I want to tell you, Mr. Vice-President, discrimination—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: I have asked that—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: The truth offends!

Sen. Robinson-Regis: “He talking tuh me”, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: No, no, no. Mr. Vice-President—

Mr. Vice-President: Let us really conduct ourselves in a manner—because all of us are aware that the entire nation is looking at this debate, and let us not act as schoolchildren, please. Let us act as responsible people that have to govern the country. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Vice-President, I will not be sent to the schoolchildren attitude; we are into the tertiary sector. We are into the higher levels. I want to say, when they talk about discrimination, I personally went and opened, for the first time—check how many years—the MIC Institute of Technology in the Diego Martin West constituency, [*Desk thumping*] and I am going to open another one there, not too far, in the same Diego Martin West constituency with YTEPP—a technology centre. That is discrimination? [*Desk thumping*] No.

But I want to tell you what discrimination is. Discrimination is when you drive from north to south and “yuh fly through central, like it doh exist. Well, ah want tuh tell yuh someting”. The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training—when they pay so much money in rent—this is the building of decentralization. [*Holds up photograph*] This is what we are going to put up! [*Desk thumping*] We have started it already. “Ah want yuh tuh watch it good! It coming and we will occupy it.” You spent a lot of money in buildings and renting. We spent \$48 million of taxpayers’ money renting a building, from 2002.

They cannot tell me about this Ministry. I was there from the time it was conceived. It was conceived and born, and I worked in it. As a matter of fact, I would not tell you something else that they did to me because it might hurt me more than it will hurt them. But I will leave that for another time.

But “lemme jes say”, we talk about we want to leave things here. People have been asking about innovation and entrepreneurship. Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you what an innovation is. An innovation is after 100 years of oil and gas—and check how many years they have been in government. We are talking about discrimination. They talk about “doh” leave anybody behind? Well, plenty were being left behind! [*Desk thumping*] Plenty were left behind!

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But I will tell “yuh” something. The Government of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar will not discriminate against anyone! We treat everyone fairly! [*Desk thumping*] And I am sure my friend, Sen. Small, will be happy when I show this photograph. After 100 years of oil and, to a lesser extent of drilling with gas, we now have to boast and to say for the people of this country, the first drilling school—look it here! Look it here! [*Desk thumping*] [*Holds up photograph*] The first drilling school! [*Continuous desk thumping*] And you are telling me that we will discriminate? We will not discriminate.

I have here in front of me, the approval for the first GATE-approved certificate in aviation technology which we are going to start in November. And in case you want to see it again, “lemme show yuh for de next time, what we going to do— [*Interruption*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: Let me see the certificate!

Sen. Hadeed: “Show dem, man; show dem!”

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: “How yuh will see de certificate? We eh start de class yet”. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] “Yuh see, dah is how all yuh is. All yuh want certificate. Leh meh show yuh! Mr. Vice-President, I want tuh show yuh how dey like certificate. Dey doh not want tuh go tuh school, dey want certificate. [*Laughter*] Dey doh want tuh study, dey want certificate. Look it here. Ah holding it up, Mr. Vice-President. [*Holds up certificate*] The GATE approval. [*Desk thumping*] Yuh want certificate? Lemme show yuh certificate. Certificate is where we have—look ah have it here”. This is certificate for you. “Lemme show yuh a certificate dey send. It is called—ah want tuh show yuh de photograph just now. It is called the Financial Assistance Studies Programme, FASP, that was under one of their Ministers. and they got a note: “keep it quiet”. [*Desk thumping*] “Keep it quiet. Keep it quiet.”

“But lemme tell yuh what we not keeping quiet.” We are advertising for everyone for six weeks in the newspapers. [*Desk thumping*] “Lemme tell yuh what ah not keeping quiet.” Since 2010, we have disbursed 247 scholarships to the tune of \$9.3 million—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Hadeed: Education! Information!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Public information! [*Desk thumping*] Keep it quiet? We will not discriminate. We are a Government that is involved and interested in the welfare of the people, creating jobs. “Lemme tell yuh how we are going tuh create jobs. Look it here.” Ten years old—look it here! [*Holds up photograph*]

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This is what we are going to be opening at Campden, an abandoned airstrip of 5,000 feet, runway; the aviation, the first of its kind. [*Desk thumping*] Aviation Campus! [*Holds up photograph*] “Look it here! Look it here! We not talkin, we walkin, we deliverin.” [*Desk thumping*] “We not promising. We do not believe in the acronym: Promises Never Materialize. We not dere!”

Sen. Robinson-Regis: And what is PP? Promises, Promises?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: You will get your opportunity. As a matter of fact, I want to tell you, when I came into the office—Mr. Vice-President, you know, I want to just alert my colleagues here, what they “doh hear from me on de other side, what dey doh” hear from me today because of the time constraint—and I want to thank my Leader of Government Business in the Senate; we want to finish today, or tonight—I will put it in the newspaper. “If yuh cyar see it and hear it here yuh will read it in de newspaper.” [*Desk thumping*]

Some of them are talking—“dey talking about dey concerned and dey care”. In 2004, the GATE programme, when I met it, I was part “ah dat” GATE programme. Minister Ganga Singh will tell you, I was part of the committee for “Dollar for Dollar”, and “yuh” know what? In 2004, when they started, they had a means test—a means test. Some people are talking now that GATE should not be for everybody; it should be for those who are in need. But all I am saying is that what I met—“lemme say, this is what I met. Look it here”. I met in 2006, the former administration removed the means test. In fact, one of their Ministers went to the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and said, “It kynah hard for all yuh tuh pay loan an ting, so doh worry, we will take care of everybody”.

When you give a benefit, it very difficult to remove that benefit. [*Desk thumping*] I want to tell you what I met with the GATE programme. “Ah lot ah people talkin bout GATE.” As a matter of fact, in one case—*Interruption*] My dear colleague, Sen. Dr. Balgobin is a very intelligent and astute person.

Sen. Robinson-Regis: He is.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: He ran the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business—*Interruption*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: Excellent.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: He is entitled to his views, and you are entitled to not comment on his views like this. [*Laughter*] Mr. Vice-President, some people—*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: You are not qualified to comment.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Vice-President, some people are not in a position to comment on people like Dr. Balgobin's views. As a matter of fact, when you want to comment, you might want to do so in the newspapers or otherwise. Mr. Vice-President, I want to tell you what I met, and "ah doh want tuh—I and you have a good relationship. Ah doh want tuh tell yuh what yuh call people any kind of other—by other names. Ah wouldn go there."

What I met is this. Priority areas were not identified. They were not eligible for GATE. And now "dey" talking about we should have alignment of GATE; we should have a strategy. You want "tuh tell we what we must have? We doing what you did not do! Yuh couldn tink bout dat!" [*Desk thumping*]

As a matter of fact, "lemme" tell you what you helped to contribute to. You helped to contribute to something I call the graduate glut, or the discouraged graduate, and let me define what that is. The discouraged graduate is a person who goes to university, maybe lectured to by Dr. Mahabir—great lecturer; visiting professor at Mc Gill University—and after that, when you graduate, "yuh lookin for ah wok" or a job. "Yuh doh even have de courtesy of getting a reply sometimes, so you become discouraged and yuh fall off de labour market."

The graduate glut is that person who, now discouraged, contributes to a heap of people who have no jobs. And hear what is happening. Hear what they helped to cause. People were going back to do two first degrees, "becor de firs one dey do"—Dr. Mahabir will bear testimony to that. Some people are repeating a second first degree rather than going up. Yesterday he spoke and I will comment on what he spoke about, in terms of postgraduates.

I know of a person who lives near to me. He just did a degree in management at UWI. "So ah see him an ah say, 'wey yuh goin'? He say, 'Gimme ah ride, ah goin up to Champs Fleurs'. Ah say, 'Champs Fleurs tuh do what'? He say he going an do anodda degree in supply management. Ah say, 'but yuh jes graduate'. He say, 'well, dah eh wokin'. Yuh know what is de cause ah dat?" Improper career advice and counselling—improper! [*Desk thumping*]

Under the previous administration, monitoring and evaluation and performance were only at private institutions. Why were you discriminating? You are a government before that discriminated! You had certain concessions. But what about the public institutions where you have the bulk of the people? You did not even consider having a minimum GPA for their performance! Why?

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GATE payments were not tied to students registered, Mr. Vice-President. They were not tied to students registered. I want to tell you, under this Government, we are insisting that we are going to be monitoring your attendance, and I want to tell you, we have received back to the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago Government, \$35 million for moneys we have paid and people did not attend class. [*Desk thumping*] Never before! Never before! I want to tell you that we are going to be ensuring—there has been a lot of discussion in the public domain about value for money for the GATE programme. Well, we are going to be ensuring that there is value for money. The question is: how do you do that? Well, in some ways what we are going to do is, we are going to ensure that there are proper terms of reference as carried out by the GATE Standing Committee.

Mr. Vice-President, let me make this very public. The GATE Standing Committee, headed by Dr. Michael Dowlath, who is the chairman of the Accreditation Council, has been doing a tremendous amount of work. Their terms of reference is really to review all the applications for GATE funding; to ensure that there is articulation between what people do and what they want to move on to. We want to also ensure that the monitoring and compliance through that GATE Standing Committee is honoured.

We want to also ensure—one of the things people are saying is that people are studying at the taxpayers' expense and they are running away from this country so that we are losing the manpower. Well, I want to tell you what we did. We reviewed the contract of both the training providers, the institutions and those students, and you have scales: amount of moneys that we will be expending, to ensure that your tuition fees give you a certain time—a year or two years, depending upon the skill. I have the scales here—and you must serve. If you do not serve the country—and I want to make it abundantly clear, serving the country does not mean serving the Government. What we have done is to say you can work anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: In the private sector.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: In the private sector as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: What was there before?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: “Ah want tuh tell yuh, what was before.”

Sen. Robinson-Regis: That was there before.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Yeah, that was there before. And I want to tell you what was not there before as well. What was not there before is that if you did not pay back the money, as we are doing now, it will be converted to a loan for you to

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pay. In other words, people are asking for value for money. “Lemme” just say what was not there before. It was not there before? I “doh” know if it was there before. I know it was not there before. There was no GATE clearance policy in place, and what we are saying is that you had to maintain this minimum GPA before you go on to the next level.

What we are doing is that we are “efficiency-ing” the system with what is called GATE e-services. “Lemme tell yuh” what was there before—volumes and heaps of manual files of student applications. We are now doing that electronically. This is the 21st Century. [*Desk thumping*] This is the time of technology.

Mr. Vice-President, “lemme tell yuh” what I inherited as well. I wish I had the time but Minister Ganga Singh is looking at his watch. I want to tell you that we met wide variations of student fees. That is what they left for us. That is what they left for this Government. You want to do a certificate in a certain thing—or a diploma—training provider A charges a fee; training provider B charges a next fee; training provider C, for the identical course, another fee of about 50 per cent increase. Why? Why could you not have equalized a band—a scale of fees? Why have you allowed people to exploit the system? I am saying to you, we will not allow that to happen. We will discriminate against none. We are going to treat everybody fairly.

10.30 a.m.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Vice-President, I want to tell you that over the 10-year period that 177,519 students of this country have benefited from the Government assistance tuition in this country. [*Desk thumping*] I want to tell you that we are reducing the amount of expenditure on the GATE programme. Do you know why? There was a question raised somewhere else that said, but if you have this \$650 million how come you have less money? Will that not impact upon the amount of the people that you train? But you see, when you did not read J. L. Hanson in your sixth form—and many may not know who J. L. Hanson is. Some of us will know. J. L. Hanson wrote the textbook of economics, and in that he will deal with internal economies of scale and external economies of scale. And when you make a system efficient as Sen. Dr. Balgobin and Sen. Dr. Mahabir will tell you, you might have less money, you might have savings and you might the same or increased levels of output because of the efficiency of the system, but then again that is another cost. That is “How to Run a Business 103”. So I will just give you three courses this morning, but we will limit it, so Mr. Howai will only teach one.

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Mr. Vice-President, we are talking about aligning education and training with the job market. That is what this is about. Do you know what we are talking about here, what did not exist? There was the absence of labour market information system. You have to depend on Sen. Dr. Tewarie now and the CSO. They are “crying down” the CSO, but I want to tell what they will not be able to “cry down”. Under this Government for the first time in the history of this country we are going to launch another innovative product called the CWRD, the Centre for Workforce, Research and Development, on the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies, and what that will do—that is, it is going to collate and collaborate all the labour market information for Trinidad and Tobago, current information, real-time information. So that if you wanted to pursue a particular career, we will be able to tell you which is the one that will be there in the next five or 10 years. We are not going to allow you to pursue programmes at the end of which you become obsolete. You have nothing in the job market and now what we have to do, we have to create now another innovative programme.

Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you what we have done and you will be able to understand this and appreciate it. For example, you will find a number of people and workers in the regional corporations who have skills and competences, but no credentials, no certification. They have not even considered to touch those people. They have seen them, they have almost been rejected. Listen, under this Government, we shall address all the needs of our people. Our citizens, all. [*Desk thumping*] So let me just quickly tell you what the Workforce Assessment Centre is all about.

The Workforce Assessment Centre is where you have skills and competences, and this is new. This is not that it was there before what is new. This is new, this is innovation, this is creativity, this is commercialization! What it is, is this. Let me show you how you get into commercialization. I know some of you, it may be beyond some of the level of understanding, but we will try to make it as simplistically as possible, or as one of my friends will say, “as pellucidly clear as possible”. Let me just indicate if you have skills and competences and you have no Sen. Dr. Mahabir, you have no certification, plumbers, mason, carpenters—I will use the reference to that somebody coming to fix your car and I mean if they are going to fix the car you have now, they have to have some skills because that car is plenty years old.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Plenty fixing.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Plenty fixing. The good thing about that car if you bounce somebody “dem geh in trouble”, not you. Mr. Vice-President, what we are doing is, we created with the National Training Agency, we took the occupational standards and we created a qualification called a CVQ, a Caribbean Vocational Qualification. It is a vocational qualification. So if you are a plumber and you need to know 10 areas or 10

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competences but you are okay with the 10, we certify you whether it is level one or level two. If you do not perform to that standard and assess and you are short, you have a skills gap or a skill deficit, we put you on a training programme, we assess your needs analysis and we bring you up to the standard to be certified. Do you know what that means?

Mr. Vice-President, for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, we have touched over 5,000 lives that would not have been touched, [*Desk thumping*] people in the communities, and I want to be careful of all who are coming after to criticize this, you know, because I will be standing to defend this. “Dey eh no way near this.” They have never even thought of it and I could tell you because I was there. So we are now certifying. Do you know what that means for jobs and employment?

Mr. Vice-President, as we go on let me just indicate to you as well, one of the focuses of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is to ensure that we satisfy the job market. I am reading in the newspapers and I am seeing regularly where people are saying that there is a labour shortage, and in some cases they are asking for the importation of labour while we have people here who are unemployed. Now, it may also be that the people who they want to import, that importation of labour, may be technically competent and highly skilled people who may be a part of the investment of your plant. There is nothing wrong in that. But what I am saying is, I have read enough of Lloyd Best, the *Plantation Economy*. I have read enough of when Lloyd Best joined with Prof. Kari Levitt from McGill. I have read enough about Gurven and Jefferson, the political economy of the English-speaking Caribbean, and I certainly read enough of George Beckford’s *Persistent Poverty*. We do not intend to be in a state of persistent poverty under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] We will rise and there will be prosperity for all, and having said that I want to indicate to you what we are doing.

Mr. Vice-President, for the first time what I am doing is, while I cannot get the data I cannot afford to invite people to send information to me, to tell me what are the jobs available. When I asked for that information from the very people who are making the comments, you do not get the data. So, you know what I decided to do? I decided I am going to launch another innovative service, and this was not done before in case you are saying that it used to be so. This is a roundtable employer discussion with the Minister, and I am going out and I have done two so far, yesterday morning at 7.30 a.m. [*Desk thumping*]

About 10 days ago, I was at Microsoft and we spoke to about 80 people there in the sector and they were telling me what they required, and I was telling them how the world of technology was going. You could look at what is happening in India, you could look at Infosys, you could look at the new learning platforms and see where the world is going like Coursera, you could look and see how edX is going, you could look and see how MIT

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and Harvard came together and joined the platform. All of these programmes are free, and let me just say for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago we have through the University of Trinidad and Tobago free programmes. Free programmes through an arrangement we have with Khan Academy, Salman Khan, and he is not the one from Bollywood, in case people are thinking. This is from Khan Academy from California, Silicon Valley, that produced over 5,000 videos. We are making that available to all the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am going out now with these—yesterday, I had one with the energy sector where they are talking to us about the job opportunities, and I want to congratulate my friend, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. We are going to be starting for the first time, again, historically the construction of the Juniper platform with bpTT, Tufco, Welfab and all of those companies, where in La Brea—that is not one of our constituencies, but we will not discriminate. [*Desk thumping*] I have already given instructions to the NESC that has a facility there in walking distance from the port, to secure through the Member of Parliament, to meet with him—and I want to meet with him—to get people from the community who are so desirous of being trained to be employed there. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are about. So the roundtable discussions will continue.

As a matter of fact, let me also tell you what I have launched, the jobs fair, and that was not there before in case you are wondering. Mr. Vice-President, they were not close to thinking about those things. They were thinking about the other things: “How to Mismanage an Economy 101”, all of which I read this morning. So what we have done, we have created the annual jobs fair. I have invited through the NESC and we are going to do it with MIC and the YTEPP—we have the chairman of YTEPP here, Mr. Supersad—and let me tell you what we are doing. We are inviting all of these employers to meet with us when we have graduation of students so that you will know who is available. If Sen. Singh wants to get people to assist him in agriculture in the Felicity area, he would know where they are. You cannot afford to stand up and say that we do not know, we do not have labour. No! And the employers who I met, about 25 of them say, “We are so happy you invited us”—Sen. Drayton—“that we now know what is available.” [*Desk thumping*] The lack of information.

While I am talking about the lack of information, let me give some information. The accreditation council—and this was not there before. As I was saying before, “you cyah say dat. How yuh go say dat. Yuh cyah say dat.” And therefore, what we are saying is, for the first time, on Friday, September 26, 2014, the Board of Directors of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago accredited for a period of five years—neither would have done with Arthur Lok

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Jack. Well Arthur Lok Jack is seven years. Accredited for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the MIC Institute of Technology. The first technical and vocational education and training outfitted in this country. But in case they say we are discriminating—and “we doh discriminate. We doh say dat. You could say dat.”

And therefore, number two. Let me just tell you, the second one they accredited—and I want my friend to take note of this—Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Yes, Tobago, and I am going to Tobago to present the certificate of accreditation. [*Desk thumping*] The Tobago Hotel and Tourism Institute, the first indigenous post-secondary institute in Tobago, congratulations. [*Desk thumping*] I will ensure we invite my friend from Tobago.

As a matter of fact, you want to know what is relevant. Let me also tell you what is relevant. What is relevant is what we would have done as a training provider in terms of this whole aspect of nurses’ care. Mr. Vice-President, time is against me, but let me just say as I wind up—as a matter of fact, I think Minister Bharath—[*Interruption*]

Sen. G. Singh: You have seven minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I have seven—oh, I have some time, man. I have some time. Let me just make another comment on the GATE programme. Mr. Vice-President, I did not walk with that photograph because I had only asked the President to permit me to do a few. I wanted to show the University of the West Indies, Penal/Debe campus, which is now 60 per cent complete, and by January 2015 we are going to have students walking and going to class. The Moot Court will be finished, the administration building will be finished, classrooms will be finished [*Desk thumping*] and Sen. Dr. Tewarie will be happy because he is a former pro vice-chancellor and campus principal of St. Augustine campus. He knows the constraints of space at the St. Augustine campus.

This Government has been able to give the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 142 acres of lands in the south. While we start with law, guess what is happening? We are now being asked by the Hugh Wooding Law School to see whether we could get space there and I am looking actively at that. Do you know why? All the graduates from UWI are automatically received at the Hugh Wooding Law School. As a matter of fact, those who are doing it through private institutions and have to find \$300,000 to go to London, we will take care of you here in Trinidad and Tobago. Stay home and study. And I want to tell you as well, we inherited the St. George’s University in 2009. St. George’s University in Grenada with GATE, medical school.

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Mr. Vice-President, I want to tell the country, I am just presenting the records. I am not making any comment and conclusion on it. We have facilitated something that we inherited to date, supplying 322 students to the tune of \$229.5 million. We are now taking that money and expanding the Faculty of Medical Sciences in Trinidad and Tobago through the University and the teaching hospital in south. That is what this Government is doing. We are building the capacity at home. [*Desk thumping*] I have no problem with sending students anywhere if we do not have capacity, but if we have the space and capacity, study right here. I do not want you to say, “How you go say dat. Yuh cyah say dat. I think dai de right ting to say.” As a matter of fact, let me also indicate I want to announce for the first time, the three-year LLB Programme would be graduating students right here at St. Augustine in Trinidad for the first time. [*Desk thumping*] Minister Ganga Singh knows that as an attorney.

Mr. Vice-President, the question has been asked: in the four years that you have held office—I could literally hear resonating from the other side—what have you done? [*Desk thumping*] What have you done? I want to read it for you so you could write it and you could repeat it in the new speech. Mr. Vice-President, allow me to say the following things:

1. We have built and we have opened the faculty of law at St. Augustine;
2. The university south campus in Debe will be opened in January 2015;
3. NESC Woodford Lodge Technology Centre—they have asked about how we would help.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir, I spoke about decentralization. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—I do not think you were there, so let me show you because I consider you very highly. This is the decentralization. [*Senator displays a diagram*] This is the Ministry’s headquarters that is moving from Port of Spain to Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*] This is what they talked about bottlenecking. This is what they talked about productivity and traffic, but let me also say they left—the former administration they talked “bout dey doh discriminate”. Close down Caroni, dismembered about 50,000 people in the sugar industry and now you leave, and now, “yuh leave de transport and field engineering department at Woodford Lodge to abandon.”

10.45 a.m.

Well, guess what Dr. Mahabir and Dr. Balgobin? I took that abandoned field engineering department, it now has a—and Sen. Singh sees it whenever he passes to go near to his market—this is now the state-of-the-art automotive technology centre. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, delivered. The NESC Palo Seco in the constituency of La

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Brea held by the PNM, delivered new technology centre. [*Desk thumping*] Workforce assessment centres, delivered. The expansion of the OJT Programme, for the first time we have removed OJTs from being gofers of tea and coffee and photocopier, no longer. We have now restructured and repositioned the OJT programme. We have called it OJT Sectoral. “We aligning what you study with what you going to do.” [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to remind them, we opened the MIC technology centre in Tobago, Canaan. “Anytime yuh pass there, yuh have to look to the left or the right and you will see ah building that might bun yuh eye because yuh left it there”—

Sen. Cudjoe: Built by the PNM.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Built by the PNM? Left by the PNM, built by the UNC, opened by the People’s Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] You talk, we deliver; you leave things, we complete! [*Desk thumping*] You dream in the night before, we get up and do it in the next day. [*Desk thumping*] And we do it in the next day. You dream in the night “when it dark, we deliver when the sun rise”. [*Desk thumping*] You discriminated against the people of Debe, “yuh close down the centre, I reopened it and ah built ah new technology centre on Petrotrin compound in Penal”.

The MIC, Diego Martin centre, “yuh must face that and we going to open YTEPP for you too”. The first drilling academy, the UTT aviation campus, jobs and career coach, the El Dorado nurses training campus, NESC, GATE e-services. And I want to tell “yuh”, I am looking to open a COSTAATT campus in Rio Claro. [*Desk thumping*] You must not discriminate, do not discriminate. COSTAATT in Sangre Grande, my friend is saying, reminding me, state-of-the-art, delivering.

And I want to tell you, as I close, what I am going to leave—I am not going to do like them, what I inherit, I inherit nothing, “ah doh know wey to go, ah do know wey to go.” [*Desk thumping*] Dr. Mahabir talked about which road to go in, I did not know which road to go in, but let me tell you what I am going to leave. I am going to leave a document that I am going to call, as the hon. Prime Minister and the Cabinet of this country call—a blueprint for tertiary education skills training 2015—2025. [*Desk thumping*] That is not no 10-year document.

Mr. President, I want to congratulate all my colleagues and thank them for the tremendous support and, of course, as I conclude, once again, the hon. Prime Minister who is welcomed back to Trinidad and Tobago, her sterling leadership and a command of the Cabinet, where she is now saying and continues to say, there will be prosperity for all, we shall discriminate to none, and my Cabinet colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

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Sen. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for giving me this opportunity to contribute to what is a most important debate today. Having reviewed this budget, we, on this side, are of the view that it will certainly drive us further down the road to disaster and notwithstanding all that the Minister said in his very passionate—

Hon. Senator: And competent. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: Well, no, I would not go there, those are lovely words in the vocabulary but I would not go there.

Mr. Vice-President: Please allow the Senator to make her contribution, thank you. Please, Senator.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. He always protects me so well, you know, you all should take a page out of that book. But notwithstanding everything that the Minister said, and he talked about how to manage—giving a class 45 minutes of “How to Manage an Economy 101”, and I will show that what the Minister spoke about in terms of prosperity for all is, in fact, not so. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister also spoke about discriminating to none. I will, in fact, show it is not so. [*Desk thumping*] He talked a lot about innovation, innovation, and he used the term “innovation” 17 times in his contribution, and the threat of more promotions, more billboards and so on, going on. Mr. Vice-President, and he even spoke about dreaming.

But I think the Minister is the one who is dreaming, “yuh know”, because the Minister really needs, instead of taking a management course on economy 101, the Minister really needs to take a course in reality 101. [*Desk thumping*] The effect of poor governance continues to unleash brutish assault on all our institutions which are now tainted with incompetence as their priorities reveal nepotism, lack of accountability with perceived selective service for promises for special interest groups.

The cries and the pleas of innocent citizens, the underprivileged, the disabled, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, fall on deaf ears as the dispossessed, the aged, the ill and working poor must now protest for their rightful due of the national budget. [*Desk thumping*] The population is now crying out for the pain they experienced from the high level of crime, poverty, congested roads, poor security and communities, high food prices, poor health services, education services poorly managed—and I will get to that—road repairs left undone and infrastructure upgrades that now threaten the integrity of homes and roads. [*Desk thumping*]

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This budget has done nothing to alleviate the grim reality of life under this UNC PP Government. Like other budget debates, 2010 to date, laid by this Government, has been the highest in the country's history, yet the human development has been severely affected and the quality of life has decreased. [*Desk thumping*] This Government has become numb to the needs of the people, deaf to the cries of the citizens, blind to the corruption and maladministration in the country, mute to the abuse of power by those entrusted with positions in the Government. The UNC PP Government has lost its way. [*Desk thumping*]

The situation has created uncertainty and anxiety among the population. Even to get to a beach to relax and de-stress, there is gridlock and poor traffic management. Trinidad and Tobago, in 2014/2015, needs a government that is prepared to serve all and do so effectively, and at the same time, it must allow the dignity of the citizens to be respected as they are being served. [*Desk thumping*] It is therefore the impact of the budget 2015 on the human development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the image of this country nationally, regionally and internationally that is my focus.

Developed countries encourage the bipartisan approach in governance and we should begin to take the lead to prevent further human development challenges to our citizens. After all, the citizens deserve the best; after all, the Government is merely entrusted by the citizens to manage the country, not to give authority to dislocate and hamper human development.

Poor implementation of an approved programme of services cannot be the way any Government delivers to citizens. The implementation process impacts the lives of all citizens, and for some, have lives and futures cut down as a result of systematic barriers to services from our Government. Arbitrary budget reductions in allocations, poor implementation and lack of oversight of the Ministries are the challenges our citizens face on a daily basis. We must do better and we can.

The citizens have all seen, read and heard, on a daily basis, examples of system failures that impact negatively on their lives. I do not wish to revive or open the painful wounds of any citizens and their families who fell victims to systemic poor implementation and a lack of an integrated approach in the systems of delivery of services. And whilst my colleagues on the opposite side might be "steupsing", I wish to remind the House that there are people who go to the hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago and wait one full year to get an appointment for a simple thing as a CT scan. [*Desk thumping*]

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Schools are not reopened on time. Who compensates these students for loss of time? [*Desk thumping*] Our natural resources and boasts of the revenues earned of the current Government literally chest thumping for having the largest budget in the history of this country is of little value when the systems of governance remain at risk from corruption and infrastructure to support all areas of human development remain fragile or non-existent.

The path to today began with the budgets with the themes: in 2010 “Turning the Economy Around”; 2011, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”; 2012/2013 “Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity”; 2014/2015 “Empowering our People through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity”. So here we are today with another plan to follow the theme for 2014/2015 and with conditions that still remain unchanged. Had the Government’s policies been effective, they would, of course, have produced the outcomes as stated in the themes previous.

Where are we as a nation, 2014? Our systems have gone adrift. Fiscal resources have been expended, but no effective value for money can be seen from many of the development programmes. In addition, we experienced a decrease in quality of services for the recurrent expenditure spent in Ministries.

Research of the IMF reveals some very critical information which I suggest we consider in this debate. Their guidelines for public expenditure are very instructive. And while many of my colleagues on the other side will defend the quantum of the budget as a signal of successful government management, notwithstanding the evidence of mismanagement and the lag behind other countries of the region on the Human Development Index.

Having said that, I wish to look at the Global Index Ranking of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of very high human development, and Trinidad and Tobago ranks number 67 in this ranking of The Human Development Index, and further, the Human Development Index—well, it really is a summary measure of the average achievement in key areas of development, and it focuses on a long and happy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. But what is interesting about both documents: both are measured, not by the largest budget nor the money circulating in the economy, and one might argue from oil and gas, but you score low because the human development of the citizens is affected because of no trickle-down of money and even opportunities, and because of the methodology and governance and—you know, we debated the FIU Bill and that sort of thing so FIU monitoring contracts and transparency, this is because of the methodology and the trickle-down effect.

So, I wanted to go into the Global Index Ranking, but the bottom line is excessive expenditure as a signal of progress is not responsible governance. No Government during their term manages with blatant inequities and maladministration of public expenditure, and in such an environment, the quality of life of the citizens is severely hampered and arrested development results. I did some research on this and it took me to India and to Africa, but I will just make reference to one such instance of arrested development. India has been, for instance, celebrated for its steep growth and rapidly expanding middle class, as well as its position as an exciting market for foreign multinationals. Yet, it has achieved these gains with astonishingly low economic participation by women and those who enter the business world often find themselves in chauvinistic and threatening work environments.

But, Trinidad and Tobago requires a serious review of how the human development can be seriously affected by a lack of access of resources and inequitable distribution of wealth. Education plays a significant role in human development. And the education offered must also reflect the skill sets required for success for each individual so that they can function and they can contribute to the nation-building consistent with their capacity.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I agree that a well-educated citizenry is an asset to any country and assists in its effective economical development. Many questions arise as to the value of money spent and access to education, but what verification is available for those who may require, for instance, customized specialized education and at what age is that assessment undertaken, dyslexia and autism and other special needs? What, by way of intervention, is available to the mother who may have a child requiring special needs? I have also come to know that there is a URP women's programme which was developed for mothers with special needs children. But the programme is not inclusive or access is not well advertised. What are the other available programmes for women? What are they, when such a programme is not accessible to all mothers who require that support? We are denying development, or at least they are denying development, of the child and not assisting the mother with her challenges.

On another point, contractors and NGOs, as well as developmental projects within Ministries have been affected by poor transfers from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

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Mr. Vice-President, the local government system is one such example of poor budgeting and transfers which will impact directly on the lives of citizens. The current ChikV challenges have not seen any robust interventions by either local government or central government interventions. I wish to go to the allocations, the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Local Government. There was a variance. There was actually a decrease and I wanted to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy what was the reason for this decrease in this Ministry. Under the Sub-Head 62, under the Head: Local Government: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, actually this time the corporations got nil. There is no allocation for this and so how are these corporations to embark on public health education interventions, when we have such a case as the ChikV now? [*Desk thumping*] The allocations for this 2014/2015 budget are all reduced in the light of the range of services that are required to not only prevent but maintain an environment for healthy living.

But Mr. Vice-President, I refer to repetitive claims of “Your Government working for you”, as if some self-convincing exercise is required on the part of the Government. [*Desk thumping*] But Mr. Vice-President, annoying ads listing basic government responsibilities parroted as voices on the media and billboards, wasting valuable resources that could be spent on effective local government transfers for public health education and interventions. Simple as that.

Mr. Vice-President, I wish to look at the allocations for the transportation services. Under the Head: Ministry of Transport, Development Programme Estimates, Transport and Communication, that also received no allocations, and I really would like to get, from the Minister’s winding-up, why no estimates have been developed and what as a result would be the impact on service and safety. And even with regard to Sea Transport, another Sub-Head, Establishment of a Vessel Traffic Management Information System, I need an explanation as to why no estimates were developed and what is the impact on this service. You see, Mr. Vice-President, no alternate traffic management advanced warnings to alert the travelling public as a result of, for instance, ineffective transportation system compromised by disruptive road works, because this causes a loss in valuable manpower time to industries and that in itself is a lot of money lost there.

Just as a matter of point, Mr. Vice-President, both airports, under air transport, require readiness for the busy season which started from the June school vacation straight on until Carnival 2015. And the allocation for that, surprisingly, is nil as well and the impact on the quality of service and breach for non-compliance within the standards of operations and rating of the airport. This will certainly

affect them, Piarco and the ANR Robinson International Airport can be a serious issue when you have all these foreign visitors. But then, interestingly enough, I have to talk about these foreign visitors because there is a very interesting piece but I would leave that for a little bit later on.

Moving on, the budgeted allocations on the human development and environmental sector, as well as health, culture, education and security must be effectively managed with verification that such services are indeed delivered.

Protests and appeals by victims of such denial of services seem to be the only way for the Government to address issues. Do these issues have a root cause from poor management and oversight of the Ministries? I do not know, I am asking. And in the areas of housing and culture, when we review the budget and the ongoing issues of the quality of services of the Ministries and its agencies, HDC, questions arise as to the effective management in a most important Ministry.

And if I were to look at the grid of the housing expenditure, there is a variance. There is actually an increase. And this brings me to think, you know, what detailed improvements in general management plan support such an increase. And with regards to property and real estate management, there is also an increase, Mr. Vice-President. And the question that might be uppermost in the minds of the citizens: when can new contractors apply to provide services? Because there certainly has been an increase in this area.

Mr. Vice-President, I wish to spend a moment on CEPEP. There has also been an increase in allocation for CEPEP. I do not know if there was a change in policy which caused this increase, but it is very interesting that I might get an answer as to what these specific areas might be. But, Mr. Vice-President, the CEPEP programme was developed with a people-centred focus on the community, enhancing their own community, making them aware of the lay of the land and the history, as they revive green spaces and historical artefacts. But my information is that the philosophy of the programme has been altered and this aspect of community-based enhancement has been sacrificed for, perhaps, political expediency. So residents from their own communities, in a lot of instances, are not employed in their communities as a result of a revision over the last four years.

In addition, the visual landscaping product associated with CEPEP has been degraded to a much lower level, and some improvement in the expenditure of the increased allocation would assume that, okay, some attention might be given in this particular area; after all, this is a people-centred focus and community empowerment programme.

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Mr. Vice-President, governance is not a walk in the park. It is serious business. [Desk thumping] It is not just opening and commissioning services and buildings and cutting ribbons and media glitz. It is managing the resources of the people, for the people and for their human development. It is to also ensure the farmers and the agriculture sector are enabled to be the best in the region. And this would be of benefit to the individuals in this sector in the country if they are enabled and treated as partners. And I am certain my colleague, Sen. Singh, can give you the areas, when he makes his contribution, where the budget impacts negatively on this sector.

Mr. Vice-President, in reviewing the research on effective budget implementation, I made note of the cautions that excessive use of exceptional procedures and supplementary appropriations should be discouraged. But as noted, supplementary appropriations are not always bad. The fundamental point, however, is that transparency requires all government transactions to go through the budget. Contingency reserves are there for exceptional expenditures. There should never be recourse to exceptional procedures or off budget accounts, and I say that to say this, LifeSport is only one example of these exceptional procedures. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, the Auditor General's Report is replete with fiscal irregularities, yet today no interventions except the undertaking of an audit of the problematic programmes and fiscal management queries. The programme has been transferred to another Ministry but no update on the human and fiscal issues has been presented. Where is the transparency and where are the systemic interventions to prevent this ongoing fiscal mismanagement and ineffective human development programmes? It is important to note that poor governance can undermine fiscal adjustment and governance issues affect the ability to deliver fiscal objectives.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to share a letter from a member of the public on this area of governance.

Sen. G. Singh: Author.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: It is a letter to the editor and I will give you—the author is Valentine Smith, Senior Lecturer, Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies, Valsayn. It shows that the public are indeed aware of the discrepancies and have a working knowledge when Government fails. We have a mature public, you know, and a trusting public who are being denied services.

As taxpayers, their expectations are legitimate and they have been monitoring the expenditure pattern of this Government, the public out there. Health is an area where severe challenges occur from not only poor budget expenditure exercises but also a focus on the people/patient-centred services. Mr. Vice-President, the gist of that letter,

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because it is quite a long letter, as a result of a robust reform health package—this is what the letter spoke about—it was developed; a robust health package was developed by the PNM and it received approval by the IDB, but when it was implemented by the UNC Government in 1996 to 2000, the UNC led this Government at the time to such mismanagement that a Commission of Enquiry by Gladys Gafoor had to be undertaken in 2005. So severe was the poor implementation process that this mismanagement and poor systems affected our health system to date. [*Desk thumping*]

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, it is setbacks like the health sector reform, and that was like \$192 million. A loan was obtained from the IDB and local banks, poorly implemented by the UNC Government at that time, and things like that we must prevent, and this is why we must insist on improved budgeting and implementation in 2014/2015. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, this is what the Government inherited you know, and they really made a mess of it.

The components of that letter—of the programme—were like reforming the Ministry of Health, returning service delivery and management to regional health authorities, developing a human resource strategy, rationalizing health services and infrastructure, emphasizing preventative measures and promoting services and so on.

So, Mr. Vice-President, when I look at the grid for the health sector, there was an increase of allocation and, you know, it will be interesting to note what strategic plans supported this overall increase, and which areas it is going into. I just want to—of course, they have listed quite a lot of the authorities, but let me just take an example of the Central Regional Health Authority. They got an increased allocation, but for instance, like what are the areas of improvements that would be looked at with this increase. Here is another showing of poor governance as issues become public with our challenged citizens. I want to focus on an article titled:

“Tensions Rise at Blind Welfare Association North Office”

Not so long ago, September 03, 2014, members of the Blind Welfare Association protested at the north office, and this I got from the *Trinidad Guardian*:

“Tensions are high at the North Office of the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. Workers at the TTBWA have been protesting over the non-payment of salaries.”

Mr. Vice-President, is this a Government working for the people? Is this serving the people? Is this a Government working for you? Mr. Vice-President, an important area of responsibility is the hearing-impaired citizens of this country; they are not being served. Our information on this side is that there are critical service delivery issues to

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these fellow citizens. Some of the issues, Mr. Vice-President, there are issues concerning the cost of a wall at Dretchi, the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, to the tune of \$8 million, and a guard booth at \$600,000 plus. Have you been informed about this? And what is the Ministry doing about this?

Second issue, Mr. Vice-President, we understand the PS is yet to address the issue of the building. Government provided funding to the tune of \$16 million for refurbishment works at the same institution, you know, Mr. Vice-President. No audit has been done or even undertaken on the millions that have already been spent. We are also informed that operations and services have been null and void over the last seven months. And members of the public who are deaf or hard of hearing, are given appointments in October 2015. We have been informed that letters were sent to the Prime Minister, who is in receipt of the same, through the Ministry of the People and Social Development and the parliamentary assistant, but this is an unacceptable situation.

The Government boasts of a \$64 billion budget, but the visually challenged and hearing challenged are not receiving service, and there is no appropriate maintenance of the offices and their equipment, Mr. Vice-President. Service—[*Interruption*] no, they do not hear. Service to hearing aids and testing for hearing challenges are not available, although allocations have been budgeted for these very areas. Mr. Vice-President, an urgent audit of these areas for human health and function, I plead, should be immediately done so that the services [*Desk thumping*] can be resumed. Original time? Perhaps a board review and audit is also required. It gives me great joy to represent this group of people, be their voice in this House.

It has been said that when cultural policies are suppressed, or not effectively managed, it leads to shackling of a people. Today, I seek an intervention for the cultural producers and artistic sector of this country. A review of the budget and ongoing issues yet to be resolved have revealed that our cultural sector is not well funded, managed or—and that is one of our precious jewels, one of the precious jewels of our country is—[*Interruption*] our cultural throve is under attack. The cultural throve is under attack, Mr. Vice-President, and Trinidad and—that is the Trinidad and Tobago carnival, and in particular the carnival and the administration of our carnival annually.

I wish to go to the grid on the Ministry—the Head is the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, and the Sub-Head is the National Carnival Commission. They got well, of course, they have to clear \$154.3 million debt servicing loan, but after that, Mr. Vice-President, there is an NCC decrease in actual operations. This decrease, does this reflect an actual decrease in operations in 2015, and is this an indicator of a poorly funded carnival 2015? Or the poor management of 2014 carnival? What is it, Mr. Vice-President?

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I also wish to spend one second on the Festival Facilities, the Sub-Head, and there was an increase in allocation but, Mr. Vice-President, what are the locations or where, in fact, are the locations of these facilities? And when did the work commence? And who are the contractors and project managers during the 2014 period to carry over that debt?

Sen. G. Singh: That was dealt with in the Finance Committee.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: You will get your turn to respond, I take it.

The producers, Mr. Vice-President, have been promised improvement by the NCC, but the relationship has been severely eroded after four years of a problematic carnival. From Blue Devil, Mr. Vice-President, to the Parade of Bands, mas producers are under siege.

Sen. G. Singh: “Yuh wearing blue today.”

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: It is a lovely blue. I look good in blue. I look good in all colours, you know, because of my skin tone. [*Desk thumping*] I look good in all colours, you know. But you know, I really do blossom in red, Mr. Vice-President. Of course, that is the colour of the People’s National Movement, but I look good in all colours. [*Desk thumping*]

The competition and the quality of the individual shows require professional intervention. There is an ongoing issue of representation of the mas stakeholders and the NCC, and questions of accountability and representation are being ignored. And with carnival a mere, what, four months away? There is need for a comprehensive review of the stakeholders who have been selectively excluded from the input on the board of the NCC.

Mr. Vice-President, yesterday, when I was in this—oh, before I get to that, I want to share with this House—maybe seeing is believing, and when it comes from one of the—well, from somebody within the Ministry, maybe they will believe it. There was this article written on September 28, 2014 by Iana Seales. It is titled:

“Carnival in Danger”

This is interesting. The other side is saying carnival is in good hands, but, Mr. Vice-President:

“Carnival, always considered a significant artistic and economic driver with tremendous social impact is now in danger...”

Where did this come from? There was a study done and the study was called: Towards Improvement and Excellence, Report on Carnival Observations 2012-2014.

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“The data released in the study...more people are leaving the twin island during Carnival season than visitors are coming in—a startling reality given that Carnival is being marketed...”

But you are saying—other Ministers are saying—giving startling reality that carnival is being marketed so people could come to the island, Mr. Vice-President:

“The study was released by the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism on September 17 at a stakeholder session at the Hyatt Regency in Port-of-Spain. Damian Richardson, a Culture Officer with the Ministry, addressed the findings from the study.

He said, ‘The parade is our marquee event and the number of spectators has dropped by considerable numbers over the last three years’—three years—‘We need to ask serious questions...why should people stay for the parade? What is it about the quality of the show that has changed?’”

Mr. Vice-President, and he further said, from the Ministry, he further said:

“...the study...sent researchers into the field to observe what was happening during the Carnival season.”—from 2012 to 2014—“They gauged the experiences of persons at various events, organised several cultural forums during the season and also reviewed press reports and letters published over the period under study.”

—from the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism.

Four months away, carnival is, and this is the sector, this sector is significant with respect to its contribution to the GDP. There is time enough to resolve the issues which remain outstanding from 2014 and 2013, Mr. Vice-President. We cannot ignore the impasse since lack of enthusiasm from our producers will not result in the spectacular creativity that we enjoy annually. And carnival 2015 must include all, and competitions must be supported by fair rules that do not breach human rights.

Mr. Vice-President, the human development index is an independent ranking exercise globally for all nations. And given the enviable economic profile of Trinidad and Tobago, we rank quite low, and even lower than our regional counterparts. And as mentioned earlier, true human development is an asset—true development. We need to develop urgent interventions to address the rank we now hold.

Mr. Vice-President, I take it I am still on original speaking time? Yes? Okay. How much minutes again do I have, Mr. Vice-President?

Mr. Vice-President: You have exactly eight minutes.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: Eight minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Yesterday an hon. Member of this House when the debate started, Sen. Raziah Ahmed, you know, she talked a lot about many different things in her contribution yesterday. She talked about—*[Interruption]*—well, that is true, about how many PNM persons can speak. I just want to bring it to her attention, perhaps she is not aware, but it is six of us here on the Opposition Bench, and that is why, you know, it is 16 of them on the other side, but I know she was expecting to hear all of us, because she cannot wait to be, you know, educated and all the research that we do. *[Desk thumping]* But you know, Mr. Vice-President—

Sen. Cudjoe: Outnumbered but never outdone.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: That is right. Mr. Vice-President—*[Interruption]* she talked a lot. The hon. Senator talked a lot yesterday about “planass”, she used that word several times, and that we should expect to get some, and who should get “planass” and who should not and that sort of thing, right, then she went on after. I know what I heard. I am very confident in what I heard.

But you know, Mr. Vice-President, if the hon. Senator had spent those 20 minutes instead of talking about who is speaking on the Opposition Bench and who is not, and who should be “planassed” and who is not. If she focused those 20 minutes on the St. Michael’s School for Boys, *[Desk thumping]* it would have served the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago a whole lot better, Mr. Vice-President.

And through you, Mr. Vice-President, I ask the Senator, woman to woman, spend your time a little bit more instructively. You know, she stood there and she—no mention of the St. Michael’s School for Boys, Mr. Vice-President, and that has been bantered about the media, front page for months, and just—*[Interruption]* that is right, and you know, that is right, she was breaking a lot of ground. She broke ground like that yesterday. But you know in my opinion, Mr. Vice-President, these incidents are as a result of poor Cabinet oversight, what happened at the St. Michael’s School for Boys, right? And no method—*[Desk thumping]*

11.30 a.m.

I would like to finish my point. No method of integrated governance was being used and I will tell you why; give me a moment. The thing about it is that—tell me if I am not right. That Ministry has changed Ministers maybe about three times in the four years. Even the justice Ministry and the Ministry of the People and Social Development, I think, they had five Ministers in the four years. *[Interruption]* That is right.

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But you know, Mr. Vice-President, so when there is a change of Ministers in these Ministries—what I would like to call a coalition conundrum; so many things happening—people development is being hampered. When it changes from Minister to Minister within the Ministry, you know people development is being hampered. It was interesting when I saw that because I remember they found a jail quick, quick in Arouca to put people, you know, when they had the SOE. They found that very quickly—in Arima it was.

It is interesting that the court sent youths to this Home and, therefore, there needs to be some sort of interministerial oversight from the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, maybe the Ministry of Justice, maybe the AG's office, the PM, the Ministry of Health, because she represents the Ministry of the People and Social Development—as well as the Ministry of Health—and the board is a combination of the Anglican and the Government reps and the Minister of Finance and the Economy seems not to be enforcing the performance manual which outlines management imperatives on these boards. So there are so many issues.

You know the hon. Senator, Sen. Ahmed, spoke about action plan for a better tomorrow. I quoted that from her, you know—always talking about assessments. To the hon. Minister, through you, Mr. Vice-President, assessments do not take four years to do. [*Desk thumping*]

What must be going through the minds of these young people? The inter-ministerial approach failed at this Home. Over the months, there were headlines that: Runaways back at St. Michael's Home; Boys house of horrors; Bishop Berkley calls in St. Michael's board; Remove all 38 boys from St. Michael's, recommends report on institution; St. Michael's resident tells of physical, sexual abuse. Under this Government? And she wants to tell us who is going to be “planassed” and who should speak when? Come on! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, to give a “planass”—and I only use that word—it is not really a word in my vocabulary, but I heard it by the hon. Senator many a time yesterday, so I am just quoting her.

Now, in winding up, to give a bonus of \$500 to mothers is not the issue, but true empowerment would prevent choices that are not planned and true empowerment would result in an improvement in the skills that will enable better choices in the lives of our citizens. Access to all available skills development must be aligned with value for money from our citizens. In addition, I just have a minute again—

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Mr. Vice-President: Please continue.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: In addition, policies that enable environment protection from our risks as an energy producer must be funded and implemented—interventions to the communities of La Brea by international standards are yet to be implemented with the oil spill.

Hon. Senator: You have extra time.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: I do? Oh yeah, I do. I forgot.

So, Mr. Vice-President, we must aim to serve to enable human development instead of inequity and instability, which lead to arrested development of our nation and I drew the reference in the case of India and it is the same that is happening in Africa where the trickle-down of resources and moneys do not come to everyone.

The expenditure of the budget allocations to these special needs communities of our nation must be effectively delivered ASAP. I trust that the team on the other side will immediately address these critical issues using the trends and actual outcomes as a result of the last three years governance and fiscal management as evidence of the—

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

Motion made: That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes.
[*Sen. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. D. Baldeo-Chadeesingh: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, and just a point to note—as I sat down for a moment because I knew I had it here somewhere—the allocations for youth, gender, child development programme—and this was in the allocations for the Consolidated Fund—and I got this information. There was actually a decrease in allocation and, given the increase in the quality of institutional care that I often hear the Minister talk about, what guided this decrease and, of course, I refer again to the St. Michael's Home for Boys.

I shudder to think what might be going through the minds of those boys and their families wanting to change; got into that institution for one reason or the other, and it is like being in shackles in there; “in hell” is how you would describe it.

So using the trends and actual outcomes of all that I have discussed of the last years of governance and fiscal management as evidence of the UNC/PP style of governance, I have identified the risks and realities of the lives of our citizens.

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A budget is a political statement that is intended to win the public over to a particular direction. It is, therefore, a statement of intent. This direction should be aligned with development objectives, priorities or imperatives, but by its very nature it is also a numerical exercise that should give us some insight into what has been achieved by expenditures past in relation to the current plan for the upcoming year.

I see gloom, I see inequity and I see barriers to human development for our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] It is not the quantity of the budget, but the specific allocations and implementation priorities that support inclusive human development that signals good governance.

This budget has fallen short in all aspects of fiscal, economic and development imperatives. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. David Small: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to join in on this debate on this significant Bill in front of us. If you will permit me, as it tends to be my normal style, I want to just say that lots of things have continued to happen in Trinidad and Tobago and, as I read the budget and I read all the commentaries, I continue to be concerned about the way in which things are interpreted and, unfortunately for me, I have a particular way I do things. I actually read things, I analyze and I drill down into the data. So, I will try my best with my time today because I also want to spend quite a bit of my contribution on the energy sector, which is where the bulk of my stuff is; but I have some other things I would like to talk about.

So, Mr. Vice-President, as we begin this debate today, we are doing so in the context of a world that is once again seeming to lean towards disorder and because there is an organization in the world that openly uses terror and other things to advance its cause.

As a mark of how serious this is being viewed, even long time “ideological enemies”, the USA and Iran, have come to a common shared opposition about this issue. As someone who continues to have to travel regularly overseas, I am acutely aware of the security and personal safety issues that occur or exist in different parts of the world, in relation to how much of a paradise we live here in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the next week, I will be visiting Mexico City to address a conference dealing with the historic opening up of the oil and gas sector to private investors in Mexico and, just for information, the Government of Mexico privatized the oil and gas business in 1938, a short little while ago, and, I think, only earlier this year, a few months ago, they passed a law to open it back up. So it is a significant development there.

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It is interesting that their resources—the government policy has been that the state company must control the development of this resource. In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, our experience is virtually the opposite in that our state company has relatively small assets under contract offshore and thus the international majors control how these resources are developed. To be clear, I am not saying one is necessarily better than the other, but what I am saying is that it is interesting for me how the historical development and evolution of countries blessed with hydrocarbon assets differ so markedly.

Just broadly speaking, in the international energy business, oil and gas prices continue to be relatively strong. WTI, West Texas Intermediate, which is the marker crude that we use to base our crude output on, it has been relatively high. Its average—over \$90 a barrel for the year so far—and the natural gas prices, certainly around the world, are averaging \$9 to \$10 if you average out the European, South American and the Asian markets. So the prices are robust, save and except for the US market where, I think, that—about half an hour ago I checked—it was like \$4.10 at Henry Hub, which is not very attractive at all.

The outlook for ammonia and methanol commodities remains relatively stable and I share this because I believe we all have to understand and perhaps accept that for the time being, and probably the medium term going out to the long term, oil and gas and the derivatives are key sources of revenue for the State and we must continue to understand what happens in those markets and monitor them.

Coming back to home, our country struggles with a crime situation that is getting scarier and scarier as only last week there was an attack on a police station, something that my mind has not yet been able to process. Our economy remains strong, but is very open to shock as global oil and gas markets determine the level of our key revenue earner. Employment opportunities are at historic lows, but the quality of many of the jobs we have still requires some work and we need to do some more work to create higher value jobs.

Thanks to the efforts of the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, there are unprecedented opportunities for skills training and enhancement across a broad cross-section of areas, [*Desk thumping*] and because I have quite a bit of interaction with the young professionals, I share with them that when I certainly was their age, there were no opportunities like they have now to do this type of special skills training. It is really, really impressive and I hope that people understand and make use of it. All that existed when I was a young chap was John D and John D was just one spot, so it was really difficult. It did not have this range of opportunity.

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Affordable housing continues to be a major hurdle for the middle and low-income earners. A large portion of our society seems destined to be denied the opportunity of home ownership. Many who have served this country in the difficult position of judges and parliamentarians continue to suffer for proper pension arrangements as those with responsibility to address this situation continue to fiddle as Rome burns. [*Desk thumping*]

Our commercial banking sector is flush and overflowing with cash and the terms for loans are so onerous, yet the economists wonder why there is virtually no inward investment. Our energy sector is in a stable operations mode as the foundations are being laid for the next significant period of growth. International indicators for transparency, governance and corruption continue to suggest that we have improvements to make in our systems.

11.45 a.m.

Our Parliament is strong, vibrant and modern and has continued to lead the way in the region in terms of improving internal procedures. In that context, I certainly have some suggestions for the House Committee given some recent experiences I have had.

In the technology age, the majority of our secondary school students have their own laptops, and there continues to be universal free tertiary education. We are on the cusp of preparing for the first general election in five years, and the usual excitement that comes with that: health care, ebola, chikungunya, infrastructure development, perennial flooding, CAL, Petrotrin and Lake Asphalt. The range of issues to be addressed in a budget is wide and diverse.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for permitting me to lay the context for my contribution. I will not be able to even begin to touch one-quarter of those issues that I just raised, but it is always useful to understand the universe of issues that impact what we do. In that context, the position of the Minister of Finance and the Economy who grapples with all of these issues, and several that I am unaware of, is a truly challenging one. It is refreshing for me to be able to interact with an incumbent in that position who, based on interactions in the Senate, is knowledgeable, accommodating [*Desk thumping*] and genial in his approach, and I really appreciate that. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I delve into the specific areas of my contribution, Mr. Vice-President—the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is not here, but I would like to beg his indulgence, and I indicate that I mean no disrespect in any way. Please permit me to give a thank you to the tremendous team of the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*] We all have received a large package of documents, and we may not have the full appreciation of the planning and execution effort that goes into preparing them.

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You know, in this country, we are very quick to criticize public officials—and I will be dealing with that shortly—but very slow to recognize that there are those who come day after day and many times into the night to preserve the order of our public system. They seek no praise; they seek no honour; they simply do their duty to the best of their abilities.

My appreciation also goes out to the dedicated public servants who were called upon to support their Ministers in the historic first-past at the public running of the Standing Finance Committee last week, in the other place, because I understand having been a member of that system for so long, I understand what goes into preparing to support the delivery and the answering of those questions. I say these words, Mr. Vice-President, because we have a system. It may not be perfect, but still several elements of it are working. We have several dedicated civil servants who are here sitting through this debate, and they are the glue who keeps this thing together; they are the guys who keep this together, and I want to give recognition to their efforts. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, as in my preamble, I indicated that I really take my time preparing, and I really work hard at making sure that when I say something, I can support it on the back of facts and sound analysis. So that I think it was Minister Karim who mentioned earlier that some elements of the society are suffering from, I think, the word is “psychosis”. It has to do with, you know, blurring the lines of reality.

Given the events of the past couple of weeks, I read a couple of articles and I came across something very interesting called “cognitive dissonance”, and cognitive dissonance has a key side effect, and it has to do with the selective hearing and retention of what was said. And, you know, this is what continues to amaze me but, perhaps, I should not be amazed. I did my research and I found a Dilbert cartoon which really captures it and it says:

Character A to Character B says: why should I hire you as my consultant?

Character B says: I’ll use my special process of cognitive dissonance to improve employee morale.

Character A says: How does it work?

Character B says: When people are in an unusual situation their minds rationalize it by inventing a comfortable illusion. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I have no problem with people questioning what I say, but come and question the facts, do not talk, because as I understand it, Mr. Vice-President, I am under watch. So those who are watching, watch on. [*Laughter*] I do not know why you want to watch me [*Desk thumping*] but watch on and, at least, understand if you have

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something to say, do not hide behind petticoats or other coats, come and say it; come and say it. I take umbrage to my personal and professional reputation. [*Desk thumping*] I stand strongly behind it with all I have. [*Desk thumping*] So I refuse in any way to be intimidated by threats or whatever. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to apologize, probably to Sen. Al Rawi, in particular, as I make a couple of quotes here because my pronunciation—I did not go to reach Sixth Form and do A Levels, so my pronunciation of Latin is pretty bad, but to those who have things to say, here is my first quote, and I apologize in advance:

“sapiens nihil affirmat quod non probat”—that means:

“don’t swear to anything you don’t know firsthand” [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

For those who have been saying things, I quote again:

“cum tacent clamant”

The parties out there tend to suggest that silence is an admission of guilt. Yeah? I want to share with them that—let me quote again:

“facilis descensus Averno”

(the descent to hell is easy)

There are many who wish to cast aspersions on people’s character. And, I quote again:

“fronti nulla fides”

(no reliance can be placed on appearance)

This is an advice against:

“...hasty judgements of character made solely on”—perception.

Bear with me, Mr. Vice-President, I am begging your indulgence. I quote again:

“in bello parvis momentis magni casus intercedunt”

This translates to:

“in war great events are the results of small causes

...Battles are usually won by the armies that blunder least.”

Hon. Senator: Correct.

Sen. D. Small: And the next two couple of quotes refer to me:

“per angusta ad augusta”

(through difficulties to honours)

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Another quote:

“persta atque obdura”

(be steadfast and endure)

And the very last one:

“qui me amat, amat et canem meam”

love me—as my dog or, in other words, take me as I am. [*Laughter*]

So, forgive me for my bad pronunciation but, Mr. Vice-President, I think it is important because we live in a place where it is very easy to say things. I, unfortunately, do not operate in that space.

I operate in a space where, if I say something, I would be very careful of what I say. I make sure I do my work and I have backup information. So if I say something, I can defend it, and I do not hide behind anyone or send coded messages about people being watched. I am not accepting of that. So forgive me for that diversion, Mr. Vice-President, and I will now go into the substance of my contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to deal with an overview issue, Mr. Vice-President, where I describe it as: “we are victims of our circumstances, our success in Trinidad and Tobago”. Mr. Vice-President, I recall a staff meeting at the Ministry of Energy, where the incoming Minister, after a general election—as with the usual process—was informed of the dire situation of the Ministry regarding the retention of senior qualified staff who were leaving the Ministry almost weekly to other jobs. The main issue that we highlighted to the Minister, at that time, was the salary package was simply incomparable to what obtained in the state sector and even worse as compared to the private companies.

The Minister was advised of several initiatives to introduce something called—a “professional allowance” had been tried in the past 20 years, but it all failed because the previous Governments could not get it through Cabinet. That Minister eventually took a Note to Cabinet and got approval to institute a professional allowance for the Ministry and, incidentally, that was a Note that was massively copied by many and several Ministries. [*Desk thumping*] The year, for the record, was 1996.

So I say this, because I understand that the situation at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs has not changed. I understand that there are moves afoot to do two things, and I would share the context for why I am saying this, about the Ministry planning to increase the current professional allowance to retain staff as

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a short-term measure and, perhaps, as a long-term measure, perhaps try to remove the Ministry from the current system and have the Ministry as a stand-alone authority. That may take some other work, but I think those are moves that I support in principle.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I raise this because I say this: Trinidad and Tobago lives and dies on the back of its oil and gas industry to the extent that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs continues to be able to fulfil its mandate, is a function of the professional staff that it is able to retain. If we look at it as simply paying people more, then we have missed the boat. This is about country competitiveness in the most important economic sector of the country.

I would continue to argue as I have argued many times—and my colleagues at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy would disagree with me—about the existence of the “petroleum Impost” where for those who may not fully understand, the Petroleum Impost is a mechanism whereby the State is able to recover all of the expenses of the operations of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs from the operating oil companies in the upstream who are producing oil. So that I understand the processes that the Government has to budget and spend the money, and then apply a formula and get the money back, but my thinking is, if you eventually get the money back, then you should not necessarily be concerned about how much it costs to run the Ministry.

I am not saying that the Ministry is a bad place. Up to when I departed those doors, it was one of the most technologically up-to-date and some of the best professionals are in there, and I am sure a lot of them are still there, but I keep running into a lot of them who have left and they keep leaving. I was at a lunch and I met three guys and they are like—they just left. So there is an issue because the industry in Trinidad and Tobago is very competitive for professionals.

Every time I travel overseas, I run into Trinidadians who were at the Ministry, and they are now with Repsol or BP or wherever and I am meeting them in all diverse places. They have come through the Ministry, but the Ministry really needs help to try to keep its staff.

And, as noted by my very esteemed and distinguished colleague, Sen. Mahabir, visiting professor of McGill University, he said yesterday at one time the public service attracted the finest talent in the country, but we must now face the fact that there are many more opportunities in the market now than at that point in time that Sen. Mahabir was talking about, and that in order to attract the finest talent now, you have to pay top dollar and then some.

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So, Mr. Vice-President, I also want to deal with one broad issue, an issue that came up yesterday, and it had to do with the manufacturing sector. I think also Sen. Mahabir noted that that sector's contribution to GDP is not going in the direction that they should be going in. I think part of the discussion was that there is perhaps a lack of innovation and I asked, but why?

I recall up until a few years ago the Ministry had a fund for precisely that purpose to assist the local manufacturing organizations, but there were virtually no takers. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Senator: Through NGC.

Sen. D. Small: Yes, through the NGC. Yes, there was a fund that if you are a local manufacturer, you could go and access that fund for innovative-type products, and there were virtually no takers, and I am going to build on this point shortly.

Now, there can be no doubt, Mr. Vice-President, that the State's policy has placed many advantages in the hands of the manufacturing sector, and they have the lowest cost of electricity in the region; they pay a low corporation tax rate. For those who use natural gas, they get it at virtually peppercorn rates. The water rates in this country are very competitive. Diesel for transportation and for other machinery is highly subsidized. So that I have to say that if you have all of these benefits already, I think we have a challenge, and the challenge is because we are blessed with oil and gas reserves. It has actually released the pressure on other sectors to innovate. Why? Because we know that we have oil and gas revenues to fall back on. The pressure to innovate in other countries is, you innovate to survive; to survive.

12.00 noon

We know that we have oil and gas revenues and if we do not innovate and we just barely make the grade, a lot of companies will still make actually quite a lot of money. So that we need to find a middle road. We need to find a middle road. Now, do not get me wrong, if you give me a choice between being a country with oil and gas reserves and a country who has to import, I will want to be in the one that has the oil and gas reserves. I think where we have a challenge with the manufacturing sector is that there is an issue around the amount of innovation and that sector becoming more and more competitive, and we need to find a way, a middle road to fix that, because I think that there is a built-in disincentive to innovation because we know that we are going to get X-amount of billions of dollars from oil and gas. In other countries, certainly the big example is Singapore or even Hong—those places have no natural resources, they have to innovate to live, whereas we are trying to innovate to move our economy forward.

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So we actually have a bit of a different hurdle to get over, and I think the initiatives of the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training are, again, critical to that. You have a group of young people out there who now have opportunities like never before, and I understand through the, I think it is the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, they have the Integrated Business Incubator System.

Sen. Karim: IBIS.

Sen. D. Small: IBIS. Thank you, Minister. I think that is an important initiative also so that people who have ideas about what they want to do in business, they can come and the Ministry can help them to take those ideas and bring those ideas forward.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to move now to a couple of broader issues, and I want to begin on this issue by thanking the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for listening to my numerous entreaties and requests regarding the reintroduction of the tax-deductible savings bonds. As Members of this Senate may recall for several months I have raised this issue and, again, I am pleased that the hon. Minister and the Government [*Desk thumping*] has seen fit to make these bonds available again. I hope that citizens are fully aware of what these bonds can do for them and that they take full advantage. I certainly plan to take full advantage of these bonds and encourage all of my neighbours and all of my friends to take advantage. We can build a secondary bond market here on that basis. While the individual investors numbers are small, if you get a big pool of small investors you can build a secondary bond market here very easily in the country. I think it is the right way to go and I am fully supportive of it. [*Desk thumping*]

However, I want to put the Minister on notice that I will continue to have a discussion and raise the issue of increasing the existing ceiling of \$5,000 a year. I think it is a good start and I think once you start to build initial momentum we need to look at increasing that number, and then I will continue to press for some action, some regulatory action or look or review at the issues around the way, the spread that the commercial banking system operates in this country right now.

I think that the spread between deposit rates and lending rates, and then the fees charged for services are major reasons for the negative returns earned by ordinary citizens, like myself, when we place our savings into these institutions, not to mention the absolutely horrendous credit card rates. Why should a credit card rate be 29.99 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago? I just do not get it. It should

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not be that. The average rates in the US are around 14 per cent, in the UK it is about 17 per cent; why should credit card rates here be 24 per cent or 29 per cent? Something is wrong with that. We have a financial regulator, somebody needs to step up and say, “Listen, could we have a discussion and try to understand, have a public forum and let us try to fix that”, and really try to bring some rigidity to the system.

As I am dealing with fiscal matters, Mr. Vice-President, I wish to register my appreciation for the increase in pensions for senior citizens and public officers. [*Desk thumping*] As always with me there is a “comebacker”, in this regard, I wish to place back on the public agenda, the matter of pensions to retired judges and parliamentarians. Mr. President, in the same way in which the Government has recognized the need for increases in pensions for other sectors, I noted in the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy’s budget statement, he made reference to what the pension was in 2010 to what it is now in this current budget for both retirees and for public servants and for senior citizens, I would like to share that judges and parliamentarians in that period have received zero per cent increase. So I am asking, where is the equity? There needs to be some equity in there. There absolutely has to be some adjustment upwardly in that, and I know I have been accused of being controversial and, unfortunately—tough.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: And continue to be so Senator.

Sen. D. Small: Well, I have no intention of being controversial but I stand by my integrity, [*Desk thumping*] and anybody questions that, I am going to challenge it.

So, Mr. Vice-President, as I said, it has been almost a year since I have been—a little more than a year and, you know, the range of experiences, you know, I have had words of congratulations, hugs, kisses, boos, hisses, veiled accusations, even boldfaced accusations; I have dealt with them all—I will continue the work that I have begun and swore an oath to deliver. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I move now, I want to manage my time. I have a few things I want to talk about. In the last session I had posed several questions to the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy about the results of the introduction of the incentives, and I did not see any update in the budget on the results of those incentives. I propose to engage the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy because I believe that we have been a hydrocarbon province producing for over a hundred years and we are at the stage where we are very mature, and when we do a round of incentives we need to at least have a scorecard to understand what happened—did it work, why did it not work? or whatever.

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Let us try to get a score back and let us get some feedback, because as we go forward, Minister—and, Members, forgive me, I am not supposed to address the Minister—Mr. Vice-President, I think that part of how we move forward is understanding what did not work, and if we understood why it did not work let us see how we can improve it together. I pledge to be part of that effort in which I can share my minor expertise or experience in the area. I will be willing to lend a hand in that.

Mr. Vice-President, according to the latest released Ryder Scott audit, Trinidad and Tobago's proven reserves stand at 12.2 trillion cubic feet. Given what appears to be a steady decline in the base, it is important to place this into its proper context. We have a situation where the national gas downstream sector has plateaued as it relates to significant expansion. Whether this is a blip in our economic history or an emergent trend that is set to continue will likely be decided by the outcome of the ongoing exploration programmes. In this scenario, in the existing scenario, companies may not necessarily be incentivized to aggressively seek new reserves unless they are sure that they have a market to develop those reserves.

When one appreciates the costs of exploration and even development drilling, sinking funds in this way without an obvious route for recouping these expenses is a difficult task for most companies. So that, instead, what we have seen today is the morphing of exploratory and development drilling into one where companies announce exploratory activity. That is more or less aimed at servicing existing customers. So we should bear that in mind when we hear the announcements of major planned expenditures.

But, Mr. Vice-President, there is a saving grace, that all of the work going on right now from the contract signed by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in the past couple of years where most prognosticators, including myself, are relatively confident that the new reserves of oil and gas will be found and will arrest the existing declines in oil and gas. I am one of those. Perhaps I am an optimist, Mr. Vice-President, but based on my short understanding of the geology, I believe that while the current sector is relatively static, what is actually happening is that the groundwork is being laid for a potentially [*Desk thumping*] significant uptick in oil and gas production.

There is always a “kicker” with me. [*Laughter*] What will always remain an issue is the use to which the resultant revenues are put by the Government of the day, and that is several levels above my pay grade. Mr. Vice-President, the points I have made here obviously manifested in the Minister of Finance and the

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Economy's very short listing of energy projects, which essentially is just the Massy Group/Mitsubishi downstream project, and I continue to be hopeful that the Caribbean LNG project is going to finally get going. I do not view a short listing of downstream projects necessarily as a negative, but simply reflective of the state of the gas industry at this point in time. As the industry evolves, I fully expect that the listing will likely be increased and be repopulated as offshore oil discoveries are proved up.

The fact of the matter is that for many years we had a very long listing of potential projects that simply did not materialize owing to many factors. So that it is easy to look at it and say that there is only one project on the list, I have a slightly different view; there was a time when there were like 15 projects on the list. So that you have one that is going to happen and you had 15 of which none happened, which do you prefer?

The other issue to be recognized with the data released by Ryder Scott is that the reserve replacement figure was about 0.58 trillion cubic feet as compared to 1.4 tcf needed to replace volumes consumed during the year. Again, the obvious question is whether this is an anomaly or the beginning of a trend. Given the preceding history it may be the former, but I caution that we should continue to remain vigilant and pursue initiatives to ensure the sustained increase in our hydrocarbon productive capacity.

As the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs is embarking on a gas master plan, perhaps the time has come for the Minister to consider changing the way in which the reserves update information is presented to allay the obvious fears uncovered by a bare analysis of the final proved reserves numbers. The National Gas Company's (NGC) contracts with gas producers to fulfil existing sales to consumers come to an end between 2015 and 2018, and negotiations for these, for renewals, will most likely see all of them being renewed. What would be of interest—and I will be paying particular interest—is the period of the renewal and the pricing terms given the changing global gas dynamics.

This point allows me to segue into another issue, and that has to do with the strategy for managing the current and forecast gas curtailment situation facing many producers in Point Lisas. Given the steady declining profiles of the existing gas producers, the country is experiencing fairly steady daily shortfalls in gas deliverability. While it may be argued that this is a temporary situation, and I believe it is, it is very well reported in the international press and, thus, has far-reaching effects for the parent companies of some producers as it relates to their forecast production and their earnings, and, ultimately, their share prices.

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Perhaps, Mr. Vice-President, the time has come for an open or a public, or a full meeting with all of the various stakeholders to ensure there is no misinformation. I think there is a lot of misinformation out there, and as it stands, given the importance of the sector, I respectfully suggest that the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs consider having an all-in-one meeting with the producers—
[Interruption]

Sen. Ramnarine: We do that all the time.

Sen. D. Small: Well, okay, I have been advised by the Minister that those meetings are occurring, because I am getting different information from different sources, and I am saying if everyone is in the same room I would like to think they all leave the room with the same information. So that there is something that is going on that probably I do not understand, but I appreciate the feedback from the Minister that a level of consultation is taking place with the producers and the consumers so that everybody understands, and the companies can make the relative plans regarding the medium-term outlook for their operations.

Mr. Vice-President, I now turn to projections for the energy sector revenues. The basis for the projected \$17.07 billion in estimated energy revenues is an estimated average cost of \$80 a barrel and a netback natural gas price of \$2.75 per million Btu. According to the United States Energy Information Administration International Energy Outlook of September 2014, they forecast that up to 2014 crude prices will stay well above \$80, and so far for the year WTI prices have exceeded \$90. Recent trends in the past few weeks have seen a softening of crude prices because global stocks are increasing faster than demand. However, I think that there has been a relatively significant decline in WTI in the past few weeks, however, it is important to note that there is a concern about possible escalation in the situation in Iraq causing a disruption on exports, thus, causing upward pressure on prices.

Mr. Vice-President, the oil market, in particular, is a volatile one. Issues are happening and the world stage affects the outlook at any point in time for oil price and oil demand. Perhaps I look at the data too often. I look at the oil price probably 15 or 20 times a day, and it is amazing to me how many stories accompany each little change in price every day. What you have to do is to step back from it and then look at the trend and then look at the various forecasts, and I think that, based on what my understanding is of what the market looks like, I think that \$80 is a very reasonable number.

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12.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, however, as always, forecasting crude price is a task replete with examples of spectacular failures and, as such, constant market vigilance and the development of a fallback strategy would be critical from a national fiscal point of view. Given that the last really hurtful crude price correction happened over six years ago, on the back of the global financial crisis, I hope that not too much inertia has been built into the system and that we are in a position to adjust spending in the event of a major market correction.

As regards the forecast gas netback price of \$2.75, with the Atlantic trains only sending a small fraction of its output at the low price US market, the prognosis is very positive for easily exceeding this forecast. Global energy demand is robust, and with limited supply additions forecast, it will continue to be a sellers' market for the short-term pending the beginning of exports from the USA, which could have a major market impact forecast for 2016, so let us see how that goes.

Mr. Vice-President, with all that being said, we must always be mindful that Trinidad and Tobago's economic and social fortunes are tied to the international market prices for crude, for oil, for gas and their related products. This has been the situation since the 1970s, and certainly is likely to continue well into the medium term, if not longer. So market changes directly impact our revenue streams for better or for worse, and given our price sticker status, some prudence must be applied to national savings, debt management and expenditure controls.

I now move on to another issue. I deliberately cherry-picked a few issues because I know I have a time constraint. I want to talk about the compressed natural gas initiative. I continue to support this move. I think that the expansion of the network to increase CNG for unleaded and diesel users is an important initiative for more than one reason.

Those of us who spend some time on this—unfortunately I am one of those. The plain and obvious economic benefits of switching to CNG are very obvious; however, I still hold to my argument previously laid out in this Senate that mass conversion can only be facilitated by a shield from upfront cost for the conversion kits. The introduction of 100 per cent tax allowance was very welcomed, but in lieu of any update on conversion since then, I fully suspect, as I have mentioned previously, the initial cash outlay requires some innovation to get people on board.

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I continue to suggest that the State considers having First Citizens Bank offer a financing facility, let us say for 12 to 18 months, at very soft terms, say 2 to 4 per cent. Make the application process as simple as possible, but robust enough to deal with the usual bright persons in our society. Use a one-stop approach; as with a new car dealer, you go in, you see what you want and the financing is right there. So you go to the kit supplier and you get the financing right there. In this way you convert a \$10,000 initial cash outlay up front, into a \$700 or \$900 per month outlay for 12 months.

I think that if you ask someone to put out \$10,000 cash today or you tell them you can put out \$700 a month for the next 12 months or over the next 18 months, or whatever is the term, you may get converters. Depending on what you are using that vehicle for, certainly anyone who uses it as a maxi, for instance, that \$700 per month they will realize more than that in savings per month. So I think we have to try to be a little innovative to get the numbers up, to get people over that hump. I think the initial upfront cost—while for some persons \$10,000 cash may not be a lot of money, for the vast majority of people in the society, \$10,000 up is a lot of money, and we need to find a way to be a little innovative, to get over that hump and get them involved in the CNG. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I continue to say that a clear taking of the lead by the State, and even Members of the Cabinet, to convert their vehicles to CNG, would do the public messaging a world of good. Think about every Ministry having at least one OEM or converted CNG vehicle in its fleet, and having a sticker saying, “This is a Government vehicle powered by CNG”. It sends a message that the Government is fully behind it. Even if one vehicle from every Ministry’s fleet is on the road with a sales sticker, “This is a Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs vehicle powered by CNG”, “This is a Ministry of Finance and the Economy vehicle powered by CNG”, it sends the message out there that CNG is starting to populate the market.

I may not be the most creative marketing person, but these are just some of my thoughts that I thought I would take the time to share.

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to look quickly at the outlook for the methanol industry in Trinidad and Tobago in particular. As I had mentioned earlier, you keep hearing bits and pieces of information and, at the last occasion, I am aware of the issues with the arbitration around the MHTL. I am particularly distressed by that but the arbitration is binding, but I am very distressed.

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If you do a simple calculation on what is the output as opposed to the marketplace, and you run that for 10 years and then you net it back, then you are like—the basis for calculation—but I leave it alone, it is done, it is finished.

The local methanol operators have been able to do well in spite of the reduced output levels, because of the ongoing high price scenario. According to the IHS World Analysis for Methanol in 2014, printed in September of this year, and I quote:

“An important factor for methanol demand will be the impact of non-integrated methanol...projects. Domestic methanol production in North America was all but extinct until shale gas developments significantly lowered natural gas prices. Now North America is back in the game with capacity restarts, plant relocations and greenfield projects. The North American revival will change the global import-export picture, as the potential additional capacity in North America will likely transform the region”—country—”from a significant importer to an exporter”—of methanol—“by 2017; some of the import volumes currently coming into the US from Trinidad will likely...”—have to seek other markets.

So if this forecast holds, then Trinidad and Tobago methanol producers will be competing with producers of methanol who are using shale gas as their source, and they are all going to be targeting all international markets. So I think the road is going to get a bit bumpier for the local methanol companies, and we need to find a way—rather than wait until it happens, let us try to strategize how we can work together to make sure that the projects that are here are not disadvantaged and decide they are going to shut it down and move it to a place where they can get gas for \$2. We will not like that.

If we go back to the history of some of those projects, we should remember that a couple of them were projects that were dismantled in other places and brought to Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Ammonia and methanol plants came here because of the price attraction. So that it is not something that is unheard of, and I am flagging it because I think it is an issue that is out there and we need to be a little proactive with it. I am not saying necessarily give any instruction, but at least start a discussion about, “Listen, this is what the market is looking like; this is the potential impact for the local methanol producers”, and let us see how we could put a plan in place, so that if it happens in the way it happens, in the time it happens, we have something that we could do, rather than at the point in time something happens, we are struggling to figure out what to do.

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Mr. Vice-President, I now go on to the liquefied natural gas industry. There are 18 countries in the world with domestic LNG production, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is aware this is a pet subject of mine. There are 18 countries in the world that produce LNG that have a national oil and gas company. Trinidad and Tobago, at 6 per cent, has the smallest state equity ownership stake. This is massively significant, given the gargantuan revenue generation of the business. *[Interruption]*

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

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move the speaking time of my colleague, Sen. Small, be extended by a further 15 minutes. I would have liked to ask for a further 30, but I know the Standing Orders permit for a maximum of 15 minutes. So I beg the indulgence, Mr. Vice-President, of this extension in time.

Thank you.

Motion made: That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes.
[Sen. Dr. D. Mahabir]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. D. Small: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you. I thank my very esteemed colleague, Sen. Dr. Mahabir, for making the request. Perhaps before I wrap up, I should say that I was in San Francisco not too long ago, and I ran into a business associate; we were having some meetings. He said he studied at McGill University and there was a guy there, a brilliant economist—brilliant economist—that he always looked up to, and he understands that he is now a visiting professor at McGill, very esteemed economist; a young chap by the name of Dhanayshar Mahabir.

When I indicated to him that I sit every day—I always give him my utmost due respect and recognition for the wonderful and brilliant talent of Dr. Mahabir. *[Desk thumping]* You are sometimes in a place, it is when you are out of a place then you recognize people give recognition for people who are leaders. So that Sen. Dr. Mahabir, I thank you for asking for the extra time. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Vice-President, I go on now to the LNG business and, as I mentioned, given the fact that the LNG industry in Trinidad and Tobago uses over 60 per cent of the natural gas production on a daily basis, the issue of the State having some sort of a say regarding this important contributor to state revenues, is something I think we need to find a way to have a discussion.

One of the most important considerations for any future LNG expansion, in the event that we find new gas reserves, which I expect, is one that the State should really understand that with any future project it should be a significant player; because, one, the large cash generation potential means that the State would have significant profits and, two, due to the large gas volumes being consumed, as Trinidad and Tobago becomes a larger player in the business, there is the opportunity to leverage that opportunity in the market internationally.

The Minister and I had a discussion over lunch yesterday about understanding as Trinidad and Tobago is a player in the business—Trinidad and Tobago is a player in the global business—and there are opportunities to strategically leverage Trinidad and Tobago's base of operations here into relationships with other countries, and see how, as a player in the global LNG business, Trinidad and Tobago can get into places.

I always say that you sit in a place and you hear decisions coming out of institutions, but nothing beats being in the room. If you are in the room, you understand what all of the players have said and what the basis is for their positions, as opposed to being on the outside and reading it in Reuters, you only have what the news release says.

I just want to share some information again. I did it the last time, but the prices have changed, and I am going to do it again. Let me help—just give a short calculation for information. A standard cargo of LNG, and I am using a 145,000 cubic metres ship, leaving Point Fortin to go to Argentina, and obtaining a sales price of \$13 per million Btu. Last year Atlantic sent probably about 40 per cent of its cargoes to Argentina, and the average price throughout the year was actually about \$15. I just used \$13 just to be conservative.

This ship going to Argentina and obtaining a price of \$13 per million Btu, that cargo will be valued at approximately US \$36 million or roughly \$230 million, after shipping and boil-off is taken into account. That is the gross revenue, but understand this: you have one cargo ship leaving with product worth \$230 million—one. If you are aware of Atlantic's operations, they have ships leaving every day. If one extrapolated that number into an ardent calculation, then the Atlantic operation will be generating over \$62 billion from LNG sales alone.

I have a sample calculation that I am very willing to share, including all the sources from where I got my data, including the prices, the shipping rates. The Minister is aware; I tend to be very thorough.

Sen. Hadeed: Good research; good research!

12.30 p.m.

Sen. D. Small: So that in addition to the LNG, Atlantic produces over 7 million barrels per year of high-value natural gas liquid which is processed at Phoenix Park and marketed on their behalf. And if you assume that they get a dollar per gallon, which is actually below the current market Mont Belvieu price, this is an additional revenue base of \$2 billion.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the point that I am making, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is probably very happy with remittances currently received from Atlantic, but think about being in position to have a larger shareholder in an organization that generates the national budget, one organization generates the nation budget, and we are a significant shareholder in that business. I think that this opportunity is so big that—I am not saying that anything is easy, but we need to start to have a discussion, and as we begin in 2016 to have the discussions around the renewal of the contracts for supplying these plants, the Government has the opportunity to leverage that discussion, and I think that is very important strategically. It is something that I had raised before, I raise today, and I will probably continue to keep on the radar because I think that this is something that we should not miss.

I am running out of time, and there are several other issues that I wanted to talk about, CO₂ capture and reuse at Point Lisas, the status of the national energy policy, management of the upstream acreage. I do not have enough time to talk about—and I have several other issues.

Mr. President—Mr. Vice-President, forgive me. A budget document will never be perfect, and certainly will not please everyone. Given the diverse range of interests that have to be managed in connection with the policies of the Government, by nature there will be persons or parties or organizations that view the document differently, depending on the extent to which they feel their particular issues have been treated with. A budget is a statement of purpose or intent regarding planned or ongoing activities and the sources and use of revenues to achieve the activities outlined therein given the information available at the time of its drafting.

In looking at the budget, I place a lot of focus on the energy sector initiatives, and based and on my view, the sector has performed reasonably well, given the current constraints surrounding our oil and gas production profile. Oil production has seen a reduction in its decline, largely due to a significant amount of drilling and development drilling activity, and I remain positive that production will see

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an uptick in the medium term, but this depends largely on the results of the ongoing upstream work both onshore and offshore. Petrotrin and Trinmar remain a challenge and require special attention, but this must be placed in the context of the fact that their fields have been in production for over 40 years, and the capital investment required to modernize the operation must be matched by the potential revenue to be gained from any increased production.

Regarding gas, the situation is better, as we have a situation of reduced deliverability, but availability is less of a challenge as the Ryder Scott audit has pointed to an increased resource base. In addition, several gas-prone blocks are currently under exploration, and there is reasonable confidence of success. As always there will be the issue of the relatively quiet downstream sector, but it must be understood that this is driven by the inability to prove additional gas reserves.

In this connection the rate of competitive bidding offerings have ramped up significantly in the past three years, and the sector and the country are likely to be begin benefiting from any successes within the next two to three years. So that all in all I believe that the energy sector is in a period of consolidation, and within there exists the opportunity to deal with several issues including gas-pricing mechanisms, a revamp of the LNG shareholding situation in such a way as to ensure that the maximization of the returns to the State occur from the exploration of these resources.

Mr. Vice-President, I have attempted today to deal with a multitude of issues. We live in a space where it is very easy to cast and say things, and I, unfortunately, am not of that ilk. I came from very humble beginnings, and I always say that when we—you know, as my mother, God bless her soul, she is a saint, will always say, make sure to put sugar on your words in case you have to eat them. [*Laughter*] I am from that school, but I try to be as polite as I can when people or anyone has any issue with me. You have an issue with what I have to say, let us have a discussion. I tend to be very approachable; let us talk, let us have a discussion. I believe that the budget is a document that is in flux. It is there. It is done. It is dusted.

I think that perhaps because I have been part of the system that has provided the documentation to support—I think no one understands how much pressure there is or probably how much pressure it is to appease all the various parties, all of the Ministries, all of the departments, all of the state companies and all of the private sector. Everyone is feeding information. We want this. We want this. We want this. And it is a massive juggling act to try to see how you can keep as many

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people happy, but at the same time achieve the objectives of the Government. So that it is a juggling act. It has always been like that. It will always be like that. It will never be perfect, and I think that in the context of the sector that is driving and supporting our economy, I think that the stewardship is what it is because I believe that the stage of our industry is mature.

I think the stage is being set, where in the next two to three years—and this is one of the issues with the—that is not necessarily funny, but it is the reality of the energy business. You have a gestation period. You offer, you do bids, and then you have to get the bids in. You wait nine months or a year. You get the bids in. Then you do a review. Then you make the award. Then the companies have to go and do seismic—they get, they hire the ships and do the seismic. Then when they get the data they have to interpret the data. Then after they interpret the data, then they say, well this is what we are going to drill. And then they engage the drilling ships, and then they start to drill. And if they find the gas or oil, then in commercial quantities, they do testing. Then after it is tested, then they can say well, okay, we would like to make it commercial. All of those things take five to seven years. And if they say today, someone hits oil and says, listen, this is great, it is going to take another two to three years at least before it starts to produce. So that it has a long gestation period.

So that we live in a space where everybody wants to claim credit. I always say, listen if you go to buy a car, and it is a used car, you do not care if John Henry was the original owner, I am the owner now. Let us just focus on it and move forward. Let us not worry about who—everyone wants to claim ownership. Let us stop worrying about who claims ownership. Let us focus on Trinidad and Tobago. Let us try to work together, and understand that we have different points of view, different positions, but we should always be able to do so, to differ respectfully. I have no problem with someone differing. I differ all the time with several positions, but I always work on the fact that we can differ respectfully, and in that way in this august Senate we can work together as a team to do the job for Trinidad and Tobago that we have been put here to do. Mr. Vice-President, with those short few words, I want to thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the time is now 12.37, I intend to break for lunch. Therefore, we will come back at twenty to two. The Senate is being suspended until twenty to two for lunch.

12.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.40 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

The Minister of Justice (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Thank you very much, Mr. President, welcome to the Chair. And I want to say on behalf of the Senate, our deepest appreciation to the Vice-President who held the fort earlier this morning.

Mr. President, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Bill, 2015. As I rise to make my contribution I will like to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar for her astute and innovative leadership. And also congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for a thoughtful budget, [*Desk thumping*] one which reflects this Government's continued focus on improving the lives of all of our people.

But before I get into the meat of my contribution, Mr. President, I want to speak to a few of matters raised by speakers just before me. And first of all, let me speak regarding the contribution of Sen. David Small who immediately preceded me before we adjourned for lunch. I want to compliment Sen. Small on his very frank, erudite and thoughtful contribution which focused on the energy sector, but which also touched on matters involving finance and the banking sector. [*Desk thumping*] His expertise, Mr. President, in this area of energy, oil and gas is there for all to see, and the Government is always appreciative of his views and insights in this area, [*Desk thumping*] and always gives due regard to them.

Sen. Ramlogan SC: He will make an excellent Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in the next year. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Mr. President, I cannot say the same of the contribution of the good Sen. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh. As her contribution went on, Mr. President, all I could ask myself over and over was, is this for real? What country is she speaking about? What Government is she speaking about?

Sen. G. Singh: And where is she?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: And in fact, where is she? [*Crosstalk*] The Opposition Benches—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Hadeed: Are depleted.

Sen. The Hon. E. George:—now peopled by one representative, Mr. Avinash Singh, who has been left once again, severely alone—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: To hold the fort, poor fella.

Sen. Hadeed: Avinash, we love “yuh” boy.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Let me quote some of the things Sen. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh said about the budget. The budget will lead us down the road to ruin. What? The Government in this budget is “deaf”, “dumb”, “blind”, and “mute to the cries of the population”. What is she saying? This budget? We “dislocate” and “hamper citizens”. This budget? The people experience “systemic barriers” to services by this Government. I do not know whether it is this budget—whether she read the budget or not. It must be some other budget from some other country. The population are victims to “systemic poor implementation” by this Government. This Government—poor implementation? Quite the opposite.

1.45 p.m.

In fact, in respect of systemic barriers to services by this Government, all I have to refer to is, the developments regarding the population being able to get electronic birth certificates virtually by the click of a mouse, now. Who is responsible for that? That is this Government. How could you say that the people are experiencing systemic barriers to services? The victims, the population are the victims to systemic pure implementation. Recall, in 2003, when the PNM Government turned the sod for the Oncology Centre. Where is the Oncology Centre now? Who is building it?

Sen. Hadeed: They leave a big hole there like a crater.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: This is the Government that is building the Oncology Centre. So when you talk about implementation—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Hadeed: They leave it there for chikungunya.

Sen. The Hon. E. George:—and that the population are the victims of systemic poor implementation by this Government. It is not in my respectful view, apparent, that Sen. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh read the budget or is living in Trinidad and Tobago. Let me say to Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh and to others and to this population, that if it is one thing that this Government will be famous for and is very good at, it is implementation. [*Desk thumping*] And this is completely apposite as my good friend Sen. Faris Al-Rawi is wont to say, to what the PNM was famous for, non-implementation. And I will give just a couple of examples of this.

Recall, the difficulties that this country faced in respect of its water services during the past PNM regimes and up to as recently as the PNM regime that expired in 2010. If one were to be reading the newspapers at the time and viewing the electronic media, it would have been a repeated observation, the extent to which people were protesting for water among other things. But recall that this Government replaced the Navet Trunk Main, 29

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kilometres of dual pipe that resolved the problems for the people in the south-east [*Desk thumping*] part of this country. All through Penal and Siparia and so on, the people's water service improved radically as a result of that. Recall also, that the desalination plant which was commissioned in Point Fortin, just outside of Point Fortin has now resolved the water issues for the people in Point Fortin and beyond. [*Desk thumping*]

So, when you talk about this Government not implementing things, I do not think that she is referring to this Government at all, and that she had not been speaking at all about Trinidad and Tobago with all of the activities that have been taking place in water among other things. Water—that is at the macro level I am speaking about there, with respect to the Trunk Main and desal plant. At a micro level, we have been affecting the various communities in this service. The PNM Government had been neglecting these communities over many, many years.

Recall, again, and I had repeated this in this Senate that this Government managed to bring water service to the people at Upper Covigne within a year of coming into office.

Sen. G. Singh: Whose constituency is that?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: The total neglect of that community, the Diego Martin West constituency is a matter that will go down in the annals of history of Trinidad and Tobago regarding the discrimination with respect to how the PNM has treated its own supporters in areas of Diego Martin. And not only there in Diego Martin, you know, the water was brought for the first time also, not only to Upper Covigne, but also to areas like Upper Big Yard in Carenage. In fact, last week Friday, was it, I think, or the Friday before I went up into Big Yard in Carenage—I wonder how many of us have gone up there, Upper Big Yard in Carenage, to see—

Hon. Senator: They never got water.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: They never got water until last year when WASA ran the pipes up to them. So all of these communities which have typically been voting for the PNM, the PNM has neglected and has not paid any attention to them at all. It took this Government [*Desk thumping*] to provide that very, very vital service to the people of those communities. Talk to the people of Upper Blue Range, the people in Blue Basin and so on, and surrounding areas about the impact that this Government has brought [*Desk thumping*] in respect of how it has delivered water for all of them. So when you come here, I think Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh must do her research and not simply come here spouting words. In fact, I did make a little jotting as she was speaking and I just want to quote the jotting because it is instructive. I said this Senator's contribution was just words, words, words, with no relation to the reality of the performance of this Government.

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Let me talk too about roads and traffic jams and so on, going to the beach. Which is the Government that has provided considerable relief to the people in south Trinidad with respect to the opening of the Golconda to Debe segment of the Point Fortin Highway? [*Desk thumping*] Which is the Government when the Valencia Bypass Road is soon completed and opened, and will bring considerable relief to the people in the east? [*Desk thumping*] This is the Government that is implementing all of these projects.

The Diego Martin Highway expansion, I live in Diego Martin so I can speak to the relief that this has brought to the people of Diego Martin, and we want to thank the people of Diego Martin for the patience that they have had while this project was under construction. In addition to the widening of the Diego Martin Highway, there was the redualing of the roadway, the Diego Martin Main Road adjacent to Starlite Shopping Plaza. Again, the paving of the La Puerta Avenue after about 25 years of neglect by the PNM Government, the La Puerta Avenue, Diego Martin was repaved by this Government, the entire length.

More recently, last weekend those of us who would have read the papers would have seen the opening of the Balmain Bridge in Couva which was recommissioned, and the old bridge had collapsed. And I remember in my stint as Minister of Works and Infrastructure we had begun the construction of this particular bridge, and I congratulate my colleague, Minister Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, Minister of Works and Infrastructure for the completion of that bridge. All of these works, all right, give the lie—and I hope that is not an unparliamentary word to use—give the lie to the suggestion by Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh, that this Government has been short on implementation.

She spoke also repeatedly—and this is her quote too—of ineffective human development programmes, repeating this over, and over and over ineffective human development programmes. I mean the Minister, Minister Fazal Karim who spoke immediately before Sen. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh, spoke to all of the programmes that have been put in place since his taking up the mantle of responsibility for tertiary education. Apparently the goodly Senator was not listening. I am amazed. The Minister indicated that some 167,000 students have benefited since his taking up the mantle of all of the programmes in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. How could you say that the human development programmes are non-existent or ineffective. Like I say, the goodly Senator resided somewhere else or she is referring to some other budget in some other country and some other Government.

Mr. President, an overview of the performance of the national economy as a whole shows that there have been improvements and citizens continued to benefit from this Government's fiscal policies, and that between 2010—2014 the inflation rate for

example has dropped, the unemployment rate has declined and there have been increases in old age pension, minimum wage has been raised, and so on. I will go through some of these to bring the goodly Senator and her team back to reality, because apparently they are somewhere lost in wonderland.

Mr. President, if one reads the fiscal and other measures in the 2015 budget, the one thing that strikes you immediately is that there is something for everyone. And, Mr. President, I have heard some of the Senators who spoke before mention this, but I think that—I want to go through some of these items in detail so that people can appreciate in a very concise way the items that have brought considerable benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and where I am insisting that there is something for everyone if you read this budget. There is something for the entrepreneurs and businessmen.

In that regard, there is a 50 per cent and up to a maximum of \$100,000 in rebate for establishing agro processing facilities for approved commodities. [*Desk thumping*] Then there is a 50 per cent rebate for repairs to those facilities, up to a maximum of \$50,000. There is an increase in the rebate from 15 to 20 per cent to a maximum of \$8 million for the use of local labour in the film, fashion and music sectors, and I heard again, the goodly Senator indicate that culture was being neglected. But I mean, look at, this is an increase in the rebate from 15 to 20 per cent for use of local labour in film, fashion and the music sub-sectors. So how could you say that? There is a tax amnesty also up to 2013 and this is for the entrepreneurs and businessmen.

There is an increase in the contract procurement value under the FairShare Programme so that small contractors can get this benefit, and this is from \$1 million—the increase in contract procurement value for \$1 million to \$1.5 million. There is something also in the budget for farmers, and I will leave all the other details for my colleague, Minister Devant Maharaj. All I would say in this case is that all fines related to predial larceny had to be increased by 15 per cent, which is a good benefit for the farmers but, as I said the Minister of Food Production will indicate other measures.

There is something in the budget for the lower, middle and upper income persons. The tax claims in respect of the annual contributions to registered annuities have been increased from \$30,000 to \$50,000. Again, the income tax amnesty up to 2013 also assists this grouping of all the lower and middle and upper income persons. There is to be introduced the tax free saving bonds—and Sen. Small spoke to this—which are tax deductible up to \$5,000 per annum for a period of five years, and this gives to persons in the middle income, in particular, an opportunity to get some tax relief and also get some return on their savings. There is an exemption of the motor vehicle tax and value added tax on new or used hybrid electric-powered vehicles that are not older than two years for a period of five years for private and commercial use.

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There is an increase in the tax allowance from \$18,000 to \$25,000 for first-time homeowners on their mortgage interest for a period of five years. So this Government is making home ownership more affordable, not only to those, but also there is the 2 per cent to 5 per cent mortgage programme that increases the chances of persons qualifying for mortgages and therefore for being able to own a home.

Mr. President, there is something in the budget for the senior citizens. The personal allowance for persons age 60 and over has been increased from \$60,000 to \$72,000. The senior citizens pension which this Government had increased in 2010 from \$1,950 to \$3,000 is now being increased to \$3,500 per month. The pension of retired public officers goes up by \$500. For low income and underprivileged persons who are struggling to make ends meet, the Government has increased the minimum wage from \$12.50 to \$15. I mean, small as it is, it is an action that the Government has taken in respect of its treatment of the less privileged people in the society.

2.00 p.m.

Disability grant has gone up to \$300 per month. The public assistance grant, gone up by \$300 per month and there is the \$500, of course, that is there now to assist parents in caring for a newborn child.

So we could itemize the initiatives that the Government is putting in place in this budget to help every single sector of the population. En masse, the population will be assisted by the 50 per cent increase in the fines for breaches of the road traffic laws because all of us are endangered, as a population, by those persons who tend to be reckless on the road and who break all of the road rules and so on.

A long-standing issue having to do with the maxi-taxi owners is being resolved in this budget, where the maxi-taxi owners will be reimbursed for their payments of motor vehicle taxes and value added tax, which the PNM never sought to resolve.

Sen. Hadeed: 2005.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Since 2005, that is right. Since 2005, the PNM took no action in resolving. And, finally, Mr. President, the protective services personnel would be assisted by a measure that establishes a fund via this budget from which the sum of \$1 million will be payable to the estate of any member of the state protective services who is killed in the line of duty.

This is, I think, a good point, a good segue on which I could get into the matters involving the Ministry of Justice for which I have responsibility. There is recognition that the safety of our prison officers is crucial and that initiative on the part of the Minister of Finance and the Economy in the budget regarding the \$1 million that will

be paid to the estate of any officer of the Government security services who is killed in the line of duty, is a good and excellent bit of protection for the families of prison officers because they fall under that population of persons who are in the service of the State as security officers.

Mr. President, the Ministry of Justice received the sum of approximately \$1.05 billion via this budget, and I want to speak to some of the uses to which this funding would be put. In fact, in this budget, the Ministry of Justice was allocated \$709,899,600 under the recurrent budget and \$315.1 million in the PSIP, making a total of \$1,024,999,600. I will go to identify some of the initiatives and projects on which this funding will be spent and also to speak to some of the projects that we will be undertaking in this fiscal.

In respect of the Forensic Science Centre which is a critical element in the Trinidad and Tobago justice system, the refurbishment of the pathology section is one of the areas to be undertaken, and when this work is completed, two separate, fully-equipped rooms will be available to facilitate the simultaneous conduct of post-mortems by pathologists so that post-mortems will be completed more quickly, and this will reduce the time spent at the centre by both investigating officers and relatives waiting for the completion of post-mortems.

It is intended also to purchase the following items of equipment: a nitrogen evaporation system; a UV Visible Spectrophotometer and a DNA extraction system which will reduce the turnaround time for casework and enhance the capability of scientific analyses.

There is to be also the acquisition and installation of a Laboratory Information Management System which will replace the current paper-based manual system with an electronic system for all evidential submissions at the centre. This Laboratory Information Management System will reduce the amount of time spent on paperwork and allow scientific personnel to focus on analytical activities. It will facilitate the tracking of evidence through the examination life cycle at the centre, the generation and storage of lab work sheets and so on.

In respect of the personnel or the human resource, the Ministry of Justice has recently obtained Cabinet's approval for the provision of scholarships in the fields of forensic pathology and forensic document examination. [*Desk thumping*] And Cabinet had agreed to the award of nine scholarships starting this semester in the two disciplines, and via this means, we seek to address the matter of succession planning for the Forensic Science Centre. As you know, it has been a long-standing issue, the problem of the unavailability of the number of pathologists required at the Forensic Science Centre.

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Also, in respect of the science centre, we are aware that the current location has outlived its usefulness. It has become too small, and while we are doing some work to ensure that it is habitable and the work that needs to be done there can be done, we have work going on with respect to the construction of a new forensic science centre in Carlsen Field.

I want now to turn to some of the legislative initiatives that the Ministry has been involved in over the last year and to point to some of the other initiatives that we plan to implement in the coming year. The Ministry of Justice has worked on, and supported a number of legislative initiatives which have resulted in the overall improvement of the criminal justice system, and some of these are: the Miscellaneous Provisions (Prisons) Act, 2014 which was assented to by His Excellency the President on September 05, and some of the amendments effected by this Act would be the creation of the Inspectorate of Prisons, and I did give some details regarding the rationale for that particular recommendation and amendment to the law. There would be increases in fines and periods of imprisonment for offences under the Prisons Act and the Criminal Offences Act, for criminal offences connected with prisoners and the prisons environment, including an increase in the penalty on summary conviction for having assaulted, obstructed or resisted any prison officer. In this manner again, the Ministry and the Government are mindful of protecting its prison officers. I should mention that the penalty for this particular offence has been increased from a fine of \$1,000 and imprisonment for six months, to a fine of \$15,000 and imprisonment for two years.

Secondly, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Administration of Justice) Act, 2014 that was assented to by His Excellency on September 10, 2014, included amendments to the Administration of Justice DNA Act, the Police Service Act, the Criminal Offences Act, the Jury Act, the Young Offenders Detention Act, the Dangerous Drugs Act and the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act. And the Ministry of Justice provided yeoman input into all of those, except the Dangerous Drugs Act and the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act.

With respect to amendments to the DNA Act, the amendments to this Act have further strengthened the regime and are part of the overall effort to intensify the use of DNA technology as an essential part of the crime-fighting arsenal of Trinidad and Tobago. In respect of the amendments to the Police Service Act, I wish to inform that before these amendments were effected, the police officers were restricted in taking the measurements, photographs and fingerprint impressions of persons in lawful custody, but some of the amendments will now

allow policemen, one, to take and record for the purpose of identification, the measurements and photograph of a person who is a detainee or an accused. It will also enable police officers to take and record, for the purpose of identification, the fingerprint impression, without their consent, where the fingerprint impression is derived from a crime scene and there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the person was involved in the commission of an offence related to the crime scene and believing that the fingerprint analysis could confirm or disprove the suspicion.

Under these amendments, a police officer, or any immigration officer at all ports of entry into Trinidad and Tobago can take and record for the purpose of identification, the fingerprint impression from a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, without consent, where the citizen has been deported from any place outside of Trinidad and Tobago, and also of any person entering Trinidad and Tobago who is not a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. And further amendments established the national fingerprint database, which will now be an electronic record of all prints of persons who have been so processed by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and can be easily retrieved by police investigators.

In respect of the Criminal Offences Act, there have also been amendments that address the matter of the intimidation of witnesses and judicial officers and jurors and so on, and certain categories of persons who are involved in the justice network.

In respect of amendments to the Jury Act, the expansion of the jury pool will be enabled by the relaxation of the qualifications enabling a person to serve as a juror, which were of some vintage and needed to be revised in keeping with international best practice. And these qualifications have been brought in line with contemporary international standards for persons serving as jurors, by abolishing any link between property ownership and eligibility to serve as a juror; abolishing the link between eligibility and marriage and removing the automatic exemption of spouses of all excepted persons, including Judges of the Supreme Court, Members of Parliament, Mayors and Deputy Mayors, Magistrates and so on. So all of this increases the jury pool. Finally, the increase in the maximum age limit for eligibility to serve as a juror from 65 to 70 years so as to permit a widening again with the jury pool.

In respect of the amendments to the Young Offenders Act, section 7(3) of the Act has been amended to remove the power that the Minister has to have some say in the sentence, or the time that the sentence of a lad, or young person, begins at the prison.

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In respect of the legislative amendments that we will seek to bring in the coming year, and also new legislation that we want to bring, let me let this august House know, through you, Mr. President, that we expect the following legislation to make its debut in the House in the coming weeks and months. First of all, the amendments to the Evidence Act, amendments to the Bail Act and the introduction of the Parole Bill which is currently engaging the attention of the Ministry of Justice and the stakeholders involved in its design.

In respect of amendments to the Evidence Act, there will be the introduction of amendments that will make for new measures to be used for the identification of suspects, specifically, such as the introduction of video identification as a new form of identification procedure and the introduction of detailed guidelines for the conduct of video identification, identification parades, identification by means of photographs, the conduct of identification in a public place and the execution of confrontation as a means of identification. It will introduce the electronic recording of the interrogation of suspects so that one will eliminate the issue of persons suggesting that they have been coerced into giving testimony or statements. There will be special provisions for witnesses including vulnerable witnesses such as use of screens, allowing witnesses to give evidence in a video link, closed proceedings and so on.

2.15 p.m.

In respect of amendments to the Bail Act, those amendments seek to remedy the heavy reliance placed by judicial officers upon bail which is secured by use of realty. The difficulty in many instances is that persons are unable to satisfy the requirements of providing surety for bail which is backed by unencumbered land. Consequently, those persons are forced to remain on remand until their matters are determined by the court, or worse, resort to the illegal underground system of professional bailors to seek relief. There are a lot of advantages to such proposals. Among them is that the number of defendants or accused persons who are constrained to remain on remand simply because they are unable to secure bail, will be reduced, and it is also anticipated that such provision would also significantly reduce the incidence of professional bailors.

In respect of the Parole Bill, Mr. President, the Parole Bill has been drafted and it is currently engaging the attention of the Legislative Review Committee. It is intended via this Bill to provide two distinct benefits: the benefit to a prisoner of early release under specific terms and conditions and with a provision of state-sponsored support; and also the benefit to society of the controlled release of offenders under stringent terms and conditions, sufficient risk of assessment

having been conducted to determine their threat to society and their capacity for reintegration. Parole, therefore, will mitigate the harshness of the sentence by reducing the time that offenders spend in custody and will form part of the continuum of punishment of the offender, thus the sentence continues even though the offender is free from incarceration.

Mr. President, there are some other projects that the Ministry is involved in. One in particular is presenting us with a challenge which we hope we can overcome if there is neutral goodwill and desire on both parties to resolve, and I speak specifically of the construction of the Malabar judicial complex. These challenges spring essentially from the resistance of the Malabar residents regarding the construction of this particular facility in their area. From the Ministry of Justice perspective, there are many, many advantages that will accrue to the community as a result of the placement of this judicial centre there and, in that regard on Friday, September 12, 2014, together with persons of the Ministry of Justice, I met with His Worship the Mayor of Arima George Hadeed, Councillor Anthony Garcia who is the Deputy Mayor and also the councillor for the area, and representatives of the Malabar Residents Association to discuss this proposed siting of this judicial centre at the location.

At this meeting, officials of the Ministry delivered a PowerPoint presentation which sought to provide the context and framework within which the site had been identified and selected, and also to seek to allay some of the fears of the residents which had been previously enunciated at a meeting hosted by the Mayor on June 28th, actually, of 2014. Some of the concerns expressed by the residents were the increased vehicular traffic, the fact that criminals would be brought to the court, and therefore, they will be in their community and present a threat to the safety of residents. We did try to tell them that this was not so because of the manner in which the court will be operated and the additional security which will naturally come as a result of the court being placed there. Anyway, Mr. President, the spokespersons for the residents indicated that the information we presented to them brought them no comfort and that they were adamant that nothing would convince them to agree to the judicial centre being placed there.

As I indicated earlier, I called for a spirit of compromise and openness in treating with the matter and promised that the Ministry will revisit the residents' concerns to determine to what extent these concerns could be resolved by adjustments that we may wish to make to the construction of the facility there, and I also encouraged the residents to take another look at their position and consider under what conditions they would be willing to accede to the construction of the judicial centre in their community. We are hopeful that this matter could be addressed.

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We face a similar challenge in respect of the construction of a youth court in Trincity. We have tried to indicate that in particular respect to the construction of the Malabar judicial centre, that it has to be located in the Arima magisterial district and so there are constraints. We could not go and put it in Brazil Village, for example, or in Tamana. Anywhere we put it, there will be residents living nearby, so there most likely would be objection anywhere we go. So, we are trying to see to what extent we can allay the fears—[*Interruption*]

Mr. President: I just want to draw to your attention you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. E. George: Yes, thank you. I will close, Mr. President. I have a lot more to say. I am prepared to say a lot more, but I know there are constraints regarding time and my Whip had indicated to me earlier that I need to pay attention to the constraints of time. So, let me say that I wanted to speak on matters involving the establishment of the DNA databank and so on, and the procurement of relevant staffing for that agency.

I think I should mention that we have been having some difficulty with finding the relevant personnel in accordance with the legislation for the custodian and deputy custodian of the DNA databank, and let me say this, eh, that as far back as 2012, the Ministry has been attempting to procure the services, via contract, of a custodian manager and deputy custodian manager and we are having some difficulty. However, there is some light at the end of the tunnel because the discussions between the Ministry of Justice and the US Embassy have resulted in the provision of assistance from the US Embassy to recruit a forensic subject-matter expert consultant to the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Justice and specifically the Forensic Science Centre so that he or she can guide the Ministry of Justice and the Forensic Science Centre in the areas of standard operating procedures, forensic laboratory quality control mechanisms and chain of custody proficiency-testing preparation and so on, so that we can establish this DNA lab. So, we hope that through this person coming on board that we will be able to make some headway in setting up the DNA databank and lab.

In respect of the electronic monitoring, this is the area in which we have been attempting to recruit an electronic monitoring manager. As far back as September 2012, it has come to naught. In fact, two applications were received that time and neither was found to be suitable. So they went back out and they received 13 applications, all of which were found to be unsuitable. So it means that we have to go internationally for the procurement of these services, and I think the Permanent Secretary was telling me either today or yesterday, this morning or yesterday—the way the days morph into each other—that they are on the point of signing an MOU for the iGovTT to put out the advertisements for these two positions.

In addition, I had prepared to mention all of the progress that we are making in respect of work on many, many projects that are being done under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice, specifically with reference to the prisons. The work going on at the Maximum Security Prison, the work going on in respect of the improvement to the conditions within the prison putting in place better improved toilet facilities, the building of security fences that will accommodate greater areas for relaxation on the part of the prisoners, as well as speaking to the matter of improving the chances for the expansion of the prison industry. So all of these are going on as we speak. The issue of the vests. We are expecting those security vests to be delivered this month, October, and so on. So there is progress being made in all of these areas for which the Ministry of Justice has responsibility, and we look forward to even greater success in the coming year.

So in conclusion, Mr. President, as seen from initiatives and work accomplished by the Ministry of Justice that I had spoken to, the Ministry has already begun critical groundwork to create a transformed criminal justice system that will provide for the rehabilitation of offenders through effective management, enhanced infrastructural and systemic support to assist with criminal justice administration and facilitation for increased accessibility to judicial services and legislative reform that will support an updated and more effective delivery process of justice to all participants in the criminal system. These initiatives continue to receive the invaluable stakeholder input necessary for the implementation towards a modernized, effective and efficient criminal justice system.

In closing, I give the nation the assurance that with the support of the Parliament, my Cabinet colleagues and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Justice will continue to pursue and to give effect to its mandate, that is, to re-engineer the criminal justice system of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. President: Sen. Avinash Singh.

Sen. Avinash Singh: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Today I rise very privileged and honoured as this is my maiden budget contribution in this august Senate. I take pride in contributing to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2014. Firstly, I would really like to commend the process and procedures adopted by the other place which really allowed for the setting-up of a Standing Finance Committee. This move certainly exposed the grey areas of our budgetary allocations, and the process was very educational and informative to anyone looking on and following those conversations.

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Having sat here and listened to most of the speakers that went before, who would have thanked and praised their leader and Members of their Cabinet, I would also like to congratulate the measured and highly intellectual responses by Members of the Opposition to this budget thus far, [*Desk thumping*] particularly the Leader of the Opposition in the other place.

Mr. President, I begin my contribution with an old saying known to all of us: “Never hang your hat out of reach”, and I would try to use that as my underlying notion for my arguments as I proceed. This Government lived up to the minute expectations by the right-thinking citizens of this nation in their delivery of the 2015 budget, and my allotted time here today is not enough to really touch on all the aspects of this budget, but I will try my best to touch on a few.

The People’s Partnership administration has reached the end of the road. [*Desk thumping*] This People’s Partnership administration has a horrendous track record—call it what you want. You could decorate it all you want, it is filled with deficits after deficits and absolutely no hope of revenue generation to transform this sector, to transform our economy into a prosperous one. Increasing in our borrowings, putting it into savings could never be sustainable, and as we have examined the budgets preceding from 2011 to today, you can only see deficits after deficits. I will not go into the details as it has already been expounded by the other place, but I would like to note, if a company was operating at that capacity, generating losses after losses, I am sure that that company heading for bankruptcy would have to make drastic changes in order to stay in operation.

2.30 p.m.

So too, the right-thinking citizens in this country understand that it is the same concept in governing a nation. Therefore, the inability of the present administration to effectively and efficiently manage this economy of Trinidad and Tobago will certainly result in the landslide firing from top to bottom of those currently involved in the administration.

But let me be fair. The employers spoke in 2010 as they clearly indicated their dissatisfaction of the administration at that point in time. There is no doubt in my mind that the population has similar emotions and sentiments on the way this current People’s Partnership administration is running our affairs. Every single citizen is asking themselves, after TT \$290-plus billion in four years: how is their life better now? How are the opportunities better now? What is the economic and buying power now? How have they really benefited under the leadership of the hon. Member of Parliament for Siparia?

Mr. President, like those citizens, I too have those questions. Am I really better off now? Is the business atmosphere any better? This budget comes at a time when education and training is one of the most important pillars in developing our nation receiving the majority of our budgetary allocations of over TT \$10 billion annually. I am certain that the population now is more active, intelligent and very informed, and they know that it is time to move on and graduate from all the well-articulated, short-term programme opportunities to that of long-term sustainable employment opportunities.

If we are really true to succession planning as the hon. Members spoke before me alluded to, if we are really true to that, at all forms, we must not allow the business population, the companies or even state enterprises, to frown upon our young people, our young professionals, who would have completed different forms of On-the-Job Training and other similar programmes to be rejected with the reason that they may have the education in theory but they lack the experience. Mr. President, how else will you get the experience if you are not given the opportunity to take responsibility to prove to your elders that you have what it takes to effectively and efficiently perform a task or a duty. I feel very strongly that this Government has no policy, no vision and no fundamental principle for the young people in this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, much can be learned from past administrations where our past leaders had sound, fundamental principles on the future of where this nation was heading, and we can certainly see the benefits of those initiatives where individuals presently are successfully employed in the major oil and gas sectors, the banking sectors, sectors of various utilities and service providers, most of which had its birthplace through the PNM's policy and vision for a better nation.

I have paid particular attention to the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training in his passionate delivery today, and that delivery—I am always here to learn—so when an hon. Member speaks with such passion without probably a prepared speech, but talks from his heart, I take heed. But he mentioned in his contribution initiatives of where we as a nation have reached, what they inherited as a Government and what was there before. So let me just take this time and this opportunity, this window, to remind Members of this Senate from where we have come, where we are now and where we are heading. I would like to identify or remind the population, through you, Mr. President, of the achievements that this country has had to endure over the past 57 years to 59 years or so.

Mr. President, let us not forget: the Hire Purchase Act, the Recovery of Chaguaramas, Petrotrin, Audrey Jeffers Highway, Priority Bus Route, public transport authority, Unit Trust, national insurance, Claude Noel Highway, Caribbean Airlines formerly BWIA, Industrial Relations Act, now the Industrial Court, the National Academy for Performing Arts. So when you hear this Government come and rant and rail that the PNM, in its administrations, did nothing for Trinidad and Tobago or nothing for the people of this Republic, it is far from the truth.

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I can continue: Hyatt, even this lovely building we are in here, the waterfront project, monetization of the natural gas, Brian Lara Promenade, First Citizens Bank, TSTT, Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange, free transport for schoolchildren and senior citizens, cane farmers association, extension of the North Coast road from Maracas to Las Cuevas, Hall of Justice, Mount Hope Medical Science Complex, Point Lisas Industrial Estate, John D, UTT, UWI expansion, Industrial Development Corporation, now the TDA, national stadium, the Beetham Highway, relocation of the central market from Charlotte Street to Beetham Highway, the Integrity Commission—I can go on and on. I will just identify a few more that we are very familiar with: the media station, National Communication Network, now CNMG, and I can go on: NGC, NEC, lake asphalt, Pigeon Point Estate and so on.

So, Mr. President, when they talk and they claim that they deliver, I am here to understand if our population was eating grass prior to 2010; I am here to understand if none of this infrastructure and foundation placed by the authority prior to 2010 is appreciated. While I acknowledge the continuation of most of these programmes geared towards developing our young people, it is in my opinion that it is really time to include constructive innovation. Let us think long term and develop new opportunities for our local graduates. At least we would not have a brain drain problem as our GATE recipients, looking for better opportunities, seeking a better life, would have to venture into other countries and so on.

I am really stressing on this commitment because our population demographics indicated in the 2011 CSO census clearly show us that the most concentrated segment of our population lies in the age bracket of 20 years to 29 years, and 40.4 per cent of all unemployed people fall between these ages. It is at these ages, our young people are job hunting, seeking to settle down, trying to start a family and so on. After speaking to my peers, after speaking to those jobseekers and so on, I have realized that the situation in this country only grew worse under the People's Partnership Administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me identify why. Qualified persons seeking employment in many state sectors are bypassed and rejected because they did not know somebody or somebody did not know them. And within the last four years, this population was no stranger to the posts being filled by incompetent, unqualified persons known to their employers which have only frustrated the law-abiding jobseekers in this country.

Another serious problem I have includes the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum by the Ministry of Education since it seems as though many courses being offered by tertiary institutions have no job opportunities in our societal environment and one example I can personally relate to. After I graduated in 2011, again, some of my

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peers who did a Bachelors of Science who read for that degree—the degree was called the Agribusiness Management from Faculty of Science and Agriculture, UWI. It must be noted that most of these persons seeking employment, having been graduated and seeking employment from the agricultural sector—because this is an agriculture-based degree, Agribusiness Management—can you imagine in 2011/2012, their degree was not even recognized for employment in the state agricultural sector. I would hope that this has changed now because these citizens were forced to accept odd jobs or read for other degrees to be accepted in the society. So I really hope that the situation is a lot better now.

We all know of the many challenges many sectors have because of shortage of manpower, especially in the medical fraternity where specialized doctors for many areas are short or they do not exist here and we have to import those in. So this is just one area in which the educational structure needs attention in filling the gaps of that sector by giving the opportunity to those students.

Another area I can directly relate to is that of the agricultural sector. It seems as though this sector is degrading rapidly over time as either the professional farmers are simply retiring to other professional or profitable jobs, or the sector is simply not attracting persons with a passion to be educated in the said field of food production. The nation is thankful for most of the modernization, development and creation of educational institutions, because I believe in the direct investment of our nation's future. It must be noted that the educational structure is the most important tool for shaping a progressive, productive, disciplined law-abiding society, but taxpayers must be assured that they are getting value for money in the high successive investments year after year.

Mr. President, I have heard hon. Minister Karim speak in terms of the successes and the indices that are used to measure these, but it is my view that indices of such success should not only concentrate on the 65 per cent student participation rate but rather the conversion of that participation rate into meaningful high-quality results and a high productive output capacity by these individuals. As the saying goes, quality and not quantity.

Turning into the area of national security receiving an allocation of \$6.994 billion for fiscal 2015, we all ask ourselves: are we really safer now? Are we really comfortable to walk on the streets of our communities after 6.00 p.m.? With an unfortunate low detection rate in crime, I do not think any citizen feels comfortable or feels safe knowing that if a crime was to be committed to them or their loved ones, it is highly likely that nothing will come out of that once a report is made.

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When we turn to the daily news, I feel as though we want to compete with other countries in the Middle East and so on. Our sisters, mothers and daughters are being raped; citizens are being beheaded and crime has escalated to an expected order of the day. And why I say expected order of the day is because people simply do not even tune into the news in most cases. They prefer not to look because they are expecting the headlines to be crime, to be murder, and that is the norm—the unfortunate norm that this population has grown into. To turn on your television at 7.00 p.m. or thereafter, and always be bombarded with these headlines: another one, another son lost their life.

Mr. President, this country is just 5,127 square kilometres having a population density of 259 persons per square kilometre. Also, having a ratio of approximately one police officer to every 200 civilians as opposed to one MP serving 20,000-odd constituents. We are definitely in a bad state as compared to other nations. It appears that the criminal elements are getting a green light and a free pass to operate their illicit trade of contrabands which, in fact, is resulting in gang violence, other crimes and frequent murders.

I would also like to turn two minutes of my attention into the rogue elements or the rogue law enforcement officers. These people continue to degrade the criminal justice system and contribute to the tarnishing of this country's international reputation and affect the ease of doing business, and the general security of its people.

2.45 p.m.

Because, Mr. President, when law enforcement units beat their chests on major drug busts, the reality quickly proceeds that no arrests were made or no charges laid and we see this time and time again. An example still fresh in my mind is the famous refrigerated container packed with marijuana and chicken parts consigned to a central businessman, over \$30 million worth of contraband. Some may call it “ganja-seasoned chicken”. And up to this day we have heard nothing on it. Up to this day no arrests.

But, I would like to make a recommendation. Let me add to the law enforcement agencies. I am not from Canada but right here in Trinidad and Tobago and this advice I did not pay for. I simply logged on or tuned in to the National Geographic channel, as all my colleagues do, and looked at some of these documentaries. I would just name a few: *Drugs Incorporated*, that is one; *To Catch a Smuggler*; *Border Wars*, and so on.

In the case of the major drug bust in September 2011, at that Port of Point Lisas, let us say—let me use a hypothetical case—the law enforcement agencies had intelligence. They would have known they got all the evidence, and so on, and they knew about the contents of that container. Hypothetically, if they would have tagged that container, let us say implanted a GPS tracker or so, assigned an undercover team to monitor and evaluate the movement of the said goods and wait for the person or persons to take possession. What you really think would have happened had that scenario gone that hypothetical way? I leave hon. Senators to really use their imagination.

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Similarly, when major intelligence is gathered about arms and ammunition, narcotics and their locations, why does law enforcement always have to carry out raids and most times no one is caught, no one is charged? Information of that nature, where contraband is being sold to persons, again, hypothetically, law enforcement could set up undercover sting operations and proceed to be part of the transaction and then make arrests after a crime is blatantly committed.

Mr. President, another thing I have noticed from observation is when there are road blocks in our country, the only vehicles that do not get stopped are vehicles bearing flashing lights and sirens. So why are they not to be stopped? They should be checked too, [*Desk thumping*] seriously. Because if you have a police vehicle passing through a roadblock, hypothetically they could have been carrying drugs, narcotics, ammunition, whatever, you name it. These simple measures/steps can and will really go a long way and help our detection rate immensely. This country's socioeconomic structure is fast degrading. And when you hear the public speak—and this is important, when you really go out there and you hear the public speak—the underlying factor fuelling many ills in society is supported by the question about who knows you or who you know in the system.

Again, we were no strangers to the news recently. Can you imagine police files strangely disappearing from police records official storage? What about evidence in the form of cash or even narcotics mysteriously and magically disappearing from police stations or being eaten by rats? This may sound very funny, Mr. President, but sadly it has become the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. We need to get our acts together. We need to get our acts together if we are serious about proper national security. Mr. President, we have spent billions of dollars and we will continue to spend billions of dollars in fighting crime but the result will be the same as long as rogue elements are webbed throughout the system and structures. Corruption will continue to be rampant.

I am grateful. I am pleased to see the provision of a \$1 million grant that is made payable to the estate of a member of the State's protective services killed in the line of duty, because now we are seeing a revolution where criminal elements are boldface firing shots back at law enforcement officers and police stations and every gun taken off the streets reveals how up-to-date these criminal elements are, with technology and machinery way past what our law enforcement have.

While I am on national security, Mr. President, something came to my attention recently and I would like to share my few findings with hon. Senators, as these are just some of the reasons why we are here and we are not getting value for money.

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I would just like to refer, very shortly, to VMCOTT, a state enterprise. Recently a tender went out for security, as I am on security. Mr. President, strange enough—I will not go into all the details but I would just like to highlight it—companies were invited to tender and most reputable organizations, some not so reputable went into that tender and strange enough, a company established very, very recently was invited to tender as well and they were given this contract of \$2.1 million but strange enough, Amalgamated Security Services was also involved in this process and the comments coming out from the tender committee was that Amalgamated Services was insufficient in information and emergency plan. Is this the same Amalgamated Services that most of the state companies and subsidiaries use? In fact the prison service uses them to transport prisoners. But strange enough, SESL Maximum Security bid on the same project and they were given the contract, quarter of a million dollars more in its tender, but they got it. But the process that went through for that contract was so flawed, and in my opinion there was massive bid-rigging, in terms of that. Because when you go through this document, Mr. President, it raises the eyebrows of the PS in that Ministry. Because this PS questioned the integrity of the evaluation committee. Here you have an evaluation committee evaluating security and not one person on that committee is qualified to even talk about security. You have the procurement officer at VMCOTT. You have an operations manager at VMCOTT and no finance manager present, no technical persons to even evaluate what was the base used to issue that contract. And this is just one of many. I just identified that one seeing that it was on security. Then you have, Mr. President, other contracts being issued in other state agencies that are questionable, but I will raise those at a different time.

I would like to move now in another area. While this Government really did not disappoint in delivering an election budget, it has really set a dangerous precedent by adding fuel to this syndrome we call the “give meh syndrome” and while I will not fall in the trap to discredit all our citizens that stand to benefit from poverty-alleviating and assistance grants, I would like to deal with the principles involved in delivering what was promised.

It must be noted that the carrying capacity as of 2011, according to CSO, indicates 100 members of the working age population is carrying 42 dependents. Currently, we have a population of 1.3 million, or just thereabout, citizens, and currently 10 per cent of that entire population is dependent on the State in the form of pensions, disability and public assistance. The working class will now have to carry these proposed underprivileged parents, and I dare say they were not included in the discussions, especially on the arrangements of how this was supposed to be rolled out. Again, I have no problem of the \$500 for a child born, but I believe that this measure was not constructively reviewed and thought through and it is not sustainable.

Mr. President, worse yet, what will happen to those babies' parents after that 12-month period? I am no expert yet in the field but from my own observations at the groceries, I can well imagine the pain these underprivileged families have to endure to the ever-increasing prices of baby items, supplements and other necessities. So after that 12-month period, the requirement of a baby only keeps inflating and this will cause a problem when parents have been accustomed to getting a grant for a period now they have to automatically switch to fully support their young ones. Hence the reason why I fully endorse many of civil society's voices in this opinion requesting not a fish but requesting rather teaching them to fish.

Mr. President, having been able to witness first-hand experiences of true poverty in India where, according to UN, some 30 per cent, 400 million persons, live below the poverty line. I actually saw hope in the eyes of these persons as they struggled to be reintegrated into an acceptable standard back into society. They were willing to do any and every single thing possible to provide for themselves. Mr. President, I saw underprivileged girls and women busy behind sewing machines, hospitality and cooking programmes arranged by private, public and non-profit organizations.

Strange enough, it was heartfelt to see that the entire agricultural industry in India was populated by these underprivileged families working with basic tools. I felt sorry for them. I in turn questioned various Ministers in all the states that I visited in India, as to why was there not mechanization and modern technology being used to minimize the amount of labour or the amount of manual labour required in food production, and every single Minister gave me the same answer: they can, but then what will happen to the 400 million people whose lives depend on any form of meaningful labour opportunities? Mr. President, we must not abuse our resources or even encourage only hand-outs and grants. We are a blessed people and a blessed nation and, therefore, let us try to add to the foundation our forefathers have set for us.

Mr. President, studying environmental and natural resource management at UWI I truly gained the experience. I truly understand the terminology "sustainability" and we must all understand that we are only here for a time, some short, some long. So let us, in our policies, principles and actions, make decisions that future generations can really benefit from.

While we are here encouraging and advocating a productive society, it must be noted that hundreds of thousands of work hours are lost every single day, due to the serious traffic congestions throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and in fact I

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dare say that we are very close to having an epidemic shutdown, where as you drive out your driveway you will be bombarded by stagnant traffic waiting on you. Complete deadlock.

Sen. Hadeed: Dreadlock?

Sen. A. Singh: Deadlock.

Hon. Senator: Gridlock.

Sen. A. Singh: Mr. President, currently the nation's roadways are clustered with over 600,000 vehicles with additions every single week and anybody—I challenge anybody here—anyone driving or travelling can certainly testify to the frustration of having to move from point A to point B.

Mr. President, all is not lost, because developed countries have invested in mass transit systems that are very effective and I am sure many hon. Senators, even members of the public, are fortunate or have had the ability to use the train in the United States, as well as the United Kingdom and they know how easy and comfortable it is to move around. So, through that, brighter days are ahead under the new People's Partnership administration in the future.

Hon. Senators: Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Singh: Another concern I have—[*Interruption*—the People's National Movement. You did not let me finish my statement. Clearly, everyone is paying attention, clearly. So, Mr. President, now that I have gained the attention of all the Senators who were sleeping opposite, I will continue and I would really say that brighter days are ahead under the new People's National Movement administration.

Mr. President, another concern I have where the construction of roads and bridges is concerned, is in the planning feasibility and overall implementation of construction and a mass evaluation of all our roadways and crossroads should emphasize on what it is we as a nation need at this point in time, with the growing capacity of wear and tear and the usage of those roads and access roads.

The hon. Minister and Senator referred to Balmain Bridge, but let me also add, while it may sound nice and the people are very grateful, it has cost \$28.3 million and it took over two years to deliver. Yes, you claim that you deliver, but if that is the pace to build one bridge, Mr. President, at \$28 million for one bridge, then certainly we are in a very bad state.

Too many times in our nation you see bridges constantly having to be redesigned and altered to accommodate the widening of access roads and likewise the coordination of road paving and utilities can never seem to coincide with each other, and millions of taxpayers' dollars are wasted when newly-paved roads have to be excavated and

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subsequently re-paved. Roads that did not need to be milled—and currently this is the current trend, election is around the corner. Mr. President, you are seeing good roads, you are seeing roads being milled all over this country that do not need milling but, then again opportunity for contracts, and so on. But what this is really doing is it is putting the taxpayers under stress.

Milling roads, the cost of that—a simple observation, in the United States that has long—term benefits is in their construction of major roads, highways and byways. They implement the use of concrete as the base or the foundation of those roads so that every election time or every year the roads do not have to be re-paved and re-paved and re-paved. We can save dollars there, Mr. President.

Turning my attention now to the agricultural sector. I would like to categorically express my disappointment in the Government's claim to a successful sector by using Caroni Green Limited as a model for success, because this initiative was doomed to fail from even the first day of its existence. The misleading information that indicates the cultivation of 360 acres on two-acre plots leased from former employees of Caroni producing some 290 metric tonnes—that is 639,341 pounds of food within the last six months—is but a dream that never materialized.

Mr. President, Caroni Green. For those Senators here, I would like to just show you what Caroni Green looked like. And with your permission, Mr. President, Caroni Green started off, and this period of time that the hon. Minister indicated in his budget presentation, this is what Caroni Green looked like for the past five or six months. [*Sen. A. Singh displays photos*] This is what Caroni Green has developed into now, nothing. It is simply bush. This is Caroni Green. You will now see roads being developed. You will see grass. You will see the drains now being cleaned. This is what we the taxpayers have spent millions of dollars in. And for the hon. Minister to use that as the success story of the agricultural sector, I am definitely disappointed.

Mr. President, let me take a few moments of my time to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. President: Just indicating that you have five more minutes.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you, Mr. President. Caroni Green Initiative was supposed to be an alternative. It is supposed to give hope to farmers and it did not do that. I have personally interacted and communicated with most of the farmers involved in producing and providing their services on the said programme, and I dare say that they are all disgusted by the operations and treatment they received by the management of that project. Most of these farmers, they had hope of

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producing good quality food and leaving the project with a profit but even that was a dream that never materialized. Many of these farmers lost their investments, lost their livelihoods and many of them gave me full permission to raise every single issue of their cases so that money, up to this present day, that is being owed to them can be paid to all of them, because like all of us here, they all have loans to pay, they have bills to pay, families to support, and so on, and I am simply directing this issue to the hon. Minister of Food Production to intervene and offer his assistance as he has willingly done in the past, in treating with similar cases.

But more than that, I would like to go into details of probably one or two of the contracts that were issued, just for the population to have an appreciation as to what took place and what is taking place. Contracts were given out. I have a few of the contracts here, of Caroni Green, and farmers were called in a profit-sharing venture where the State would provide the facility, the infrastructure, the various costs of inputs for those farmers to produce. But after I had gone through some of these contracts, it is clear that some of the farmers ventured into planting crops with no contracts. So in turn, I have receipts from some of the farmers here, selling produce which was officially breach of contract from day one because Caroni Green is supposed to get the markets for these people. Caroni Green is supposed to facilitate the sale of this produce and in turn give back to the farmers their profit-sharing ratio.

But one particular farmer had a field of pawpaw and strange enough, he sold these pawpaws. With your permission I would like to show you the state of the pawpaw. When he sold it to Caroni Green, this was the pawpaw, for hon. Senators. [*Sen. A. Singh displays photos*] This was the pawpaw. And if you watch the picture below here, that is the same pawpaw. In one picture, the farmer was very, very knowledgeable. In fact, he took his pictures and dated them and all these sort of things. He took the picture of the pawpaw when he picked it and it was green. It was full. It was in the stages of being sold. But Caroni Green could not sell these pawpaws, because they had no markets. None! Absolutely none! And they left that pawpaws there to rot and after weeks of rotting those same pawpaws, they came and they gave that farmer a protocol letter indicating that he has breached his contract and he is not taking care of his produce. That is the level of disrespect that this agency had for those farmers.

I would just like to read into the record the letter that they sent him, to one Mr. Sunil Dookan. It says:

Please be advised that approximately 75 per cent of the pawpaw supplied to Caroni Green has been of poor quality. Until this matter is resolved you are hereby requested to cease harvesting of the pawpaw.

Furthermore you are requested to attend a meeting, and so on.

Mr. President, this issue is just but one of many that took place under the Caroni Green and I have official receipts that the farmer, Mr. Dookan, sold the produce, because the initiative included a profit-sharing ratio.

Sen. Maharaj: Mr. President, I am advised that matter is before the court right now.

Sen. Al-Rawi: What is the Standing Order?

Sen. Maharaj: Standing Order 35(2).

Mr. President: If the matter—and I take the Senator's word, as I am required to do, that the matter is sub judice. But if it is, then you would not be able to go in Senator, into the details of the matter, other than having referenced it as you have.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you, Mr. President. I am guided. But the point I was trying to make, not going into the details, is that farmers of the programme were selling produce because they had intention of getting a profit, and in terms of selling the produce, they were giving cash to members of staff of the Caroni Green with receipts and these receipts had nowhere, no indication of a Caroni Green stamp, no letterhead. So one were to assume that these moneys, having been paid to individuals representing Caroni Green, if it really went into Caroni Green's accounts, Mr. President.

Caroni Green, for the few produce and—the Minister indicated 290 tonnes, I would really like to see proof. I would like to see evidence where that amount of food you are talking about really went into the system, really went into helping us reduce our food import bill and where it was sold. Who benefited? Because that is a lot of food you are talking about; 290 tonnes of food is a lot.

Mr. President, moving on. After this Government condemned the PNM's proposal of mega farm initiatives, they have now accepted the same concept and principles, via the commercial large farm. One year ago, the Government signed an MOU with the Government of the Republic of Guyana, and now we have been told that responses are being evaluated. So if they are taking one year to just evaluate responses, what is the hope in that project?

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Mr. President, as I indicated earlier, Trinidad and Tobago is one of the most blessed nations on Planet Earth and let me say why. I am saying this on the backdrop of agricultural commodities produced here in Trinidad and Tobago. Because some of our commodities, for those of you all who may not know, have attained world recognition—[*Interruption*]

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

Motion made: That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you hon. Leader of Business in the Senate. Thank you, hon. colleagues. Mr. President, I was on the point that we here in Trinidad produce goods of a certain quality and a certain standard. And let me give you some examples. As the hon. Minister of Food Production would well be aware, for years now in Trinidad and Tobago, the Moruga Scorpion Pepper ranked the world's hottest pepper with a mean of more than 1.2 million Scoville heat units but only a few months ago it went down to the order to second place in the world.

Similarly, there is a high demand for Trinidad-grown passion fruit worldwide since passion fruit pulp produced right here is one of the world's best used in the flavouring for the lower quality grown fruits elsewhere in the juice industry. And I really do not need to elaborate on our award winning top fine or flavour cocoa varieties grown right here in Trinidad and Tobago used in flavouring many of the world's best and most expensive chocolates and not forgetting Trinidad-produced honey that has continuously placed first in various categories in the past.

Mr. President, all these commodities I have outlined is as a direct result of our soil type, our soil texture, porosity and acidity, topography, sunlight intensity, environmental conditions, availability of clean water, and so on. So, I do not see the need to move to Guyana to produce agricultural commodities because I have every confidence and faith in locally-produced food by our local farmers. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, simply create the opportunity, give them the infrastructure and they will produce.

The cocoa industry has declined to a point of challenging resuscitation but I dare say revival is not impossible, with the right management and proposals geared towards giving the farmers hope in the industry.

And while I am on the cocoa and coffee industry, as you all know, the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board would have been disbanded and on behalf of all the cocoa farmers I would like to really ask for an update, because I know the hon. Minister, when he is responding, he could respond to this too. I would like an update on the new arrangements on the operations of the cocoa company and how the transformation has accommodated the existing cocoa farmers.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. President, I have heard about a land-use policy by hon. Minister Tewarie, but we seriously need to prioritize the land for housing, commercial, industrial, recreational and agricultural use. This is long overdue and needs to be urgently, urgently done so that situations like the bulldozing of Egypt Trace farmers do not reoccur.

Let me also identify what that cost the State because a lot of people will just hear bulldozing and so on, but it cost the State. I have in my possession that incident when it took place; 12 farmers were involved in that bulldozing—16 plots, 41 acres. Can you imagine that that bulldozing cost us, the taxpayers, \$1.2 million, plus relocation? So, it is not just about moving farmers and so on, it is about cost-benefit analysis and land prioritization.

So, I am urging the hon. Minister of Food Production, and relevant Ministries—through you, Mr. President—to give particular consideration to the Felicity Food Crop Project which they have spent millions of dollars on to bring that project to where it is—a bearing stage—and producing millions of pounds of food per annum.

Mr. President, if I were to use the base of the Egypt Trace bulldozing, as opposed to using the Felicity issue, we have over 500 acres and over 210 farming families involved in the Felicity Food Crop Project. If we were to bulldoze them—I would just leave it to hon. Senators' imagination as to how much it is going to cost the State in terms of bulldozing all those food crop commodities; all those lands, and relocation.

Mr. President, most of the farming population in Trinidad and Tobago have no problem producing food, but the cost of inputs continues to be the major driving factor for the challenges in the sector and labour is one of the most important and top priorities since it seems as though Trinbagonians seem to dislike turning to skilled or unskilled duties in the agricultural sector.

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The Agriculture Now programme is supposed to be structured to guide young people in the field, but it has really failed to deliver at the level of manual skilled and unskilled labour, required by these farmers. While this Government continues to disrespect the agricultural sector, the population should know that the farmers are being stifled at this point in time where expansion in their operations are concerned.

Mr. President, I would like to turn to the Agricultural Incentive Programme because now, under the 2015 budget, there is a forecast that \$11 million is cut from that incentive programme. What this means is that now, although in 2011 the overall incentive package was revised with the intervention by then Minister of Food Production, hon. Vasant Bharath, when he had a conversation with us, the farmers. We revised this package, and most of the caps in this investment programme for the various elements of the subsidies were increased.

I would just give you one example so you would get an idea. Prior to 2011 someone purchasing a new wheel tractor had a \$25,000 cap in which he would have applied and got the subsidy rebate. Now, we have moved from \$25,000 to \$50,000. So, unlike those figures throughout the entire package, most of the incentive programme packages have been increased. So, what that in turn really means is that the allocation is supposed to be raised to accommodate that. It is only obvious.

So, Mr. President, farmers will now have to encounter problems in the amount of capital investments they are making at this time. I will just give you one example from my own personal relations. I purchased a capital investment over two years ago and that investment should take three years to bear fruit in terms of the reimbursement. Twelve months have passed already and I am yet to be paid on the second tranche of that contribution. Now, the third application is due, but I have not been paid the second one. There is a backlog in the system.

I would like to turn to NAMDEVCO: NAMDEVCO's mandate is to create, facilitate and maintain an environment conducive to the efficient marketing of agricultural produce and food products through the provision of marketing services and the stimulation of business investments in the agro industrial sector.

Mr. President, NAMDEVCO, in my opinion, is not delivering value for money to the farming population since there are no new real substantive market opportunities and this is the next major challenge for us the farming population.

Mr. President, NAMDEVCO continues to be incompetent and commodities have no stabilization in price. So, you can go to the market today and get tomatoes for \$2.00 a pound and go back tomorrow and get the same tomatoes for \$20.00 a pound. No stabilization in price. In my mind, NAMDEVCO should have been in a position to act as

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the marketing agent for all local farmers at a fixed contracted price, outsource markets for fresh produce and process or package these produce to distribute to the buyers. This agency could have been the mega food operation of this country and, in turn be self-sustainable and very profitable.

Mr. President, \$47 million in allocation to NAMDEVCO for fiscal 2015 and I am seeing no value for money in their past actions and, in fact, when one looks at the allocation of food production, it is a slap in the face of every single farmer. Where you dig deep into the allocations you will really realize that after you pay recurrent expenditure and transfers to state subsidies and boards and so on, there is really nothing left for innovation by the Ministry.

A full-scale evaluation needs to be done in the cost-benefit analysis where taxpayers dollars are going and how these agencies receiving state, subvention under the Ministry of Food Production, impacts on the farming population.

Mr. President, how this farming population is really benefiting from the billions of dollars, we are yet to know. While I would like to touch on all the aspects of agriculture, time is of the limit, but I would also like to raise another important matter in terms of agriculture. Research and education on agriculture is very important. Right now we have a situation where the genetic pool and the genetic resources are exhausted. We need to have genetic material in order to get our yields back on track to raise our outputs in food and, in turn, help reduce the food import bill. I would like the Minister to also address where research is concerned.

Mr. President, I know I have like two minutes to wrap up, so let me do so now.

Mr. President: Three.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Touching slightly on the health sector, I am one of those that always—*[Interruption]* Well, this is the part. I am one of those who always turns to the public health care system before I even consider a private institution. Whilst I have been fortunate to be treated good—I must say I was treated good on every single occasion, whether it is the Chaguanas Health Centre, Mount Hope or Port of Spain—*[Desk thumping]*—my heart still pains to see this day and age when citizens have to sit on benches and chairs for hours—*[Interruption]* sometimes days before they can be accommodated in beds.

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When a country has this wealth, we have this unsatisfactory service, it is unacceptable. I have a very weak heart for those senior citizens and young couples—

Sen. Ramlogan SC: I would recommend you to a specialist.

Sen. A. Singh: —that turn to the public health system. Mr. President, the simple needs of our population should be met and, therefore, people will have that sense of participation and inclusion whenever a budget is read. Of course, most of our population contribute via taxes and they want to know that their resources are being sustainably managed and not squandered by an administration with a blurred vision and no plan for revenue generation as we have seen over the past four years. Handouts, grants and assistance cannot continue to be the main topic of our budgets, but the economy must be stimulated to ensure that citizens regain hope and patriotism that they are the true owners of this country and its resources and will work hard to defend the integrity and continuance for a sustainable tomorrow.

Mr. President, it has been a pleasure commenting and have my recommendations heard on the 2015 budget.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Vieira.

Sen. Anthony Vieira: Thank you, Mr. President, thank you. Mr. President, let me say, straight off the bat, that there is much in this budget that resonates with me. I particularly like the theme of the budget, “Empowering Our People Through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity” and the concept of people-centred development.

At this stage of the budget cycle, we are just debating the budget plan as formulated by the Government and it remains to be seen how the proposed allocations will be spent, monitored and controlled and whether there will be effective auditing and oversight, but at this juncture—in terms of the indicated policies, commitments and goals—I would like to believe we are heading in the right direction. [*Desk thumping*] At least from a social and philosophical point of view, and in the context of overall national development as was so aptly articulated by Sen. Tewarie yesterday. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, if the goal is to make the economy more inclusive and to improve living standards amongst all citizens by ensuring an equitable distribution for wealth, then I am all for it. A thriving middle class must be the

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goal. Indeed, one of my dreams for Trinidad and Tobago is to see the broadest widening of the middle class, whilst conversely a shrinking of the super-rich and the poor and impoverished.

A couple weeks ago I attended a surprise birthday party for someone in his early 30s. That was a gathering of mainly young people in their late 20s, early 30s. I could not help but be impressed by what I saw: a mixing of the races, interracial couples where people genuinely enjoyed liming with each other; all well-educated, beautiful, articulate, interesting, solid middle class Trinbagonians having a good time and at the same time making their way in the world. I thought to myself that if this was typical of life in Trinidad and Tobago, then that would be something of which we can be justly proud. [*Desk thumping*]

At the end of the day, proper use of the country's resources must be about developing our citizens into becoming active participants and productive members of the society. So, if the proposed allocations can help move us towards nation building, and becoming a more inclusive and caring society, if it is going to move us towards a fairer distribution of the country's wealth and resources and towards economic benefit and improvement for the majority rather than for the few, then I am all for it.

Now, in trying to get a bearing on the budget, which is, in effect, Government's most important economic policy tool, I thought it useful to look at the budgets of some other countries. So, I got Barbados, Jamaica, Singapore and a few others.

In his 2013 financial statement and budgetary proposals, the Barbadian Minister of Finance took pains to point out how the global economic downturn was negatively impacting their economy, an economy he described as sorely lacking sustainable economic diversification and badly in need of restructuring, where confidence continued to decline because of the persistently high budget deficits of the Government, unsustainable debt levels and sluggish growth.

For the average Barbadian, the budget usually portends an increase in taxation and calls for national fortitude with a view to stabilizing the economy.

The Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller's 2013-2014 budget presentation can only be described as a brave attempt to uplift the spirit of Jamaicans in a period of continuing fiscal constraints and where the country has even less resources to work with than it had last year.

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In Jamaica, the measures to be implemented under their budget will make life difficult for many. Taxes have increased and their public servants and trade unions are being thanked for having made tremendous sacrifices.

So when one looks at our budget, one cannot help but reflect how blessed we are. [*Desk thumping*] How fortunate we are to be living in this beautiful twin-island Republic, particularly when compared to what obtains in so many other parts of the world. We should not take for granted the fact that there are no new taxes and no austerity measures in this budget. [*Desk thumping*] We should not take for granted our abundant natural resources, our unique, vibrant and happy culture, and the creativity and the beauty of our people. And yet, mindful of these blessings and all that we have, it is bemusing to consider why there are so many still without. How it is that we can still have citizens living in shacks and hovels, and whether the quality of life for the average Trinidadian is getting better or worse?

We all want to see a better Trinidad and Tobago. As such, we have a shared responsibility in helping the Government prioritize the country's needs, to point out where improvement is needed, and to ensure that proper steps and systems are in place, to ensure that the appropriated sums are managed well— that is to say, through effective, independent oversight. Mr. President, having all these blessings and not using them to full advantage, is not only irresponsible and wasteful, it would be positively sinful. A better quality of life for the average Trinidadian must be the goal.

Now, in this regard, I thought it useful to compare the Singaporean budget with ours. For a country with few, if any, natural resources, their budget for 2013 is expected to record an overall surplus of \$3.9 billion. That is higher than the surplus of the \$2.4 billion they budgeted the year previously. The Singaporean economy grew by 4.1 per cent in 2013, up from 1.9 per cent a year earlier, and is expected to grow between 2 per cent and 4 per cent in 2014. While their labour market also remains close to full employment, their wages continue to rise. Indeed, the wages of the median Singaporean worker increased by about 5 per cent in real terms in 2013. Wages also grew for many low income workers, with those at the 20 percentile on the income ladder seeing real wages go up by around 7 per cent.

One of the most striking features of the Singaporean budget is how seriously they take the challenges faced by their lower paid workers, and the commitment given to helping them through both economic and social strategies. This year's Singaporean budget also purports to be people centred. Among other things, it declares that they are aiming to build a fair and equitable society with stronger support for those who start off with less, and where everyone will have a real chance to pursue their aspirations and earn their own success.

The Singaporean budget declares that they too are aiming at strengthening social safety nets and mitigating against inequality. In particular, as their population ages, they are seeking to make quality health care affordable, and they are strengthening community networks to help their elderly, called “the pioneer generation”, enjoy active and fulfilling lives. Care for their elderly is one of the top features of their budget.

Singapore is aiming to transform its economy by creating higher value industries, and quality jobs for its citizens. They are investing in new manufacturing capabilities, making use of advanced robotics, new sensor technologies and networks with Internet-enabled devices. While Singaporeans are often hailed as a progressive and disciplined people, they have traditionally tended to score low on the happiness scale. Perhaps with a view to improvement in that regard, it is interesting to observe that one of the key budget themes this year in Singapore is, transformation of their society.

In this regard, they have declared that transforming the economy is not just about technology, and productivity is not ultimately about the dollars and cents of upgrading. It also means changing their social norms, creating a workplace where employees’ views and contributions are valued, up and down the chain, and creating—I found this very interesting—a culture of mastery on the job. According to their budget, they say, as individuals or companies, and as a society, we have to take pride in developing expertise and flair in every vocation, seeing not just competence, but excellence throughout people’s working lives. Employers have to support this too; doing the job well is what counts, not long hours on the job.

In terms of innovation and skill supports, there are tax incentives geared towards encouraging private research and development, and cost allowances for the acquisition of intellectual property rights. The Singaporean Government has committed to support 80 per cent of the qualifying cost for firms that are implementing solutions that are new to Singapore. But what impresses me most about the Singaporean budget is its commitment towards achieving a fair and equitable society, including enhanced retirement adequacy and health care affordability for all Singaporeans, not just a favoured few.

If Singapore can commit towards the transformation of its economy and society, with a view to improving living standards amongst all its citizens, then why should we not? In the main, therefore, I think our budget reads just as well as Singapore’s, and I am confident that we are holding our own. [*Desk thumping*]

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As I mentioned earlier, I like the theme of this budget and there are a number of goals I would personally like to see realized, including ensuring that the economy returns to more inclusive, fair and equitable growth; ensuring stability to the financial system; establishing the right framework for the agricultural sector; making more intelligent use of our financial, human and other resources; modernizing the country with a view to creating a dynamic knowledge-based society; improving the delivery of the social safety-net services as we move to protect the most vulnerable in our society; and the rehabilitation of our watersheds and restoration of our forest cover through enrichment planting. These are all worthwhile goals entirely consistent with the functions of Government and worthy of support.

However, the budget debate also provides an opportunity to check the pulse of the nation, in terms of ascertaining overall health. Notwithstanding Government's good intentions, I am not so sure that the country is in as healthy a condition as it could or should be.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy declared in his budget statement on September 08, that as a nation we are better off today than four years ago. While that may be so from a GDP point of view, I believe it is questionable whether the average citizen feels happier and more secure today than he did previously. Certainly at an emotional level, it seems to me that our collective spirit has dampened. There is an air of anxiety and apprehension. Many people seem uneasy, angry and fearful; others complain of feeling dulled and disempowered.

Now, Robert Kennedy spoke about the fundamental shortcomings of gross national product as a measure of well-being in a speech he gave at the University of Kansas on March 18, 1968. His words are even more apt today and if you would allow me the liberty of paraphrasing him. I am using his words:

“Even if we act to erase material poverty and restructure the economy, there is another greater task, which is to confront the poverty of satisfaction, purpose and dignity that afflicts us all.”

Too much and for too long we seem to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Even though our growth momentum is expected to be maintained, and the balance of payments is projected to continue to generate surpluses and increasing levels of reserves, such does not allow for the air pollution caused by the amount of vehicles on the road, the burnings at the Beetham dump, the many bushfires, the deadly mix of toxic chemicals which were released into the atmosphere, because of a leak at Petrotrin earlier this year. It does not count for the loss of fish stock and damage to our beleaguered Gulf of Paria, and our ecosystem, because of the disastrous Petrotrin oil spills in December last year and July this year.

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I was always taught that if you make a mess, you should clean it up, and resolve to do your best not for it to happen again. When negative externalities are not paid for, the beneficiaries are ripping off those who ultimately bear the cost of their negligence and behaviour. So I say, shame on Petrotrin because in the end, it is society which is paying the cost for their environmental disasters.

It does not count for the locks on our doors, the burglar bars in our homes, and the jails for the people who break them. It does not count for the widespread mistrust of the police and law enforcement, or for those communities who feel that they are being victimized. It does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the lessened joy of their play, because of the amount of time spent in traffic jams and the loss of green spaces in our communities. It does not include the value of our culture which, as the Tibetan philosopher, Sakyong Mipham describes:

“Is the invisible network that allows us to understand and develop meaning; which allows us to transmit values, ethics and ideas through communal osmosis, and which has the potential to shift our future by enabling us to rise to our most creative and best selves.”

These are some of the externalities that cannot be ignored. In the final analysis and as Robert Kennedy concluded, GDP measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. In short, it measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile—*[Interruption]* and it can tell us everything about Trinidad and Tobago, except why we are proud to be citizens of this country.

“Accordingly, it is not sufficient to judge Trinidad and Tobago’s progress in terms of GDP or by focusing simply on economic growth. Indeed, the happiest places in the world are not necessarily wealthy.”

So I have no problem with the budget, insofar as it seeks to restructure the economy, whilst at the same time seeking to create a habitat for citizens to live happier, healthier lives, the conditions for well-being to occur and what I would regard as true progress.

Education: I have no problem with education getting the largest allocation. The purpose of investing in education is to cultivate citizens. It is one of the best routes towards reducing the level of crime, *[Desk thumping]* and it is the key determinant for economic growth. Education is the best investment we can make in national growth and national security. Education is the number one strategy in Singapore’s economic plan, and it should be ours as well. *[Desk thumping]* Education is a necessity for a middle-class standard of living.

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However, beyond the dollars and cents allocated towards education, we need to do as much as we can in attracting, developing and keeping the best teachers and school administrators. As it stands, we do very little to measure, develop and reward our good teachers. And yet, the quality of our education system can only be as good as the quality of its teachers. So we need to raise the status of the teaching profession and to support the research and development which is essential for teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

I believe there may be need for a national dialogue involving the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, TTUTA, the National PTA, and other stakeholders as to how we might best be able to weed out unsatisfactory and delinquent teachers, whilst at the same time encouraging and better rewarding those who are excellent.

Infrastructure: besides investing in education, we must also invest in infrastructure and keep our already existing plants in good order and repair. When buildings and offices are closed down because they fall below OSHA standards, or are otherwise not properly maintained, it suggests gaps in the system which need to be addressed. I will not belabour the point because Sen. Mahabir already said all that I wanted to say on it—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: And say it again. Say it again, man.

Sen. A. Vieira:—but, allowing our buildings and work places to fall into a state of disrepair bespeaks a lack of pride and an unacceptable level of complacency and wastage. [*Desk thumping*]

3.45 p.m.

Mass transit: the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke of his desire to provide an efficient, reliable and affordable transportation system for our citizens. Well, this is a precondition for modernization. The economist Andre Gunder Frank has debunked the theory that Third World people are underdeveloped because they are stupid, poor or lazy. He has shown that underdevelopment arises as a result of uneven or a lack of adequate infrastructure. The countries ranking at the top in overall global competitiveness also rank at the top in the extensiveness and quality of their roads, railways, ports and air transport, whilst those at the bottom also have among the poorest transportation infrastructures in the world. So I very much support the idea of mass transit.

In fact, when the UNC was in government, I made a pitch to Jearlean John—she was the then Minister of Transport—to consider implementation of a rapid rail or light rail system, an electric tram system, in and around Port of Spain and water-based transport

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systems. To the extent that these previously existed in Trinidad, it was not a new idea. I felt then and I feel now that a rapid rail system would be easy to implement since we can build on the footprints of the previous train tracks.

The benefits of a proper mass transit system will improve the efficiency of transport, a decreased use of motor cars in densely populated areas, less noise and air pollution, people not having to wait in the rain and hot sun for transport, a considerable ease in the parking problem. I believe that investing in infrastructural development will reap enormous rewards across the board.

Money for the Judiciary: in his address at the opening of this year's law term, the hon. Chief Justice made a strong plea for the Judiciary to have its own allocation, from the annual budget, over which it is allowed to exercise full control. He also called for an increase in the Judiciary's allocation or even perhaps for a percentage share of the budget. I would respectfully urge Government to heed the plea of the hon. Chief Justice as doing so will deepen the separation of powers and strengthen the rule of law.

Mr. President, it may not be readily appreciated that the legal system is crucial for our economic growth and stability, or that the Judiciary is intrinsically intertwined with economic, social and political development. It may not be readily appreciated that the autonomy of our courts and the rule of law is a key part of our development process and our development as a country. The rule of law enshrines the greatest values society can aspire to—justice, democracy and freedom—and must never be compromised. The rule of law and the independence of our judges is, therefore, not a means to an end, but is an end in its own right.

The Chief Justice has highlighted a weakness with regard to the rule of law when he referred to the potential risk of the Judiciary's expenditures being trimmed at the discretion of the Executive and without careful consideration of the Judiciary's internal policies.

Now, I accept that this is not the fault of the current administration. It was an inherent flaw in the system we inherited, but if we accept that the justice sector is a critical part of the larger political context, if we accept that the justice sector constitutes an important means for the realization of our society's ideals in the organization of government power, relations of production and social order, and if we accept that the rule of law is not just about judges, magistrates and lawyers, but is an intrinsic part of our freedoms and capabilities as a people, then the budget should reflect a holistic appreciation of the importance of the separation of powers doctrine.

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Pandemics and infectious diseases: there is no mention of Ebola in the budget but, as a student of history, I cannot help but be mindful of the catastrophic effects pandemics have had on societies throughout the ages: the Bubonic Plague or Black Death throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, Spanish Influenza after World War I, which killed more people than those who actually died in the war, cholera and tuberculosis which have from time even plagued the Caribbean. We saw SARS, Bird Flu, Swine Flu and now we have Chikungunya, and just look at how swiftly Chikungunya has swept through the Caribbean in less than a year.

At this juncture, Ebola is running out of control in West Africa. Thousands have died and the disease is still spreading. UNICEF has warned about the need to confront and contain the growing crisis. Among other things, UNICEF has drawn attention to the thousands of orphan children in its wake—children living through the deaths of their mothers, fathers and family members from Ebola, yet many of whom are being left abandoned.

Ebola has turned a basic human reaction, like comforting a sick child, into a potential death sentence. The vast majority of children affected by Ebola are being left without appropriate care. UNICEF warns that the world cannot respond to a crisis of this nature and this scale in the usual way. It says we need more courage, more creativity and far, far more resources.

So, Mr. President, through you, I would like to warn also that the Ebola outbreak should not be a black swan event for Trinidad and Tobago. We need to marshal our resources against this potential hazard. Failing to properly do so may have a negative, perhaps even disastrous effect and it can undo and set us back of all the gains that we have fought so hard to achieve.

I, therefore, urge Government to allocate funds towards strengthening the public health sector by training medical personnel so that they have the skills needed to heal Ebola patients while safeguarding both themselves and the public; providing responders, caregivers and those who man our borders with protective equipment and decontaminate gear needed to protect everybody from contracting the disease; setting up appropriate waste and disposal systems to deal with Ebola-infected clothing and Ebola-infected bedcloths; and ensuring that there is the necessary legal authority in place to quarantine those who have been exposed.

Mr. President, Ebola is a lethal disease which needs to be taken seriously. If we wait for it to get here before investing in the proper equipment, facilities and training, we may be allowing ourselves to be exposed to an unpredictable, but avoidable, set of losses.

Social safety nets: in principle, I am in favour of the proposed social safety net programmes. A civilized society cares for its people, especially the poor and the less fortunate, but social programmes should be cast as a means towards developing and enabling recipients. As far as is practicable, they should avoid making the recipients dependent on the State. Social safety programmes should also be reviewed periodically and be goal oriented. One disparity, which I think needs attending to, relates to the possibility that persons who may have never worked a day in their lives can now be getting more money than NIS contributors of many years. I think there needs to be some adjustment here for the NIS contributors.

Moneys spent on national security: I was going to speak out against the acquisition of the 52 armoured vehicles, particularly when I saw them largely displayed on the papers. But after seeing police stations and law enforcement officers being shot at and put under siege and realizing now that there are Trinidadian Jihadists fighting alongside Islamic terrorists abroad, now I am not so sure. I was going to suggest that instead of spending millions on armoured vehicles, the money might have been better spent on strengthening the DPP's Department, enhancing community policing, increasing the Judiciary's budget, but now I am not so sure.

So for the time being I am going to give Government the benefit of the doubt. We all want to support the police by giving them the necessary equipment to keep them safe when doing their jobs, but such equipment must be used as shields, not swords. The powers that be must resolve that the might of the State must never be arrayed against law-abiding citizens; in particular those who may be engaged in peaceful demonstrations and protests.

The powers that be must take care not to treat civic activists and non-violent protestors as terrorists or criminals. We measure our democracy by the freedom we give to our dissidents, not by the freedom we give to our conformists. The idea behind giving police better equipment is to serve and protect all citizens, not to silence dissenters and not to transform our democracy into a police state.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I am not an economist and not being an economist, I am unable to say whether the budget is grounded in sound economic theory and policy. I guess time will tell whether the measures proposed will lead to a more sustainable economy. But from where I stand, it seems that there are many positives in this budget. While challenges remain and whilst there is always room for improvement, I very much appreciate the fact that it is gentle and generous to the average citizen. [*Desk thumping*]

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Also, by placing people at the centre and by attempting to focus on the true nature of development and progress, I find it insightful and forward looking. Accordingly, the Government and, in particular, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, are to be commended.

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

The Minister of Food Production (Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity to contribute to this year's budget debate. I must begin, no doubt, by congratulating the hon. Sen. Larry Howai for what has to be considered, in the words of Sen. Vieira, who proceeded me, a budget to be envied, a budget that has to be viewed in no short measure—that is, people and not project focused.

In the past, we were regaled with megaprojects, under the last PNM administration. However, we have seen, under this People's Partnership administration, a refocusing back on the citizenry today. [*Desk thumping*] So, it is no wonder, Mr. President, that the confusion that finds itself in the Opposition, when they fail to grasp and appreciate the various social measures that we have put in place to help those in our society as opposed to building megaprojects—buildings, brick and mortar—and forget the persons who are involved in that.

I took copious notes during the contributions of all Senators. However, I do not think it is necessary that I respond to all of the issues raised. Some of my colleagues have already addressed some of the major issues raised. However, the citing by Sen. Lester Henry of Zero Hedge as his compass to guide his contribution or his criticism of the budget is very, very worrying because that website—I am sure Sen. Al-Rawi, if he looks at the review of it, would see it has been described by reasonable persons as a conspiracy theory website with a penchant for doom and gloom, an apocalyptic vision of the future. And that is really the PNM vision of the future, bent on doom and gloom. [*Desk thumping*]

So it is no surprise that Sen. Henry finds comfort and refuge in those of similar ilk because they only see the glass half empty and they see the worst around them rather than seeing it half full. I leave the rest of Sen. Henry's contribution for Sen. Howai to address.

4.00 p.m.

Sen. Drayton raised one interesting point in her contribution that caught my attention, repeated later on in some of the news today and yesterday, where she cited that on average—if I am to remember correctly—Ministries are allocated

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\$20 million for advertising. Am I quoting you correctly? Yeah, and she agrees. My budget in this Ministry is nowhere close to \$20 million. I have asked some of my colleagues in other Ministries and none of us has received \$20 million. I have added up all the agencies under my Ministry—[*Interruption*] So, I find it a little—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: It says average.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: The average among all of us is not \$20 million. So, I want to correct that error, I know it was not done maliciously, that on average we do not receive \$20 million, nowhere close to \$20 million. Even if I add up the budgetary allocations to my state boards in addition to the Ministry and its agencies, we do not come close to \$20 million.

There is a need for governmental—and all Governments this applies to, regardless of administration—to advertise the work that the various Ministries and agencies are doing. I would give you an example. Some time ago Sen. Singh had asked about the issue of using prisoners on farms, as he and the rest of the agriculture community grapple for labour on farms, and I stood up in response to his contribution indicating that Minister George and I have set up a team to look at that. Now his answer was that he was not in Cabinet and could not see the Cabinet Note, but following that Cabinet decision to introduce prison labour on farms, I went to the post-Cab and announced it. It was carried live on television. We sent out a press release. It was published, I think, in one or two lines buried deep in the newspaper.

So how are we to communicate to the population? I appreciate that Sen. Singh was not in Cabinet and I want to keep him out of Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] So it is my job—I want to keep him out of the Cabinet even though after today's endorsement of the Partnership vision, I think he is making an application to come in the Cabinet of the party. We need to inform and advise and educate the population of some of the things Ministries and Ministers have been embarking upon without politicizing, necessarily, to show people where their money is being spent. So it is very important that we get into that.

The substance of Sen. Singh, I will go into during the detail of my contribution. The last few weeks were very instructive in this country's history. I think we all could consider ourselves very fortunate and privileged to be part of this Parliament, as we witnessed history in the making that others could look back upon. That since we as an independent country came into existence, we amended our Standing Orders significantly so. [*Desk thumping*] I hear those opposite to us lauding such innovation, an innovation that would have never seen the light of day under them. It took place under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] where we introduced the Standing Finance Committee.

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I want to spend a few minutes on that. Now it has been said in many quarters here, as well as outside, that the Standing Finance Committee has really—the work of the Standing Finance Committee over the last five days has taken the wind out of the sails of the debate in the Senate. To quote the Leader of Government Business, the granularity to which they went down into the Draft Estimates of Expenditure, really, it exposed the budget naked for the population and the scrutiny of it by both sides.

Mr. President, what really changed with that Standing Finance Committee? What was the Standing Order they amended? If you reflect, there was a Finance Committee that Minister Howai attended last year and the year before and so on, how come it did not create this wave in the society? What was the difference that we introduced? It was seven days before, we said now, five. The Leader of the Opposition now has the opportunity to prioritize which Ministries that he would scrutinize and how he would scrutinize. Again, not a major difference, what made the difference is by having it public.

In the past the Opposition had seven days to scrutinize the budget in a similar fashion. They often took one or two hours for the most because it was not public. There was no show to display to the population, but because it was televised they took the five days, which they are entitled to. This is the same PNM that when we, in their absence at the Joint Select Committee stage, Dr. Moonilal moved the Motion to have the Joint Select Committee televised that they were angry about. Understand the duplicity of it. It was under Dr. Roodal Moonilal, as Chairman of the Joint Select Committee that the matter became publicized.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Where is the evidence of that?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: It is in the report. Their memory is very selective, Mr. President. Cognitive dissonance by Sen. Small.

So, Mr. President, we are here today, we are boasting of the deepening of our democracy, thanks to the People's Partnership administration. [*Desk thumping*] It is not the first time that we have embarked upon holding our democracy near and dear to us. We called the local election when it was due after being put off four times under the PNM before 2010. We reformed local government electoral process under this administration, allowing every voice to count in that election. [*Desk thumping*] Those on the other side were having local government reform talks for over seven years, putting off the election while they were talking, deferring our democratic right while they were under the pretence of reform. We amended our Constitution right here in this Senate, again, allowing the democracy to deepen.

So, Mr. President, it should not be a surprise, the measures instituted by this administration in particular to the budget where the population is brought in really in the guts of the budget, and each Minister really had to account where the money was being spent. What was also surprising, Mr. President, as a Minister taking part in that progress was those who were questioning me were persons who held office, in some instances, close to 10 years, and their ignorance of the draft estimates, how to read it. These were persons administering Ministries asking rudimentary questions that any public officer would be able to answer, for example, “the travelling vote gone up, your travelling officers vote going up”; that is something for the CPO, terms and conditions—[*Interruption*—focusing on the telephone expenditure of the police, not recognizing the various components of telecommunications. Speaking really to terms and conditions of Ministries which would have been better posed to the service commissions, administrative issues were being brought to light really highlighting the administrative ignorance of those wanting to coming on this side.

What was instructive also is the “duck and run” of the Chief Secretary refusing to attend those discussions. But enough said on the process of the Standing Finance Committee stage. Mr. President, the People’s Partnership budget 2015, read by Minister Howai, highlighted a number of initiatives, some of which have already been repeated by Minister George. I intended to remind Senators about some of these but Minister George anticipated me. So these would have included the rebate with the non-energy sector, the amendment to the Unit Trust Act, the tax amnesty, the various social safety nets spoken about by Sen. Vieira, the tax saving bonds spoken about by Sen. Small, but on the issue of agricultural incentives, I would like to just focus on a little bit.

The agricultural incentive, which includes predial larceny fine increasing by 50 per cent, the cost of establishing approved facilities for the agro-processing of approved commodities will be subject to a rebate of 50 per cent up to a maximum of \$100,000, the cost of refurbishing approved facilities for agro-processing of approved commodities up to 50 per cent to a maximum of \$50,000, and 40 per cent of the cost of the Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points for agro-processors, better known as (HACCP), will be refunded to a maximum of \$150,000, providing the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) with an allocation of \$75 million.

I will go into the predial larceny a little later in my contribution, but in terms of the agro-processing, the approved commodities which have been outlined in the National Food Action Production Plan have identified staples and that would include sweet potatoes, cassava, rice and dasheen and so on; vegetables, for example, pumpkin,

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dasheen bush, ochro, tomatoes, hot peppers; fruits such as citrus, pineapple, coconut, dwarf pommecythere, pawpaw; livestock, meat and milk and aquaculture. The benefit of these two policies, the rebates for the refurbishing and the agro-processing facilities, is that reduction in food waste and loss, an increase in employment, an increase in the contribution to GDP, an increase in the inter-sectorial linkages.

The measures will facilitate a more stable marketing arrangement between primary agricultural producers and processors, a more stable income for farmers, a reduction in the food import bill through import substitution, an increased consumption of local foods, an increase in the export of processed foods, and a decrease in the export of processed foods. It can also facilitate backward linkages in the commodity value chain, for example, the cross-border investment initiative with Guyana where Trinidad and Tobago companies can produce the primary feedstock in Guyana for their processing plant and undertake the processing in Trinidad.

The 40 per cent of the HACCP for agro-processors will be refunded and that will represent a 275 per cent increase to agro-processors, and gives a serious signal for agro-processors to assist in their upgrading plant and processes—a 275 per cent increase. You know, those on the other side, perhaps with the exception of Sen. Singh, they are not alive to the fact of what this will mean for the agro-processing industry. It really will mean that they will be meeting international standards to a large extent to facilitate the exportation of our products in terms of health and safety standards.

The policy measure will yield benefits which will include the production of food in a safety manner along the value chain, resulting in a reduction in foodborne diseases and a greater export potential in meeting the requirements for developed markets, such as the Food Safety Modernization Act in the United States of America.

Mr. President, the People's Partnership, when we were on the campaign trail in 2010 we had our manifesto and I often hold it up, because this document offered at the time of the campaign what we promised the nation that we would deliver upon, and based on the promises that they adjudicated upon us. On page 59 of this document we have "Food Production and Food Security", "Creating a Food Secure Nation", and it identified Pillars of Development for Agriculture, Key Initiatives, and it enumerated a number of them. These were promises made a little over four years ago.

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In this document laid by Sen. Bhoendradatt Tewarie some time ago, *Achievements Aligned to Government's Framework for Sustainable Development*, Commitment, Review of Government 2010 Official Policy Framework, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, March 31, 2014. It outlines on page—starting from page 35 upwards, the manifesto commitments and the actual achievements in terms of the agricultural sector, in particular, and here you would see that nearly in every column we have delivered on the promises of 2010. [*Desk thumping*]

4.15 p.m.

I want to commend Minister Tewarie and his staff for undertaking this painstaking review, not only of the Ministry of Food Production, but of all Ministries, and they put it down as it is. If they did not see a delivery on a promise, they left it like that. They were honest in their review. You would see if you thumb through this book, that all Ministries, not only the Ministry of Food Production, have yielded significant progress in terms of the delivery of their achievements.

Before I go into a review of the year of the Ministry of Food Production where we were, what we have delivered, the tradition normally I see in budgets is that the Ministers from the various Ministries account for their stewardship for the last year of the last year's funds, and see how we go forward with that. But we have to appreciate what we started from in 2010. What did we inherit from those on the other side?

What we saw were characteristic symptoms of PNM management. The agricultural sector was neglected. It was battered, it was bruised, it was alienated and it was left for dead. I have noted the statements of Sen. Singh about the decline of the sector—[*Interruption*] yes, Mr. Avinash Singh, I have to make sure the Singhs are not mixed up. [*Laughter*] The position at that time under the last administration bore nothing resembling a forward movement of the sector. I would like to remind this Chamber that the present Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, was himself a Minister of Agriculture during the period 1992—1995. So I thought it wise that the man who is going up and down and inspecting spent shells in the hills of Laventille at this point in time, to look at his track record as Minister of Agriculture, since Sen. Singh is following him all over the place. [*Interruption*] 1992—1995.

Sen. Robinson-Regis: We are in 2014. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Allow me to get to my point. Sen. Singh is following him, no doubt as his leader, and as a farmer I am sure he would be interested to find out what agricultural policies were put in place then. My friend on the other side is saying that we are in 2014. In a little while I will get to the administration of Mr. Rahael and Mr. Piggott in due course as well.

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I am minded that the Roman emperor Caligula appointed his horse as a Senator at one point the time, with the statement of that—[*Laughter and crosstalk*]

There was a flippant disregard for the sector during that period. In his capacity as Agriculture Minister, a report was commissioned called the “Closure/Cessation of Activities on Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs Facilities”. I want to repeat that: commissioned a report entitled “Closure/Cessation of Activities on Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs”. This report came after to the Cabinet in 1994 with a proposal to restructure the Ministry. So a report came to restructure the Ministry, and after that was approved, a subsequent report came to close down some of the Ministry’s parts.

But what did they mean by restructuring during that period? It meant simply releasing resources via prime agricultural lands for redistribution to “friends and family” of the PNM; releasing buildings, vehicles, equipment and closing key facilities in the sector, key facilities like Centeno in El Carmen. That is the central experimental station in El Carmen; that same station which is now servicing so many parts of Trinidad and Tobago. They wanted to close it down.

There was a well thought out strategy devised to relegate the agricultural sector into a state of nothingness, out of pure malice and hate, [*Desk thumping*] and to drive our nation into a state of insecurity.

Mr. President, when I am finished with the information that I am sharing with you, I am sure you will arrive at the same conclusion that we are where we are in terms of food inflation, shortages, because of some of the decisions taken in that 1992—1995 period. We have to pay a higher price for citrus and many other commodities, because that 1992 to 1995 decision had taken place. So food inflation because of the action under the then Minister, we are feeling it here today.

Mr. President, for those who doubt me, this is the policy document here. [*Minister Maharaj lifts document*] This is the policy document here. If you want I could give you a copy of this. This is what your leader had in plan to “lick up” the agricultural sector. [*Desk thumping*]

In this plan is an ominous and sinister road map to discontinue several vital sectors of the agricultural sector, which would have resulted in a matter near and dear to my friend here, that saw the firing of 638 daily-rated workers. You remember that?

Sen. Lambert: True, that is right.

Sen. D. Maharaj: They are talking about they are worried about 17 workers on the other side in Caroni GREEN. They “lick up” 638 workers on this side, no problem. The same Leader of the Opposition now talking about 17 workers here.

Sen. Robinson-Regis: In six months you “lick up” 3,000.

Sen. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, my friend Sen. Singh spoke about the need to protect our germ plasm and our genetic material, and I agree with him 100 per cent. But you know what his leader did? In this plan, the research division outlined the plan to discontinue the cross-breeding programme at the Aripo livestock programme, to discontinue the rice seed production at El Carmen, to discontinue the production of cocoa beans for sale at La Reunion. That was the plan. Some of these plans—
[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: What year?

Sen. D. Maharaj: Some of these plans actually were effected and prevented the further development of the sector in a significant way. With regard to the specific issue of preserving our genetic material, the head of the research division sent me this email following Sen. Singh’s contribution. I want to quote from it:

The Ministry of Food Production accords high priority for the conservation of our valuable genetic resources for food and agriculture and museums’ collections of exotic fruits, root crop, vegetable, herbs and spices are judiciously maintained. Additionally, a tissue culture facility will be operationalized this year to facilitate the conservation of germ plasm under laboratory conditions.

So the matter is being addressed right now.

Mr. President, I continue with their plan to “lick up” the agricultural sector.

Sen. Lambert: “Avinash say yuh owe him, eh? Pay him, eh.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: “We in government?”

Sen. D. Maharaj: The position then was to discontinue the propagation, sale and distribution of the tilapia fingerlings at the Bamboo grow-fish farm. That is opposite Nestlé on the highway. I will come to that afterwards.

The plans were to discontinue the cross-breeding programme aimed at developing local cross-bred dairy cows; to discontinue the production of liquid semen for stud bulls for artificial insemination at the artificial insemination centres. This actually stopped along with some of them. That meant that we are forced now to reinvent the wheel, start all over when we came into office, to put back a programme of artificial

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insemination, embryonic artificial insemination, so that we would not have to continually import dairy cows, cattle and so on to our shores. You know when you import a pregnant heifer, you run the risk of both the mother and heifer dying, as has happened. The cow and the heifer—“ah trying to be little sensitive”—but you run the risk of that and losing your investment. The plan before was to have the technology here, to have artificial insemination taking place with embryonic transfer and so on.

Mr. President, in terms of the agricultural services, the plan here was to discontinue the propagation and sale of floral and foliage type material, as well as production of orchard crops including cocoa, endangered species at La Pastora Propagation Station. The plan was to discontinue the sale of planting material for tree crops such as citrus, mango, cocoa and coffee at Marper Propagation Station. The plan was to discontinue production of vegetative planting material at the Chaguaramas Agricultural Development Project. Fifteen stations faced the onslaught, the brutal onslaught, of the then Minister of Agriculture, who was most “unagricultural” in his approach. [Crosstalk] Most of these stations—some of them totally closed down.

During this period there was total havoc in the sector. They are irked, you hear the mutterings on the other side, that is because the truth offends. [Crosstalk] You could see the thinking of the then Minister. To solve the problem, to turn around the sector was to close down this, shut down that, close down this, shut down that. So it is no surprise that in the PNM plan for budgets is to close down the Ministry of Local Government, is to close down the Ministry of Tobago Affairs. Their plan of closing down to fix things have not changed. They want to close down the Ministry of Local Government. It has been articulated in the PNM budget plans. [Crosstalk]

They want to close down the Ministry of Local Government and have it as a unit in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. So he is really the Minister of Close Down and if heaven forbid he becomes Prime Minister, he is going to be the Prime Minister of Close Down in this country. He might close down Sen. Avinash Singh just now, Senator as he is, because Clarence Rambharat is in Mayaro.

Sen. A. Singh: Mr. President, Standing Order 35(5).

Sen. D. Maharaj: I did not impute improper motive.

Mr. President: I did not understand that any improper motive was imputed.

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Sen. D. Maharaj: I think he is facing a close down and he does not know about it.

Mr. President, mindful of the time, I want to go into Caroni GREEN, a much maligned institution taken out of context. I want to say something—I do not know how we would break for tea at 4.30 or so—but I have lot to say on Caroni GREEN.

My friend on the other side held up photographs of Caroni GREEN bush. Now, I am not imputing any improper motives on my colleague, Sen. A. Singh. “I doh know where he take dat. He coulda go in de back of his yard, take off a piece of picture.” I do not know. I am not saying you did, let me put that on record, but I do not know. I had officers of the Ministry, public officers, not political agents, go to Caroni GREEN and take out pictures and send them for me. Watch what they are showing me, a pawpaw field right now. [*Minister Maharaj displays photograph*] [*Crosstalk*] This is a pawpaw field right now.

Sen. Cudjoe: You could have taken it in your backyard.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I know sometimes judges during a hearing, they take the whole jury and carry them down. “Take all ah we.” I am willing to stand up with this. Take us down there. Look a next field here. [*Minister Maharaj displays photograph*] This is pommecythere. [*Crosstalk*] Notice my pictures bigger than his own. [*Laughter*] Pawpaw; look at cassava.

Sen. Hadeed: That is my cassava.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, more Caroni GREEN produce. It is functioning and it is functioning well. As you can see it is very green. And I want to get into Caroni GREEN now.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. President, the ghost of Caroni (1975) Limited will forever haunt the PNM. As much as they want to, we will never let them forget [*Desk thumping*] how they fired over 7,000 of Caroni (1975) Limited workers. They destroyed families in central and south Trinidad. They decimated communities that are still reeling today. Sen. Singh’s grandfather probably rolling in his grave knowing that he is part of the PNM—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. A. Singh: All of them alive still.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—your great grandfather. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Mr. President, they want to sidestep the issue, but the destruction of the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago, they have sole paternity for. [*Desk thumping*] And you see they will want to come with the misguided and misinformed notion that that was a “Panday plan”, but they are confused. They mix up restructuring with closure and that is the warped PNM thinking because they have a fatalistic vision of the future.

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They closed down this industry, destroyed the lives of the workers, the farmers, the cane farmers, communities. They affected communities in south and central. They did not appreciate that Caroni was not only Caroni. It rehabilitated recreational grounds, paid attention to cemeteries, local drains and so on. So when you had—its impact on agriculture export to other countries and so on in the Caribbean—you brutalized Caroni (1975) Limited because they felt it was an Opposition stronghold, they brutalized the country and our food import bill, and our food inflation on top of the shut-down Minister's practice in the '92—95' period, have us where we are today with a food inflation bill of a little under \$4 billion, with a food inflation rate that we have only now brought down into single digits.

When we came into office in 2010, Mr. President, the food inflation figure was 29 per cent you know—29 per cent. Last month, under this administration, it was 3.5 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] That did not happen overnight, bringing it down to 3.5 per cent. We have appreciation, a sensibility for the agricultural sector and for farmers. It has gone up to 7 per cent in the last month. We are still in single figures. And the Central Bank is asking, why it is that it has gone up? We have enquired why. You know what they attributed the increase from 3 to 7 per cent? The temporary rescinding of the activities of Caroni GREEN. The introduction of Caroni GREEN to this country saw the plummeting of the food inflation rate. [*Desk thumping*] And fate has a strange way of showing the reality. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Lambert: “Avinash, come back home eh boy, too much problems on the other side.” [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: We had heard about some little difficulties at Caroni GREEN Initiative. And I want to make the distinction. Caroni GREEN Initiative was a project of Caroni (1975) Limited, and the Ministry of Food Production along with the Ministry of Finance and the Economy had a meeting with the officers of Caroni (1975) Limited, and we decided to conduct a systems audit. I want to stress, we initiated a systems audit, and we hired Ernst & Young. It was Caroni GREEN Initiative which was administered by Caroni (1975) Limited. They used the same Caroni, so it might be a bit confusing for those are not au courant with the system, and hence I could understand the confusion on the Opposition side.

Mr. President: Five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Five more minutes. I need a little hour here, you know. Let me cut to the chase on Caroni GREEN. It has been said that Caroni GREEN cost us, in the other place, \$30 million. Mr. President—false. Cabinet agreed to a \$4 million one-off grant for land preparation—one \$4 million grant. There has never been a \$30 million

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anything to Caroni GREEN. Caroni GREEN was incorporated into a company in December 2013. Caroni Initiative which was a project of Caroni (1975) Limited was formed in March 2013. That was five minutes of original time, Mr. President? [*Crosstalk*] Yes. I am taking all my time. I have to answer Avinash.

The board of this new company was appointed in April 2014, and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy—by Corporation Sole—Ministry of Finance and the Economy in June 2014. In May 2014, Cabinet gave a one-off grant of \$22 million to the new company Caroni GREEN Limited. And the funds were finally released to the company in August 2014. So at no point in the life of either Caroni GREEN Initiative, which was a project of Caroni (1975) Limited or the company Caroni GREEN Limited, did they ever control \$30 million to lose it. So that is wrong.

Secondly, this information on Caroni GREEN really is coming from a disgruntled employee who has now found home and refuge in the PNM. Clarence Rambharat, the designated candidate for Mayaro was a Caroni worker, an employee. He writes now as a columnist for the *Express*. Before he was pretending to be independent, now we really see what independent means.

Sen. Hadeed: He pass on some land to a partner.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Now, Clarence Rambharat has a personal grouse, a personal axe to grind. He did not tell us when he was writing his column and so on, that he was former CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited, at no point in time.

Sen. G. Singh: Did he say that to his screening committee? [*Laughter*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: He was corporate secretary and he was the attorney.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Yes. He was corporate secretary and he was the attorney. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: And so what?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And he presided over the termination of all these employees—7,000. [*Desk thumping*] The blood of Caroni is dripping off the fingers of Clarence Rambharat. [*Desk thumping*] That was the hatchet man for the PNM. [*Crosstalk*] And Clarence Rambharat is now pontificating on Caroni. [*Crosstalk*]

Now what I find instructive, Mr. President, is that this former CEO, former corporate secretary, former lawyer for Caroni (1975) Limited got that systems audit before I, as Minister, got it, before the Minister of Finance and the Economy got it because it was seen—he went in and went out with this thing. He has

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friends there still. So there is a haemorrhage. This is a confidential document of a system on audit which has now been twisted for political—which we commissioned. We were not forced to do this. Nobody bent our arms. We did it on our own because we wanted to ensure that Caroni GREEN could stand scrutiny. If there were any shortcomings, we addressed it as soon as possible. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I heard the mutterings earlier about the termination of 18 employees, both here and in the Lower House. Again, false. False. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to lay that to rest here. And again, it comes to the distinction between Caroni (1975) Limited, Caroni GREEN Initiative and Caroni GREEN Limited; you have to understand that. Caroni GREEN Initiative, a project of Caroni (1975) Limited, had 18 employees who had all received severance before being separated from Caroni (1975) Limited and they were running the project.

When the company formed, these employees were transitioning the newly formed company from Caroni, and they were working under that. Once the board of directors came into being, these employees were once again sent back to Caroni (1975) Limited where they were originally employed. So to suggest that there was any firing of 18 employees in some callous way, is really being mischievous, being a stranger to the truth, and [*Desk thumping*] playing smart with foolishness, really.

Mr. President, well, they spoke about no lands being under cultivation and so on, and I put to rest that lie with the photos that I have had there. To say that Caroni GREEN went into red very shortly again, there was no red to go into, they were not given any money or anything.

There was also mention in the other place, Mr. President, about the dismissal of a senior executive who was a former worker and who had Caroni GREEN in court and so on. Again, it was—we have to understand the dynamics of interoffice politics here. Clarence Rambharat was the CEO. Deosaran Jagroo was the corporate secretary. That is the person who spearheaded the Caroni GREEN. And Deosaran Jagroo had a better relationship with the line Minister Christine Sahadeo. So Clarence Rambharat “start to get a tabanca” for that. [*Laughter*] And today, he is still toting that “tabanca” for Deosaran Jagroo. [*Desk thumping*] Because he and Christine Sahadeo could not get along, “he take it out” on poor—[*Interruption*]

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

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Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. J. Lambert*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. President: The Minister of Food Production will have another 15 minutes, but it is now 4.42 and I propose to go for tea. And therefore, this Senate, if so pleases it, will be suspended until 5.45 when we will—not 5.45 sorry—5.15, return and resume, and the Minister of Food Production will again commence.

4.42 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. President: Before we took the break, the Minister of Food Production was on his feet and he was permitted another 15 minutes of speaking time. Minister of Food Production. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you very much colleagues for the extension of time. Mr. President, when we took the break, I was sharing with you a little bit about Caroni (1975) Limited and how it was left bleeding on the side of the road after the PNM had run over it. I want to continue where we left off, because during the break I got a number of calls from various news agencies in Trinidad, even from outside, saying that they did not know that this candidate and columnist of the PNM was the man who presided over the rape and plunder of Caroni (1975) Limited in 2003/2004, and they wondered if that was on his résumé when he screened. And he told them that, but I wonder, Mr. President, if he also told them that in his stewardship as CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited, that he walked away with a bungalow in Woodford Lodge—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Robinson-Regis: He walked away with a bungalow?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: He walked away with a bungalow and then he profiteered on it when he sold it to somebody else. I wonder if he also told them that his friend of the fellow PNM-mite, Wayne Inniss also got a bungalow in Charlieville. This is where you have the plundering of the resources of the State and the access. What arrangements and secret deals of giving away land happened and administered under the Rambharat administration of Caroni (1975) Limited. I wonder, that when he goes to the electorate, if his conscience will be clear, knowing that he decimated the lives of over 20,000 individuals. [*Desk thumping*]

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That is the kind of persons they attract. That is the kind of persons the PNM attracts, ragamuffins for candidates. [Crosstalk] And I had no intention of going down that road, you know. I saw Mr. Rambharat's column and he was very critical of the administration and so on, and Mr. Rambharat, I left him alone as an independent columnist. He is entitled to his opinion. As a former columnist myself—

Sen. Robinson-Regis: You were independent?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I was never independent, I support the UNC, I was always against the PNM, “doh ever doubt that”. But I left him alone. But when he tipped his hand and he declared his allegiance and he went up as a candidate, selected as a candidate, continues to write as the *Express* columnist—I hope that one day the Partnership candidate could get a column similarly. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Al-Rawi: Sat Maharaj.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: He is not a candidate. Now, on a side note, I see candidate Rambharat being selected, candidate Stuart Young, candidate Terrence Deyalsingh, I am not seeing candidate Faris Al-Rawi.

Sen. G. Singh: I wonder why?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: He is not selected. I know why he is not selected. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Not tonight, not tonight, Faris.

Mr. President, I raised the question of the kind of individual who holds portfolio in light of how the administration of the Ministry of Food Production was transformed negatively in the '92—'95 period. And the DNA of the PNM in choosing suspicious persons continues, and it continued recently in this Chamber here, Mr. President. And I ask the Opposition to clarify a matter, it had been raised in the media on one or two occasions but perhaps it is not the media that they like, so they ignore it. If it was the Voice of i95, the organ of the PNM they would have responded, right?

Sen. Robinson-Regis: Voice.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I know the Voice would “ketch yuh; dat is why ah say it.” I want to know—Pavlov theory, you say the right thing and they respond, right—is the appointment of former Sherrie Hamidan Lorna Ali as Opposition Senator—[Interruption]

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Oh God, say it outside, nah.”

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Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Has she been convicted in any way in the United States? Was she ever in jail on several accounts of fraud, including tax evasion and social security fraud? Mr. President, I want clarification on that because she is in the San Fernando council at this point in time, appointed by the PNM.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Appointed by the people.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And she is a candidate of the PNM. I make reference to:

“Case No. 3:04-cr-00196-FJP-CN, Baton Rouge Sentenced in False Claims Scheme.

On June 3, 2005, in Baton Rouge, LA, Sherri Ali Benson was sentenced to 24 months in prison to be followed by three years supervised release. Benson was ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$52,217 for filing false claims. Upon release, Benson will be deported to her home town on San Fernando, Trinidad. According to the plea agreement, Benson presented claims to the IRS, knowing them to be false. In 2001 and 2002, Benson electronically filed false 1999, 2000, and 2001 federal income tax returns in the names of her father sister, and brother and she filed all of these returns reflecting false wages, tax withholdings and itemized deductions claiming the refunds to herself in the amount of \$530,000.”

Sen. Lambert: Well, the lady Vice-President, the lady Vice-President—

Sen. Robinson-Regis: I am the lady Vice-Chairman.

Sen. Lambert: Well, lady Vice-Chairman, she cannot go for no candidacy, not under your rule.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And she is a lady, Mr. President. There is another account, Mr. President—[*Crosstalk and laughter*] I think clarification is due from the PNM. If this is not the same person who was a temporary Senator appointed by the PNM, if this is not the same person who was a candidate of the PNM in the local government election who is now a sitting councillor, say so and put to rest. [*Desk thumping*] Put to rest the speculation for your own member’s security safety of mind. There is a speculation hanging over this person that this person and the person mentioned in this report, this court document, is one and the same. If it is not one and the same person, say it out.

Let us clear the air and move on from there. Just as we know, for a fact, that Clarence Rambharat was the man who was the CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited who presided over their death, the man who got a bungalow in Woodford Lodge, a man who assisted a friend in getting a bungalow as well and land. That we know as a fact. We want to know if Sherrie Hamidan Lorna Ali is the same person as mentioned in these legal documents in United States. Just clear it up, I want to know that the PNM stopped choosing criminals as candidates. This is a deportee here and masquerading as a candidate for the PNM. I ask the question, we need to address that.

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Now, Mr. President, the issue of Caroni GREEN, I come back to it, I think I have addressed all the issues raised by Sen. Singh, right? But as he spoke about the money owing to farmers, in any issue there are three sides, your side, my side and the truth. Caroni GREEN has sent me a report, because I had them monitoring the debate knowing that it is a “hot potato” subject raised in the Lower House, and whereby they have indicated the vast majority of the contracts have been settled and paid for. There are two or three matters which are before the courts right now, one cited by my learned friend, Sen. Avinash Singh, which I will not go into because the matter is before the courts.

There is another one before the court again, not worthwhile, but there were certain actions taken upon by the farmers themselves which was not catered for in the contract, and that led to some issues between Caroni GREEN and the farmers now. Bearing in mind, this was a new initiative whereby lands that were underutilized by the Caroni workers who received the VSEP properties and so on, were being rented out to those persons who wanted to farm but did not have land available to them, struck this relationship whereby Caroni (1975) Limited entered as a facilitating agency in terms of developing the land and so on.

So, it was new and certain hiccups were foreseen in the rolling out of the project. As a result of these we had the systems audit. The systems audit which was engaged by the Ministry of Food Production and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy to address the issues which we addressed, initiated by ourselves. I cannot help but to underscore that, that this was not forced upon by any external factor, but it was initiated by the Ministry of Food Production and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the systems audit came forward with recommendations and we held back Caroni GREEN expanding further and restricted where we are now in order to implement the recommendations of that system.

And I want to repeat something I said earlier, because I think it is worth repeating: when we introduced Caroni GREEN we saw an immediate decrease in the food inflation rate, dropping, and the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago attributed the drop to Caroni GREEN. When we restricted Caroni GREEN, because of this system audit which we are implementing the measure we saw an increase in the food inflation, almost, simultaneously we can—and the Central Bank has also stated to our technocrats that they attribute the increase in the food inflation rate last month to the Caroni GREEN restricting production.

So we are clear that the model of Caroni GREEN is working, even though it was flawed with some hiccups in the initial stages, it worked and it will work much better once we implement those changes. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Lambert: So we are not owing you anything, eh, Avinash.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: We are convinced that we understand agriculture and we have testimony by our successes. I could have stood up here and tell you how much road we pave, how much road we maintain compare it in 2008 when the PNM was in power they did 38 kilometres of road for that one year period compared to ours where we did 64 per cent showing that we get 70 per cent more production out of the same amount of funds. I could have told you about how much more ponds we dug compared to the PNM but those issues of pond water management technique. I do not want to bore you because it makes no sense, Sen. Singh. In every area, in agriculture, we outperformed your administration. [*Desk thumping*] Every area. I understand and empathize with Sen. Singh that he is not seeing as much happening. You know why, Mr. President?—because that is just—if you sit down in a car and the car revving and you know it could go but it is not reaching far yet, you know why, because he was in a dead car before, the PNM is a dead car. We are going Sen. Singh, we are going.

Now, he complained about the incentives. I agree with him. We gave out in this last fiscal period in region north, \$19-odd million for incentives. In region north, \$10 million. Combined between region north and south \$29/\$30 million in incentives, [*Desk thumping*] but Sen. Singh has not had his personal incentive and I agree with him. He should get it, because that is we are clearing up the backlog still left by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] I agree with you, you know. You are getting it, you are getting it and all those who are entitled to their incentives, but the mess that we met in terms of process and procedures in terms of incentives, we have to treat with it. [*Crosstalk*]

Similarly, Mr. President, NAMDEVCO, he complained bitterly about NAMDEVCO's lack of performance and I agree with him, that NAMDEVCO did not perform. But why? Let us talk about that in the few minutes I have remaining. How much minutes I have remaining—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Ten.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Ten.

Mr. President: One and three quarter minutes.

5.30 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. President, the PNM administration emasculated NAMDEVCO during their tenureship. They starved it of funds and what they did was set up a parallel institution called TTABA, which they pumped in, in a five-year period, a quarter billion dollars, and which they have zero to show for it. And the assets of TTABA, because it is a non-profit organization, has nothing to do with the State. TTABA “buss” bad. We have terminated that arrangement.

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We are now in the process of re-empowering NAMDEVCO, and NAMDEVCO has already started to respond. They have gotten export markets in New York and Toronto, where you have hot peppers and pumpkin already penetrating. We have gotten markets in the United Kingdom where we will be sending a shipment in September with an assortment of vegetables, soup packs and callaloo packs. And we continue to engage in developing the markets in the Caribbean such as Barbados and so on.

So NAMDEVCO has to rebound from the onslaught of the PNM and their failed agricultural initiatives, and their failure to understand the sector. We have now implemented NAMIS, which allows real-time updating of prices and so on, in the sector, on line. So this will allow a further deepening of the agricultural sector. I know Sen. Singh is deeply interested that we, as a Government, continue this plan and I have before me in my hand, the National Food Production Action Plan 2015 to 2020, [*Desk thumping*] and you will be a beneficiary of this plan because under your administration that plan really is a death certificate.

So, Mr. President, the farmers of the country can rest assured that the development and growth of the agricultural sector will continue in leaps and bounds under the Partnership.

Sen. Armstrong: Performance.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Faris Al-Rawi. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Faris Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. I think the Attorney General could rejoin the Parliament at this point. I know he has been anxiously awaiting as to when I would actually speak, so I am on my feet.

Mr. President, I rise to join in a debate which ended pretty much at midnight last night, and let me say why. We are discussing a money Bill; we are discussing the budget, the Appropriation Bill of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are doing so under the constitutional parameters that prescribe the manner in which we ought to debate.

The financial year-end of Trinidad and Tobago passed, as the Minister of Finance and the Economy would know, last night. Anything that we do, say, object to, et cetera, in this Senate, is really otiose at the end of the day. Perhaps that is why I am getting the signal from Sen. Ahmed to hurry up and speak. [*Laughter*] And maybe, in fact, she is right because I think that Trinidad and Tobago has had the benefit of a very good interrogation into the budgetary process by all Members. [*Desk thumping*] I think that Trinidad and Tobago has witnessed an historic budgetary interrogation exercise and that the House of Representatives did a very good job. I would say that they did a good job from both perspectives, on both sides [*Desk thumping*] and I think that that is a fair comment to make.

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I say that that is so, Mr. Vice-President—Mr. President—so used to the Vice-President being in the Chair at times. I say that that is so, recognizing that we are in a polarized parliamentary system, that the Westminster system of governance requires that we take polar opposites at times, so that we can interrogate the issues.

But I want to set the record straight. I heard this afternoon, praise being heaped upon the People's Partnership by my learned colleague, Sen. Maharaj, saying that there was no way that the type of reforms to the Standing Orders, which happened in the House of Representatives, could have happened under the PNM, and I want to tell him, through you, most respectfully, dear Senator, revisionism becomes you not, because you can be easily found out. The fact is that he did not reflect upon the truth of this, which is that Speaker Barendra Sinanan and Camille Robinson-Regis, then Member of the House of Representatives, drafted and prepared everything, almost word for word, that is in those new standing Orders, and when the PNM went out of Government, respectable and responsible Speaker that he was, Sinanan handed the file over to incoming Speaker, Wade Mark, and then the work went forward from there.

But, Mr. President—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Maharaj: Where is the evidence of that?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: It is a fact.

Sen. Maharaj: Where is the evidence?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: And it is also a fact that when you look to the debates on Standing Orders revision, which I had a chance to do in this 10th Parliament—because in this Senate we had a Motion on the Order Paper for years, talking about the amendment to the Standing Orders of the Senate, and I did the research of the entire *Hansard* library and I found that there was stout opposition, from one party only, to a revision of Standing Orders, and that was the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, the chief advocate for not cutting down speaking time was then one Leader of Opposition Business, Sen. Wade Mark.

So let me make this absolutely clear, through you, Mr. President, the exercise which we saw and which both parties participated in well, originated, quite properly, under the PNM and was passed with the PNM support whilst in opposition. [*Desk thumping*] And that is not something to be surprised about because, statistically, the PNM, in its support of policies for the benefit of the country—by way of example in its tenure in opposition—has supported 93 per cent

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of the legislation brought to this Senate. The UNC cannot even speak to a 1 per cent support rate when in opposition. And I hear them adopting, wildly as they do, in sometimes rag publications, as they claim ownership of—and I mean *The Voice* newspaper by way of example.

Hon. Senator: *The Voice* worrying you.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: I hear them—*The Voice* does not worry me—[*Crosstalk*]—very, very happy about it. But the fact is that I listen to them talking about what kind of Prime Minister Keith Rowley will make if this is what he does in opposition. I want to point out that an Opposition Leader that could direct his Senate Bench to support, if necessary, 93 per cent of the legislation coming on the desk, and beat vehemently until you get the amendments in the record to the point where the Bill can be supported, is a man that I will support any day, and all of us on this Bench will support any day. [*Desk thumping*]

So I want to put that record straight. Time will go very quickly, so I would like to say Sen. Maharaj is, perhaps, not only a very good advocate this evening of revisionism, but his entire argument can be bowled clean by reference to facts against what he has put on to the record. [*Desk thumping*] Number one, he has come to this Parliament and he has said, bold-facedly, mind you, the PNM presided over the destruction of Caroni.

Now, why should I listen to Sen. Maharaj, other than courtesy, of course? The closure of Caroni—let us listen to the words of, not Faris Al-Rawi, Senator, speaking now; let us listen to one Anand Ramlogan, author of the article “Black and White Facts” where Mr. Ramlogan then—not Senator as he is now—in 2010 wrote the following:

The closure of Caroni was started off by the Panday government—[*Desk thumping*]—which was ready to dismantle it and sell it off.

So tell me this. Your Attorney General now—back then in 2010, writing, says conclusively—not only in 2010 but in 2007 on the platforms where he said then that Mr. Panday and the UNC presided over the death and destruction by way of final rites, “aarti” and all.

Sen. Armstrong: He was a foe at the time.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: So let me ask you this. Because he is a foe he cannot speak the truth? [*Desk thumping*] So let me make this clear, I do not buy the argument coming across the floor that a foe can say something which is untrue. A foe ought to win an argument based upon reason, logic and the truth.

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So, hon. Sen. Maharaj, point number one as to why your entire treatise ought to be discounted is that you should reflect upon the words of your own Members. When the Cotonou Agreement was signed by Basdeo Panday and the preferential treatment for sugarcane was removed, Caroni was dead on arrival. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact! That is an economic, international law, treaty, obligation, fact. That is what Mr. Ramlogan was referring to in 2007 and 2010.

Fact number two why we ought not to listen to Sen. Maharaj. When he spoke about—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Listen well.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi:—the disdain to be poured upon Zero Hedge, he was not the only person to do that. Sen. Ahmed stood up and read a part of Zero Hedge last night, but she nor he read the other part:

“Sometimes the site gets it right before everyone else. Zero Hedge is credited with flagging financial issues like high-frequency trading before they became sexy mainstream stories.

‘It’s extremely influential in the New York, London and global hedge fund community. I meet clients in London and they mention it, and I meet regulators in Washington and they mention it’, said Nicholas Colas, chief market strategist at ConvergeX Group, a brokerage firm.

Zero Hedge’s outlook is nicely summed up by the tagline at the top of its website ‘On a long enough timeline the survival rate for everyone drops to zero’.” [*Desk thumping*]

But you see, that is not the only reason why, where you can have the habit of reading half of the story because that is a theme that I am going to come through in the rest of my contribution.

But he stood up here today and spoke about Sherrie—he said Hamidan Ali—asked for the PNM to come clean on an issue. Well, I called and certified. Before I say what I am about to say, I called the young lady who he claims is the person that he mentioned out, and I am advised—because this is not the first time they have done that. It is the first time they have been bold-faced enough to do it in the articulation of name. But, Mr. President, the hon. Senator knows, as do I, that section 55 of the Constitution provides him with absolute privilege. I cannot—lest I breach some of the standing rules of courtesy—bait him to go outside and repeat the words. I may love it if he did because I am sure that I would have a handsome pay day out of it. But the point is, I am certifying now that the advice that I have received directly from the person that he has alleged is involved, is that that is not her—full stop. [*Desk thumping*] So let us end the nonsense here today.

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Mr. President, we have—Mr. President, could you tell me what time precisely my hour will finish?

Mr. President: I count for the 45 minutes. I do not count by the hour.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Sure. Would you tell me?

Mr. President: But precisely you have until 6.17.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. I fear that I have so much material to go through—

Hon. Senator: That is for 45.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: For 45—that I may have to dive straight ahead into some issues.

Mr. President, there is a lot to respond to from some of the speakers' past. Sen. Tewarie spoke interestingly about philosophy and policy which, I think, is a very good conversation. I would have hoped that as Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, however, that he could have spoken to his Ministry's issues in this Senate. I appreciate he may have spoken elsewhere. I paid attention to the issues that he spoke about in the committee stage of the Standing Finance Committee and also in the budget debate. I would have hoped that he could have given some assurance in relation to the statistical position that the CSO must come up to. And I would have hoped that he would have done that particularly in view of the exhortations coming out of no less than an institution than the IMF and their Article IV Consultation, I would have hoped, as well, that he would have reflected upon the statement of critical need coming out of that. I do not think I need to remind him further. I would have hoped that Sen. Dr. Tewarie would also have spoken to the UDeCOTT Invaders Bay issue, and I want to spend a second on that. [*Desk thumping*]

5.45 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Tewarie is on record as saying in the Standing Finance Committee that the President has signed something which now essentially makes the project work. That is what Sen. Dr. Tewarie has said. I, in fact, have his contribution here with me and if you permit me a moment to reflect upon it. Sen. Dr. Tewarie said at page 35 of his contribution on September 23, 2014, that with respect to the Invaders Bay project that essentially the President has made this all fine. He says at page 36:

“On the Invaders Bay project, what this reveals really is that despite all the charges that have been made about Invaders Bay, there is very negligible Government spending in Invaders Bay.”—et cetera, and he goes on to give some degree of assurances.

But, Mr. President, I want to ask the hon. Senator squarely: how does he propose to deal with the information that has come into the public domain being the publication in the newspapers of the very piece of advice, one of the pieces of advice that he does not want to issue in legal proceedings? It has been published in the newspapers that the advice coming out of Joan Furlong, in advising the hon. Minister, in relation to this particular project, that the advice is quite simply that the project cannot fly. That is the advice. The advice coming out is—and if I could find that particular note amongst all of my papers. That particular piece of advice coming out of his own department is that the exhortation is that you ought not to proceed with the project, that it is in fact something which is unlawful and that, that position is all the much more so a great concern in light of the size of the investment and public concerns surrounding it.

Now I raised this because we on this side would sincerely appreciate the launching of that project. We are very concerned that the three people who were selected would have the ability to be protected in terms of their investments as well. The last thing that we would like to see, is that through a breach of the Central Tenders Board Act that the persons who were selected and who spent millions of dollars in development, ideas and work, find themselves the victims of a Government gone wrong through a non-adherence to policy and that is, the law as well laid on to that, meaning: have you obeyed the Central Tenders Board? The reason is that the project would be laid there, they would likely suffer millions of dollars of losses and hundreds of millions of dollars of lost profit, and the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago would be invited to foot that bill because of a legitimate expectation on the part of the developers that the Government has done all things properly.

This is not an issue confined only to the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development. This is an issue which reared its head in the Ministry of Justice, as my learned colleague, the hon. Sen. Emmanuel George, is aware. Prior to his time, there was a naked breach of the Central Tenders Board Act with respect to the procurement of the judicial complexes as a result of which they could not be built. That found its way into the Chief Justice's opening address on the law term opening this year in saying, "If you are not going to build essentially the judicial complexes, give me the billion dollars. I will spend it appropriately." So the adherence to law is a critical issue that we must, of course, remind the Government of.

Now, Sen. Maharaj went on a wild excursion into 1992, talking about Dr. Keith Rowley as Minister of Agriculture in 1992 and what the PNM would do. Well I could not imagine that he would not reflect upon the recent events of his own Government which I will come to in a while. But, Mr. President, what concerned me is, if I am to accept what Sen. Maharaj has put to us by way of exhortation, then, do I say to him that

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in 2007 the UNC's position is the same? Do I say to him that in 2007 when the UNC cried and poured scorn on the CEPEP programme that their position is the same? Is that to be found out by the fact that they have tripled the budget on CEPEP? If it is in fact the same and I am to accept his arguments, then how do the following words uttered in the Parliament on Friday, March 02, 2007 ring to him?

“It is a billion-dollar pork barrel politics and the pigs at the trough are the friends and family of the PNM, in a feeding frenzy...”

Said by one Ganga Singh in a Motion on CEPEP government mismanagement. Now, if I were to accept that line of thought from Sen. Maharaj, I think I would be losing more than my marbles. So, hon. Senator, do your homework a little bit better. Get yourself ready.

Mr. President, I heard of Sen. Raziah Ahmed, some exhortations. She said to us that the Children's Life Fund was going to come alive. She said the PNM left it—I am sorry. I will try to be generous. She said that the PNM left it in the dustbin. Finally, it is coming to life. She did not reflect upon the words of her colleague, Sen. Marlene Coudray, on October 17, 2012, where Sen. Coudray in her contribution to the Appropriation Bill for the financial year 2013, spoke at pages 146 and 147 of her *Hansard* contribution about what she referred to as a lease:

“...something jumped out”—to—“me”—she says—“when we were doing the draft estimates”—for—“the Children's Authority”—I—“was asking”—what is—“the sum for \$7.5 million for rental of...premises...”

I have two leases here; I do not know why they are dated March 2010. Somebody sought to tie up—we cannot talk; we cannot come and talk about expenditure...funds and savings and exorbitant rent when, for a Children's Authority that was put in place to deal with unfortunate children, we are committed to paying \$7.5 million. Somebody has tied up Children's Authority like a Sunday crab...

...I want to ask why this was done just before the general election and why it was for a period of 12 years?... This is wickedness!

I have given instructions to the Permanent Secretary to get us out of this lease.
[*Desk thumping*]

Well you know, they are still in the same building. Mind you, the Children's Authority to be launched in 2014 is in the same building, [*Desk thumping*] but let me tell you why the hon. Senator in my estimation said what she said.

1. I drafted the lease;
2. I drafted it in conjunction with Madam Justice Sealey and Mrs. Stephanie Daly and the draft was theirs. The lease was put for 12 years to save the Children's Authority a massive amount of stamp duty, but it was terminable in three-year periods and the lease expired ages ago.

So, the hon. Senator, had she done her homework, should have known not just because you see the name Faris Al-Rawi you have to get on bad about it, because the Children's Authority is now being launched in 2014 in the same building.

Sen. Ahmed: Half of it.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Half of the same building she says, because another Government Ministry now rents the other half of the building at a higher rental.

Mr. President, the level of incompetence in research in the Government's research team—I would not put it to the Members. I am sure they are competent—is really staggering, but you ought not to take chain up. Double-check your facts, hon. Minister. What concerned me as well is that while we are talking about baby care grant and we are talking about generosity, nobody spoke to Vision on a Mission, again, coming out of Ministry of the People and Social Development. This is under Head 56.

I am looking at the Draft Estimates of Development Programme for 2015, I note 2014 revised estimate \$1.91 million; 2015, zero dollars and zero cents. It is nothing said inside of here. This is the Consolidated Fund positions out. I have no objection to looking after the vulnerable in society, but I have a problem when you pretend that you are giving whilst you are taking from somewhere else and not telling us. Not only is this here, but the allocation to the St. Vincent de Paul Society has gone down as well.

So we are giving on the one hand to baby mothers, we are making it a big issue, but we are not telling the population Vision on a Mission to deal with the recidivism rates, to deal with persons in prison, et cetera, going down, and deportees cannot be managed and people coming out of prison cannot be managed, and we are not hearing as well—St. Vincent de Paul, a well-established society, reduced expenditure. This is why this Government is not trusted. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I wish to go to what Sen. Ahmed referred to as “Las Planass”. This is the issue I am sure that several people have been waiting on opposite. I have here a couple of files. I am a stickler for maintaining documentation. I have in my possession material that was provided to me as a member of the board of directors of the HDC in the period whilst I sat on the HDC. I have them given to me in the period whilst I sat there. In the same way that I keep all of my parliamentary documents marked up and

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written up, I have my HDC board minutes. I have looked at those minutes and I can certify that the minutes that were given to me, together with the packages vouched at the back, that there is no material inside of there, which causes any form of suspicion, such that a reasonable member acting as a person in the capacity as a director of a Board of Directors would have had to integrate.

Sen. Maharaj: You adjudicated on your own board?

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, I have adjudicated on what is in front of me, and in terms of adjudicating, the crosstalk has come adjudicating on your own board. So it is okay for the Attorney General to adjudicate upon “prisongate” which is a complaint about something under his Ministry; it is okay for the Ministry of Health to say that the Children’s Life Fund Board could investigate a matter under the Children’s Life Fund Board; it is okay for CAL to investigate a billion dollar loss in CAL; it is okay for Petrotrin to investigate billions of dollars of losses in a situation today where 19 out of 21 of the plants are shut down today. It is okay! So, Sen. Maharaj, do not get me started. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us deal with the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago’s announcement which caused her shock and horror, as she put it in the public domain.

6.00 p.m.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago spoke in the House on September 18, 2014. Right after she spoke, her Division of Publications, or whatever it is Office of the Prime Minister, issued out speaking notes of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, House of Representatives, September 18, 2014 (Check against delivery, Las Alturas).

The hon. Prime Minister went on to say, in her notes:

Mr. Speaker,

“The people of this country have a right to know who is accountable for this construction disaster...soon become the new flag bearer for the member for Diego Martin West’s...”

She said she:

“cringed at the wanton wastage...PNM disaster that is Las Alturas.

Las Alturas Buildings H & I was designed by the PNM, contractor hired under the PNM, started and completed under the PNM, paid for under the PNM, collapsed under the PNM.”

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She goes on and says that what she found disgusted her.

“There would need to be a detailed and forensic enquiry into the failure of the Las Alturas Buildings H & I...

What I do know, is that certain names kept appearing in that file. High profile PNM names...”—she says.

She then goes on to describe a series of events beginning in March 2004 and she says that information went to the board of UDeCoTT. She took pride in calling the names of the members of UDeCoTT: Mr. John Mair, Mr. Calder Hart, Dr. Krishna Bahadoorsingh, et cetera; Ramnarine, Agard. She says March 2005 reports were received. She goes down the line, tantalizing how the project was awarded to a company called China Jiangsu International Corporation, as if she has never heard of the company.

She then goes on to say:

“...geotechnical information provided by Geo-Tech Associates failed to detect that there was a partially blocked ravine and the presence of a spring on the site which contributed...”

She goes on to say, July 30, 2007—[*Interruption*] I am reading from a publication in the public domain and Sen. Ahmed raised it.

Sen. Maharaj: You are reviving a debate.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: “July 30, 2007—CJIC was awarded the contract for 24 months and given possession of the site.”

She says:

“Mr. Speaker, for those who may not remember, at that time the member for Diego Martin West was Housing Minister, one...Andre Monteil was...Chairman of the HDC and a Mr. Faris Al-Rawi was a Director of the HDC!”

She goes on:

“...January 24th 2008...at this time Andre Monteil was chairman...Faris Al Rawi...Director...”

She goes to October 2008. She says:

“...Sydney McIntosh was chairman...Faris Al Rawi was a Director...”

In her *Hansard* debate, Mrs. Mc Intosh jumps up and says, “Who is that? That’s my husband.” She said, “Well, I was not sure, I did not know.” In her note disseminated to the public she says:

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“I am informed...Sydney McIntosh is the husband of none other than...current Member of Parliament for Port-of-Spain North...”

Sen. Maharaj: She did not say that in the *Hansard* debate.

Sen. F. Al Rawi: I am reading from the publication that went to the press.

“In December...2008...” she goes on—but hear this one: She comes up to say:

“...November 2009...Signs of cracking were observed...”

Footnote No. 1—this she did not read out in the *Hansard* record.

“Faris Al Rawi was revoked as a Director of HDC on 13th March 2009.”

Sen. Maharaj: Did you resign?

Sen. F. Al Rawi: No, I was revoked.

She then goes on to say “...January 2010”—that the buildings were finished—

“Although cracks were observed in November 2009, Geotech Associates were only asked to do a second soil...”—sample—“October 2010...”

She said Geotech did further work, et cetera, and then she goes on to talk about “Dr. Robert Ratay, an International Forensic Structural Engineer”.

Mr. President, when I read this, I said to myself, first of all, I am very comfortable with and will have no opposition to any enquiry—that is a proper enquiry—into any public project involving public persons. People in public life have to expect that they will be subjected to scrutiny and it is only right that they give account for their tenure and it is only right that they give account for what may have happened under their position. Wherever liability may be found out, so be it.

However, Mr. President, what concerned me is that the hon. Prime Minister went on, in her contributions, to do much like Sen. Maharaj did. She read part of the story. She focused on names and sensationalization, but she did not deliver the rest of the story.

Mr. President, I think it incumbent upon learned Senior Counsel, as she now is—particularly as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago—that she find measure in her position. What concerned me is that in her *Hansard* debate she referred to Faris Al-Rawi having signed an annual report 2006-2007. I pulled that report, 2006-2007 and on page 2 there is a chairman’s review; on the bottom of the report it says, F-A-R-R-I-S A-L-R-A-W-I, Acting Chairman. It jogged my memory.

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The hon. Prime Minister, having a large research team, I jumped immediately back to Tuesday, October 26, 2010 when under the item in the Senate, there was business under the heading “Personal Explanation, Clarification of Housing Development Corporation Documents”. You, Mr. President, granted me leave, pursuant to Standing Order 19, to clarify an issue. The personal explanation that I gave concerned this very report. You allowed me permission—it is on record as of October 26, 2010, to say that, first of all:

“...I was not, nor have I ever been appointed by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as the Chairman or Acting Chairman of the Housing Development Corporation.

Secondly, I was not on the Board of Directors of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation in 2006.

Thirdly, I joined the Board of Directors of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation in 2007.”

In fact, I received my instrument of appointment in January 2007.

“Fourthly, prior to the delivery of the Annual Report 2006...”

et cetera.

“...at the Parliament...I never had sight nor acknowledge any sight of the...document.

...further, I was not the author...nor did I, at any time prior to the commencement...have sight...”—of that document.

“Sixthly, no person from the...”—HDC, or any person—“...on its behalf, contacted me...”—and—

“Seventhly...”—I have not been able—“...to obtain an explanation...”—and—

“Lastly, my name...

is spelt F-A-R-I-S A-L-R-A-W-I; one ‘R’ and a hyphen.

Now, I bothered to put that on the record to show, in a string of events, how wrong the Prime Minister can be at times; and how this Government that comes up with its constant “aha” moments, needs to spend some time to remember that people document their positions well.

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The Prime Minister went on in her treatise, as I read out a little while ago, to say Andre Monteil was a member of the Board of Directors when he was not. As a matter of fact, in July 2007 he had resigned already by May of the same year.

Sen. G. Singh: I forced him to resign.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. President, so the hon. Leader of Government Business recognizes, in crosstalk, that he forced Andre Monteil to resign in May 2007, yet he allows his own Prime Minister to go to Parliament and speak an untruth, potentially. Perhaps, she was ill-advised; perhaps Sen. Singh did not write her speech or, God forbid that he wrote the speech and he set up his own Prime Minister. I mean, he is, after all, still in the COP. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. G. Singh: Withdraw that remark.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: I withdraw that remark. That is my learned friend and good colleague, Sen. Singh. I mean him no harm, but I am giving the permutations of how words halfway thought can be felt.

So, the Prime Minister goes on and says that, but, Mr. President, what stunned me? The Prime Minister said she had a pile of documents. She knows about latent defects in buildings because she is, after all, Senior Counsel. She knows that she is making a public admission that the signs of defects were seen in November 2009, but the statutory period of limitation for action is four years. So, the Prime Minister is now shooting the option entirely and killing it, of the legitimate compensation that can happen by the HDC suing the project contractor who received a design/build contract. China Jiangsu, the recipient of a \$100-plus million project to build the Debe campus under this Government—[*Desk thumping*]*—*who the Prime Minister seems not to recall is the person on the line, as a design/build contractor, responsible to receive the first claim of the HDC. Why? They designed it; secondly, they built it.

The hon. Prime Minister, in referring to geotechnical reports and saying she has read it all, did not bother to refer to, for instance, the report of Geotech Associates Limited which said—this is their 2011 report—because there are several reports.

Due to isolated plan of those loose material and significant depth of sliding the occurrence can be classified as an unforeseen geotechnical circumstance which could not be ascertained either from observation or typical geotechnical investigation.

She did not bother to read that. I managed to get that particular report after she made her statement, but the hon. Prime Minister knows better than that. She did not also bother to read any other statements coming out of that particular enquiry and, in particular, for instance—as she has read it all—statements coming out of Geotech that say,

It is our considered opinion that the observation of cracking is not conclusive evidence of slope failure or displacement, particularly, since a retaining wall has been constructed on the down slope side of the area in question. Therefore, it is recommended that three inclinometers be installed to confirm the lateral behaviour of the sub-soils.

Mr. President, what I am driving at is actually quite simple. You have a situation where you have a design/build contract. You have a contractor who is now in the saddle with this particular Government for hundreds of millions of dollars. They are likely to be sued by the HDC—they ought to be. They have the right to bring ancillary proceedings against their own advisors, Geotechnical Associates, Geotech Associates and civil engineering company that provided them with work referred to as CMAS.

The hon. Prime Minister knows that already, but instead, it is our genuine belief that this exercise is one of simple slander in terms of tarnishing the names of persons who are involved—or supposedly involved by the Prime Minister's estimation—even when she knows they were not on the boards at the relevant times and even when she ought to know, by way of proper advice, that the Board of Directors is confined to acting in certain circumstances. That is even more so—[Desk thumping]—worse a position when it is related to the Leader of the Opposition. Because, the Minister of Housing, acting in any capacity, only receives minutes from the board of directors and that is the constitutional instrument that he really ought to be looking at.

So, I would like to ask if we are using that same yardstick when Petrotrin has suffered the kind of massive losses that it has. For instance, having made an open admission to breaching the environmental protection laws of Trinidad and Tobago, and forking out \$20 million—of tax paid dollars—to the EMA by way of fines. Are we to take that board to task? If so, are we to take the Minister to task? Because the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs would know, in relation to the oil spill, there is a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan of Trinidad and Tobago that resided on the website of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, up until the hon. Minister—his department, the Ministry—was faced with the oil spill. I checked immediately, at the time of the oil spill, to see what contingency plans were in place. I saw the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan and I downloaded it, dated February 2010; detailed procedures as to what should have been done. Do you know what I found quickly thereafter when it turned out that the oil spill was really through negligence of the Board of Petrotrin and nothing else? Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs website, I looked for the same

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document, Error 404 Page Not Found; search, cannot find the document—[*Desk thumping*] I took a screen shot of it. I took a screen shot before it was taken down, after it was taken down. So, if we are going to call a commission of enquiry into Las Alturas, let us call a commission of enquiry into Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] Let us talk about catalytic cracker that is down. Let us talk about 19 out of 21 plants in Petrotrin that are down now. Let us find out if this Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has any culpability in relation to the take-down of the contingency plan. Let us check that, but let us not stop there. Let us look instead at something which is easy to look at.

6.15 p.m.

I have, in fact, a whole package of them here. I wish I had the time to deal with it. I have information in relation to sport. I have a Minister of Sport then, one Anil Roberts now, signing off on June 26, 2010: Approved, Anil Roberts, Malabar FC funding for a football club in his constituency, where Ministers have absolutely no authority to sign off on this kind of contract. Let us call a commission of enquiry into that. Let us see if that Minister deserves to answer anything.

Let us ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, himself, again: what is going on in respect of the National Quarries: Let us ask of the board of National Quarries in relation to the hard evidence that exists in the public domain which has not gone with any answer, what are you doing about Raldon Construction and Gopaul and Company where there is evidence—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh): I want to thank the hon. Member for giving way. I will just wait until he takes his seat. Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 9(8), I beg to move that the Senate continues to sit until the completion of the business at hand.

Question put and agreed to.

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Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. Yes, Mr. President, I was saying let us ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs: what is going with Raldon Construction and Gopaul? We have a board of directors for National Quarries Company Limited dealing with a situation where importation of equipment happens, one piece of equipment ends up in National Quarries, another piece of

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equipment ends up in the hands of Gopaul and Company, Ralph Gopaul, et cetera, in their company Raldon it seems, working on SWMCO land site. How could there be no investigation into theft of state money, theft of state property? Silence on that but we want commission of enquiry into Dr. Rowley and Las Alturas referred to a “Las Planass” by my learned colleague.

Let us look again, let us look at the LifeSport Programme. Trinidad and Tobago has a situation where the Minister of National Security seemed to have been in open opposition to the Minister of Sport.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you to my learned colleague, Sen. Balgobin and to Members opposite as well. Yes, Mr. President, I was saying, in LifeSport, we have an incredible situation: Minister of Sport saying that there is absolutely no problem. In that regard, I think that everybody should reflect properly upon the contribution of Anil Roberts then, June 27, 2014: desk thumping galore, “no criminal gangs”, “no ghost gangs”, “bacchanal”, “PNM plot”. Then we look to the newspaper positions, and what do we see? Just by way of scanning, June 03, 2014:

“Auditor General cites discrepancies in Life Sport”

Article by Andre Bagoo, thousands of percentage points above. Next article, June 11 appearing in the *Newsday*, Andre Bagoo again:

“Griffith targets criminal elements in Life Sport”—Programme.

June 12:

“Howai on Life Sport audit: Probers need more time”

That is an article appearing in the *Guardian* under the hand of Gail Alexander. Next position, June 21, *Guardian* again:

“Life Sport not funding criminals—Kamla”

Article by Radhica Sookraj published in the *Guardian* again. Kamla Persad-Bissessar denied that the Government was funding criminals. Next article, June 23, *Trinidad Express*, Asha Javeed:

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“LifeSport requests \$32m more”

Next article, Alexander Bruzual, June 26, 2014, *Trinidad Express*:

“Bullets for bodyguard”

Next article, June 27:

“Roberts: No link between slain bodyguard and LifeSport”

Article by Joel Julien. Next article, Asha Javeed, June 28, *Trinidad Express*:

“LifeSport hold-up”

Next article:

“UNC PRO: Imbert’s behaviour shows what PNM would do...”

This is their campaign strategy-man himself, one Rodney Charles:

“... ‘In a calculated attempt to divert attention from (Opposition Leader Dr. Keith) Rowley’s greed in standing firm on his support for increased salaries and pensions even after Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar had second thoughts and put the brakes on it, Imbert tried to distract by going after (Sport Minister) Anil Roberts and the LifeSport programme making all manner of wild allegations that could only be stated under the protection of privilege enjoyed by legislators.’”

Well, he obviously did not listen to Sen. Ganga Singh who was in open support of the same Motion that he was criticizing Dr. Rowley for. That is the PRO of the UNC in the elections that they never had. He was probably appointed.

Trinidad Express newspaper, next article, June 30, 2014, by Ria Taitt:

“...Rowley to Howai: tell how much was spent on LifeSport”

And it goes on and it goes on.

But, do you know what the committee of the finance committee had to say?
Headline:

“Griffith”—meaning Rupert Griffith, hon. Member that he is—“mum on...LifeSport...”

Well, we know Sen. Howai was mum on LifeSport, we know Sen. Maharaj was mum on LifeSport, we know everybody here will be mum on LifeSport, but the fact is, Mr. President, that the allegations of funding of criminal activity were made in the public domain by Dr. Rowley on the promenade and by many members of the PNM. Secondly, it has never been disputed that there has been murder and mayhem arising out of this programme—it has never been convincingly disputed.

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Next, Mr. President, the fact is the Special Branch of Trinidad and Tobago can testify, if they could, that thousands of rounds of ammunition of high-powered weaponry have been found in the forests of Trinidad and Tobago where target practice has gone on. Let me repeat that: thousands of rounds of heavy, large-gauge ammunition, tens of thousands of rounds have been found in the forests of Trinidad and Tobago by the police. There is no mystery that funding of criminal activity has gone on in this country. The fact is that there is a direct correlation to the LifeSport Programme but we have no commission of enquiry into that; [*Desk thumping*] that does not deserve one. The contract to Daniel—how much was it?—\$36 million—\$34 million plus \$2 million—because there was \$2 million extra. No commission of enquiry into that; no Minister of Sport connected to a 2014 activity.

But, Mr. President, far be it for me to leave out contracts like SIS/NGC/WASA contract. No mention of that. We know for a fact that that NGC contract went out, it was rushed. Dr. Rowley had given allegations of bid-rigging as early as the budgetary contribution that he made. We called for the project to be stopped. We then moved, in the PNM, a Motion against that particular project. Anil Roberts stood up in Parliament and said that the estimates by WASA did not include 34 kilometres of pipeline, that they had to add on, and therefore, when you add on the moneys for the pipeline, you would come up to the SIS contract price when the very WASA documentation showed that \$60 million was included inside—the 34 kilometres of pipe was included in the \$100 million estimate. No explanation for that; none at all.

But hear the greatest: newspaper article coming forward:

SIS sub-contracting

Mr. President, I have in my hand here:

SIS request for price cover letter contractors

—a document sent out by Super Industrial Services Limited specifically asking for request for prices for the Beetham water recycling project.

So, they awarded a project that they obviously cannot do by themselves; they knock out international firms with capabilities to deal with this project—that does not worry this particular Government—knock out international players, bump up the price by \$400 million, but that does not concern the Government so no commission of enquiry into that.

But hear the greatest, September 29, 2014: NGC is instructed in its Finance Department to rush to prepare a cheque to SIS for \$100 million and the staff members were invited to do that without the vouching documentation. Let me repeat that: SIS gets an instruction, NGC gets an instruction, its finance department, to pay SIS—hurry

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up and pay SIS \$100 million and do it without proper documentation. “Buh yuh want to check Las Alturas when yuh could get de money back from the contractor”; if not the contractor, the engineer; if not the engineer, GeoTechnical; if not GeoTechnical, everybody knows the insurance on the project is there, plus China Jiangsu is there for you to reach too. So, \$100 million out, \$400 million over budget “buh doh worry about that”.

Mr. President, this is a Government of duplicity. [*Desk thumping*] This is a Government of double standard. I say that with a heavy heart. There are people opposite me who I have great like for, seriously. I have learnt a lot watching some of the Members opposite me in terms of ability, in terms of strategy, good politicians. It is a heavy heart that I say this with.

I do not share the rose-tinted lenses that some of my learned colleagues on the Independent Bench do, because when we have gone through the financial information, I am staggered by the Minister of Finance and the Economy’s admission that he split the moneys in CAL into half and put \$250 million in equity—odd—and another \$200-and-something million as the actual loans, when they have \$700 million plus \$300 million plus \$200 million in loans, in debts, in fuel subsidy, outstanding. And then the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy stands up—and because he is such a charming gentleman, and really a respectable man in his past incarnation and I am sure still now, he stands up and he says this at page 90 of his contribution:

“So I may want to reclassify this.”

That is what he says when he is caught with the trick of cheating the budget figures as it seems—

Mr. President: Senator—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Sorry, I withdraw, I withdraw—when he is caught with the trick of fancy financial footwork which appears to be a deceit but which we hope is not. He then simply says: “So I may want to reclassify this.” “Ah didn know, ah sorry, ah might want to reclassify.” So, it is easy on the Independent Bench, respectfully, to say, “Well, you know, good policy, everybody needs to have spending, and you know, ah like that”. Perhaps, I would say the same thing there, but the one thing—

Mr. President: You have three more minutes.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. But the one thing that I am sure of is that the benefit of a larger mind operation, mind work poured into documentation, is that we tend to flesh out information.

Now, Mr. President, there are many things that I wish to say, I wish I had the time. I wish to say to Sen. Small, in particular, that I do not support any form of attack on any of the Independents, and I could tell that he felt a great degree of difficulty in, perhaps, some of the interactions that he has had with the public over his participation robustly in the Senate. I cannot tolerate any of that and I certainly would not.

6.30 p.m.

I want to say, Mr. President, the staff members that are here have done a phenomenal job for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Clerk of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, the Hansard crew, the members of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the public servants, the Ministers themselves and the hard work that they were put through. We are all tired over the exercise; the Opposition.

But, Mr. President, I am very concerned that the documentation which should have come from the Standing Finance Committee, and which was supposed to be delivered fully by the Government on Monday of this week gone, has not been delivered. The reason why we requested information in writing, and were driven into that direction, was so that we could interrogate further, the exercise of the budgetary inspection, so that we could make sense of it in the Senate debate. We have been deprived of that opportunity.

The hon. Speaker was at pains to point out that there would be penalty for non-compliance, and I am looking to the House to see if that is really going to happen. I appreciate that the exercise may be difficult as it is the first time. Let me be generous and at least say that I am sure the public servants have been working hard at it. I just wish that we had the opportunity to interrogate those figures.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago has a very real conversation to happen on energy. I just wish to say that we have a serious conversation on the gas cushion that we need to explore, and the need for it to be retooled. It is a choice that we have: earn money by selling LNG or employ people by making sure Point Lisas Industrial Estate has gas to run its plants.

We are in a difficult situation where the electricity rates in Trinidad and Tobago are under serious pressure because T&TEC is running at a massive loss, and they are running at a loss because we do not have the ability to pay for power generation on the take-or-pay basis. I will wind up now.

So those are two very real conversations that I know the Ministers are conscious to find answers to. I hope that we can have that information quickly, and that in particular the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, charged with carrying the world of Trinidad and Tobago on his back, will get us the position of the gas master plan, and the renegotiation of contracts which expire in 2017 and 2018, as quickly as possible.

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I thank you for the opportunity to contribute and I certainly will now happily listen to my sister, when she has her turn to speak next, Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Hadeed): I am very pleased today to contribute on the debate before us, and I would like to praise the Minister of Finance and the Economy, [*Desk thumping*] all of my colleagues who spoke eloquently. I will like to say thank you also to the Independent Senators. I have learned a lot from what you have said, and a lot of it resonates with a lot of good ideas. I cannot really say the same thing for what I see in front of me. [*Laughter*]

I will like just to—[*Interruption*] just excuse me—say a few words in relation to the contribution of Sen. Cudjoe. I was able to collect some information about the *Galicia*. The *Galicia* is a roll-on-roll-off cargo vessel. It was designed and built for 130 passengers. Its carrying capacity is 7,321 metric tonnes. The boat is on a 12-month charter-party agreement; the lease arrangements with clauses to protect the client. The vessel is 11 years old. The vessel can take all cargo bound for Tobago with no delay in bookings for freight space including cement and other building materials. The vessel cruises at 22 knots. The vessel has a sick bay facility and it also has security cells.

We also have a charter for a vessel, the *MV Warrior Spirit*, another roll-on-roll-off cargo vessel, designed and built for 130 passengers. The carrying capacity is 3,400 metric tonnes, almost just a little more than half of what the other vessel can carry. The vessel is on a three-year renewable charter-party agreement with no exit clause. The vessel is 34 years old. The vessel cannot take all cargo and cannot take cement shipments. Therefore, shippers have to book in advance sometimes a month in advance, and cement has to be shipped by a separate vessel at an additional cost. The vessel cruises at 15 knots. The vessel has suffered major engine failures over the years and other mechanical defects.

Speaking about the ANR Robinson International Airport, the international airport has a capacity for 150 arriving passengers. We were making all sorts of attempts to have this, the ANR Robinson International Airport upgraded, but we have encountered a lot of difficulties with regard to the implementing of the construction of the airport. The reason for that is that the airport opens at 6.00 a.m. and the last flight leaves at 2.00 a.m. The opening hours and the closing hours of the airport make it extremely difficult to conduct repairs during the course of the operation of the airport. We are working towards finding a solution and discussions are under way with the Tobago House of Assembly.

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Regarding the Scarborough Port facilities, there are a number of historical wrecks on the seabed, which require further examination before any dredging can take place. We are in the process of having the survey done to determine the authenticity of the wrecks. The berthing basin on the port cruise ship facility requires widening which we are looking at. So until we can actually find a solution to the wrecks and the value of the wrecks, we just cannot do anything at the time.

With regard to Dr. Wheeler, I want to assure Dr. Wheeler that the Government will not proceed in any way to build a marina in Tobago, without getting full permission from the Tobago House of Assembly.

I would like to also say a few words to Dr. Henry. In his contribution Dr. Henry spoke quite a lot about the People's Partnership's deficit spending. I have here with me the Auditor General's Report, page 79 of 2007. In 2003, there was deficit spending by the then PNM Government; 2004, likewise; 2005, likewise; 2006, likewise; 2007, likewise. The Auditor General's Report of 2010, page 89, deficit spending. In 2008 there was a surplus of \$95 million; 2009, \$5,165,572,000 and change. And in 2010, there was a deficit of \$2.441billion, which was a decrease when the Government took office.

So I just wanted to put that on record and also to state that during the high income earning years, between 2003 and 2007, when gas prices and oil prices were extremely high, the PNM Government maintained a heavy borrowing and heavy expenditure profile, and the PNM did not put in place any emphasis on savings of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. They got big revenues and they borrowed plenty money. If the PNM Government complied and subscribed to the principles of the fund, we would probably have today in excess of US \$10 billion. I just want to record these facts because it appears that Sen. Henry sometimes distorts facts.

I will like now just to read from a publication here. I will like to read it carefully for all to hear. The author: it is excerpts from Sir Winston Churchill's speeches, No. 20:

"There is no finer investment of any community than putting milk into babies."

I will repeat it.

"There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies."

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A radio broadcast on March 27, 1943. The reason I read this out is a lot of people do not seem to understand how important it is to ensure that children, especially those less taken care of children, are given a change to grow up strong and healthy. A lot of times people talk, but they do not understand how vulnerable children are, and how important it is to ensure that we make sure that those little kids get the best nourishment in the early years.

I listened to Dr. Wheeler, a wise man. Dr. Wheeler suggested that we just do not only give them the milk when they are born, but we should do it when the mothers become pregnant. I think that is a wonderful idea, and I do not think it can change now, because the budget has been passed in the Lower House, but I am certain that any opportunity that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy can find to help the vulnerable in our society, he will so do.

I did not start my contribution here today to talk about the Ministry of Tourism, because I was questioned at the Standing Finance Committee in Parliament, and I explained a lot of what was asked of me. So I would like to spend time today to deal with some issues that I think are really important in the context of why we are here.

I want to point out to all the Members of the Opposition, more specifically, Sen. Al-Wari.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Rawi!

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: “I eh christen yuh.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: Rawi! [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: “I know yuh as Johnny”, all right? [*Laughter*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: If you want to say it, but at least pronounce it correctly.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I did not christen you.

Sen. Al-Rawi: I could call you Sen. Wadeed?

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: “Yuh kud say whey yuh want.”

6.45 p.m.

There was so much of talk by the good Senator about how much was spent, how it went and what could have happened, and everything that he talked about boils back down to one thing that I want to ask him. You said that you have your minutes when you were on the board and you maintained all your minutes. You said that, I presume. You said that you are a person in public life. You said that. You are prepared to stand on your record as a director wherever you serve.

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Sen. Al-Rawi: I have to.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: And you also said that you conduct your position properly as a director and you always ensure—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 35(5), Mr. President. I have the feeling that—if you want to bring a private Motion on me, I have no objection, but I am—

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: “I ent bringing no Motion.” I am just suggesting—

Mr. President: I certainly do not think he has improper motives.

Sen. G. Singh: You are a bit too anticipatory.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Perhaps so, but I have achieved my purpose.

Sen. G. Singh: You only talk like that when you have cocoa in sun, you know.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Bring a Motion.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I am only quoting what you said here in this Senate. That is all I am doing.

Sen. Al-Rawi: You are asking questions.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I am only asking you what you said and I wrote it.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Check *Hansard*.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: I do not have to check *Hansard*. I write what I have to say.

I have before me documents that, as far as I am concerned and as far as this country needs to know and I will quote the Financial Institutions Act.

1. Debars certain persons from management, including a director or officer of the company which has been ordered by the court to be placed in receivership, or adjudged bankrupt under the Bankruptcy Act. Also debars anyone from management or a director of a company whose licence has been revoked.
2. The Financial Institutions Act debars a person who is not fit and proper to act as a director or officer of a licensed institution or financial holding company.
3. Fit and proper guidelines issued by CBTT for persons holding key positions in the financial institution including one defining criterion: whether the person has been a director of any business that has gone into receivership, insolvency or compulsory liquidation whilst connected with that organization.

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I ask a question: what positions within a government are available for persons who are unable to be deemed fit and proper by the CBTT? I put those questions out because you were a former—

Sen. Robinson-Regis: Mr. President, 35(5): is this a substantive debate on Sen. Al-Rawi?

Sen. Al-Rawi: “You talking to me de whole debate?”

Mr. President: I see 35(5) as the question of whether improper motives have been imputed. I have not heard that yet, but I do have to caution Sen. Hadeed that you may not step over the boundaries whereby what you say might be taken to constitute improper motives on the part of Sen. Al-Rawi. Insofar as a Member of the Senate is concerned, you are not allowed to do that.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Thank you for the guidance. I rest my case. I come back to issues that were raised this morning about wanton waste in the sector, of what took place during the time of the PNM Government and this morning I heard my friend and colleague speak about wanton waste all over by the then Government.

I tabulated the amount of money that was wasted whilst the hon. Minister was speaking and it tabulated to approximately \$10 billion. I say \$10 billion because it was \$10 billion in wastage that my dear friend was talking about.

Now, I did a small tabulation on just \$3 billion, what could have been done and what \$3 billion could have been used for. Mr. President, let us deal with the gas to liquids. That was almost \$3 billion in wastage under the PNM Government, under the Cabinet of a PNM Government, under the management and control of a PNM Government and under a board of directors that was appointed by a PNM Government. So I am just going to say what \$3 billion could have done for this country. I am not saying what \$10 billion could have done, but the country will use their imagination.

Under this Government:

The same \$3 billion would have been better utilized for the benefit of our citizens. Under the health care services and hospitals, that money could have purchased 175,764 hospital beds at a cost of \$8,500 per bed. Imagine. It could have also brought 59,760 ICU beds at a cost of \$25,000 per bed.

2. Additionally, Mr. President, eight assessment centres for abused children in need of care and protection could have been constructed at a cost of \$1.5 million per centre, a total cost of \$12 million.

3. Three billion dollars could have given 6,000 additional homes at a unit cost of \$500,000 each. At an estimated four persons per home, this would have benefited 24,000 people. We are talking about a gas to liquids plant that you can see standing up there as scrap iron.
4. \$3 billion: 12 per cent of our population is over the age of 60 years. This is about 156,000 people. Currently, our monthly pension grant is \$3,500 and costs the country \$546 million annually. With \$3 billion, 136,000 citizens of this country could have benefited from an increased pension of \$4,500 per month, which would have provided coverage for over a four-year period.

Why I am bringing these issues out in such minute detail is because I want the country to know the wastefulness of the former Government, the PNM Government.

5. With the money, the Government could have built five Hyatt-type hotels, which would have generated about 5,000 additional direct jobs and at least another 2,000 indirect jobs in the service sector, including the small taxi operators, tour guides and food suppliers. This would have nearly doubled the country's room stock making us more attractive as a conference venue and generating a major source of sustainable revenue and employment.
6. The Ministry has a project for the creation of a sugar village and heritage site at the old Brechin Castle factory. Three billion dollars would have built hotels, conference centres, recreational facilities, a sugar museum and converted this site into a premium tourist attraction in central Trinidad. It would have put to good use the tremendous asset that was closed down and left to deteriorate by the former administration.

I was just thinking, that could have been the budget for Tobago for a year, just thinking about it.

7. The Ministry also has a project for the development of Maracas Bay. The former PNM administration had a proposal for the development of this area at a cost of about \$300 million. Mr. President, \$3 billion would have completed Maracas Bay and upgraded nine more such premier recreational attractions across the country, sustaining the tourism industry, bringing in revenues and creating jobs for persons in the communities. This would have covered all of our major beaches across the country.

What do we have for the \$3 billion, much less the \$10 billion that was wasted? All I can say we have—and I can see—is the rusting metal that is standing up there; that is what we know as a gas-to-liquids project.

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8. We come to the cruise ship industry and home porting. The Government could have upgraded the Port of Spain harbour so that larger cruise ships could utilize the harbour for bunkering and overnight stays. This would have added revenue to the economy through bunkering and other charges.
9. Eco-tourism: This money could have been spent on the development of the eco-tourism industry, for example, the nesting of the leatherback turtles along the east and north-east coastlines; major infrastructure such as roads, bridges, lights and other utilities could have been upgraded or implemented to further develop these rural communities, which would have allowed for further development of small and micro enterprises in these areas and directly impact employment levels. That is some of the things this \$3 billion that they wasted could have done, much less \$10 billion.

What would you do with \$10 billion?

10. The upgrade of the ANR Robinson Airport, which would have facilitated larger airlines, example, Virgin. This would have led to increased airlift to Tobago and, therefore, would have increased international visitors' arrival, generating additional foreign exchange revenues for Tobago development. We could have built two airports in Tobago for that—new airports.
11. The agricultural sector: they talked about the rejuvenation of the cocoa industry through mechanisation and re-engineering could have been facilitated Trinidad and Tobago as one of the best grades of cocoa globally. Local bean production is valued at \$2.4 million. It could have tripled within the last three to five years, had they used the money properly.
12. The Government has a special child grant of \$800 per month per child. This \$3 billion could have helped 31,000 children over 10 years—pay attention. Thirty-one thousand children over a 10-year period could have received \$800 per month. The Government currently has a housing assistance grant of \$15,000 per home owner. If you had used the \$3 billion properly, we could have assisted 200,000 households across the country, if you had used the money properly and not squandered it.

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The Government currently has a Medical Equipment Grant to needy persons who can qualify for wheelchairs, commodity special beds, dentures, et cetera, in the amount of \$7,500. Three billion dollars could have benefited 400,000 cases of persons with such special needs, our old, our sick and our needy, but no, \$3 billion is a stack of iron sitting down there doing nothing. You can do nothing with it. The Government Pharmaceutical Grant is provided for the purchase of medications not already covered under CDAP. Suitable persons are allowed a three-month supply of up to \$2,500 paid once per year. With \$3 billion we could have increased this to a yearly supply up to the value of \$10,000 which would have facilitated 30,000 requests over a 10-year period.

In conclusion, the last administration used \$3 billion of our money which could have been used for so many important purposes, and that was just one project. I would like to tell the House and the population of the \$1.5 billion spent on the Summit of the Americas and CHOGM—total waste of money. You could imagine what you could have done with that? What about the \$1 billion spent on the Brian Lara Stadium of shame? I wish someday the Government would just take that goodly gentleman's name off of the stadium.

I want to know if this PNM Bench in front of me will vote against citizens receiving increased contributions to registered annuities. I want to know if this PNM Bench in front of me will vote against personal allowances where people 60 years and over will benefit. I want to know if this PNM Bench in front of me will vote against first-time homeowners' allowances. [*Crosstalk*] You could say yes or no.

Sen. Al-Rawi: There is no vote here.

Sen. The Hon. G. Hadeed: Well I want to know whether you will support tax amnesty. I want to know if you will support corporate document amnesty. I want to know if you will support the film industry receiving more incentives. I want to know if you will support hybrid and electronic-powered vehicles coming to Trinidad with a duty-free concession. I want to know if you would support tax-deductible bonds so people would benefit from, the citizens. I want to know if you would support hotel and guest house upgrade. Sen. Cudjoe, I wish you would support that.

I want to know if you would support the inclusion of self-employed for NIS, where the Government would assist self-employed people between the ages of 50 and 56. I want to know if you will support Public Assistance Grants to the public servants and other people. I also want to know if you would support the Disability Grant. I want to know if you would support the financial assistance to underprivileged

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parents. I want to know if you would support deceased security personnel of \$1 million per family if they lose someone in the line of duty. I want to know if you would support Servol Adolescent Programme, senior citizens' pension, public officers' pension, and I want to know if you would support minimum wages.

You see, I have heard Sen. Al-Rawi in his contribution, I heard him making statements and all sort of questions he asked, but I ask here today whether or not the bench I see in front of me has any intentions, whatever, to support measures that would bring relief to poor people in our country. I close by saying thank you, Mr. President, for being able to say a few words here today. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I thought that the Government, given the fact that they have so many people who have not yet spoken would have gotten up, and I assume after I speak they will get up.

I think there are several issues that need to be dealt with in this debate, and as the last person to speak on the side of the Opposition, I am pleased to present another side, as we have been doing in this debate, of what the Government has been purporting to be the truth to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and to indicate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to the Government, because I know that they are well aware that most, if not all, of what they have been saying since September 08, when this budget was laid, has been incorrect and that they have presided over wanton waste and corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I start by indicating that I heard the Minister of Food Production, as usual, misleading the House and the public about the activities of the Standing Finance Committee. My colleague went into some of that but let me set the record straight, let me add to what my colleague, Sen. Al-Rawi, said. The Standing Finance Committee in its new form was as a result of the work of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives, and this committee, as he well knows, is comprised of Opposition and Government Members. So when he spoke about that the Opposition had no role in the committee, that is totally incorrect. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, if one were truly honest, when Members of the public and persons who attended the committee looked on at the work of the committee, we noticed that many Ministers were lost when questions were directed to them. They did not even know where in the budget documents to look—when a

question was posed to them, where should they look to see what the Members of the Opposition were talking about. As a matter of fact, it was only when the Chairman of the committee, the Speaker, directed them to the page in question that they understood what was being asked of them and where in the budget documents they could find the information.

Mr. President, some Ministers did not even realize that provisions for the Tobago House of Assembly were in the Draft Estimates for Statutory Bodies. When the Minister of Food Production seeks to denigrate Members of the PNM who participated in the Standing Finance Committee, I wish to point out to him that his label was totally incorrect because the persons who were highly prepared for this new Standing Finance Committee were the Members of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] So the Minister needs to get his facts straight and not do the usual song and dance to try to mislead the population.

Mr. President, I continue. It was so bad in the Standing Finance Committee that some Ministers did not even want to attend, they almost had to be dragged to the chair to account. Some tried repeatedly to disrupt the proceedings. They were totally unprepared and in most instances requested time to provide answers. The Minister has the audacity to say that the Opposition asked petty questions, but is it a petty question only because it revealed the many instances of wanton wastage and overspending by this Government? This Government is known for its squandermania.

I would also like to talk about, or respond to what the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, and I think the Minister of Food Production, also said about the Couva Children's Hospital and Invaders Bay. Mr. President, if you look at the estimates you would see that in relation to the Infrastructure Development Fund for the Couva Children's Hospital, Item 003, Head 701, shows the allocation for the construction of the Couva Children's Hospital, the draft estimates for 2014 were in the order of \$80 million; the revised estimates for 2014 increased the original allocation from \$80 million to \$220 million. The 2015 draft estimates allocate \$140 million for the project.

Mr. President, the Couva Children's Hospital was estimated at the sum of \$1.3 million and as a total cost, it has now been revised to \$1,520.9 million. At this point, where the allocation has moved from \$80 million to \$220 million, the hospital is only 24 per cent complete. I would like to place on the record that in relation to this hospital, Mr. President, there has been no final planning approval for this hospital. I would like to ask the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development if there will ever be final approval and if the Government will continue to build without planning approval for this hospital?

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Mr. President, there has been no final approval, there is outline approval and they are building the hospital; it is 24 per cent complete at this stage. We heard the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development talking about Invaders Bay and nothing much happening there, and the Government has not played any major role in the infrastructure at Invaders Bay because it is going to be a private sector project. However, under Head 67 of the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, Item number 001, shows the allocation of \$50 million for infrastructure development at Invaders Bay. Again, Mr. President, this Government has become known for its untrustworthiness and its ability to continuously mislead the public.

Mr. President, they could steups as much as they want, but facts are facts, and facts are difficult things to erase. A fact is a fact and these are facts. [*Desk thumping*] In their own documents these are the facts that are coming out. The Government has continuously said and, again, I go back to the Minister of Food Production and the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training who talked about under the United National Congress and under the PP Government there has been no discrimination, that the PNM was famous for discrimination and mismanagement, and, Mr. President, I want to remind this Government that in the first six months of their incarnation, over 3,000 persons were dismissed—in the first six months over 3,000 were dismissed, and within the next six months a total of 10,000 persons were dismissed from office because they looked like PNM supporters.

7.15 p.m.

You know what is very interesting, Mr. President? Even someone of the calibre of Sen. Small was dismissed by this current administration, a person who had worked for over 20 years in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, who had served as Acting Chairman of NGC was dismissed by this Government, and when he attempted to get employment elsewhere was blackballed by this Government. And they want to sit here in this Parliament and talk to us about discrimination.

Mr. President, this People's National Movement—while current Minister Fazal Karim was the secretary of the United National Congress, he served in the Ministry of Tertiary Education under the People's National Movement. So do not talk to us about discrimination.

Minister Hadeed mentioned that we should take Brian Lara's name off the Tarouba Stadium, but we are not the ones who in the first six months of government dismissed Brian Lara from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Why? Because you thought he was a People's National Movement supporter?

Sen. Bharath: That is why he is a sports ambassador to this party—for this Government.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: For the party? [*Crosstalk*] But you dismissed him from the UTT. You dismissed him from the UTT; that is a fact.

Sen. Maharaj: We have a bigger job for him. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: What bigger job? You only made him a sports ambassador after you went to India—your Prime Minister went to India—and you then realized the value of Brian Lara. [*Crosstalk*] And then you realized the value, because he was so well known. So do not try and hoodwink the population; do not try that.

Sen. Maharaj: Standing Order 35(5).

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: You want to go ahead and move it?

Sen. G. Singh: Take your time sitting down. You are eating up your time.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: This administration is known for its discriminatory behaviour against all citizens, especially citizens who they think are supporters of the PNM. You know what is so amazing? It was within one month of coming into office that the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to Mrs. Andrea Chambers a letter saying:

I refer to your employment at the New York office of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Consulate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in New York. I wish to inform you that in accordance with terms and conditions of persons employed on contract, your employment will be terminated with immediate effect—with immediate effect.

The daughter of the second Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and then they give posthumously an award to that Prime Minister. It is so farcical, with immediate effect Andrea Chambers was dismissed. And what makes it worse, in the letter it says:

In this regard, please be advised that you will be compensated for all your unutilized vacation leave and also be paid a prorated gratuity for the period of your employment.

To date, Mr. President, Andrea Chambers and others are still awaiting the prorated gratuity. They have appealed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They have appealed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to date they have not been paid the gratuity. Is this fair? Is this fair? It cannot be fair, and they are talking about a budget for all? They are talking about a budget for all?

I want to tell you how the People's National Movement operated when we came into government after the UNC, in this same type of circumstance. At the London High Commission, Candice Kelshall was employed as the Commercial

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Attaché, and when the PNM won in 2002 she was asked whether she wanted to conclude her contract and get paid off or work out her contract. She opted to work out the contract and at the conclusion she received all to which she was entitled: unutilized vacation leave, prorated gratuity. And this Government is talking about a budget for all?

They are so far from working for all in this country that they and all are starting to believe their own rhetoric. [*Desk thumping*] This is totally untrue. This budget is filled with inaccuracies, inconsistencies and attempts at all levels to mislead the population—at all levels.

It was in 2005 that then Leader of the Opposition, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, said, and I quote from the *Hansard* of October 07, 2005:

“In last year’s budget, in my contribution, I crunched the numbers in the *Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* with respect to four items of expenditure within each Ministry and I had dubbed these four, taken together, as the ‘propaganda vote’ in the budget for the various ministries. That ‘propaganda vote’ comprises the vote for entertainment, overseas travel, hosting and publicity. The vote for hosting is an entirely new vote that has been inserted in the budget by this Government. It was never there when the UNC was in government. It is an entirely new vote that has been created. The vote for publicity did not exist in the majority of ministries, under the UNC. These are new items of expenditure.

Based on what I saw happening in the budget and the fact that for last year, there was an allocation in the budget that amounted to a total of \$159 million under that ‘propaganda vote’...I wrote the Integrity Commission as follows...”

Mr. President, Kamla Persad-Bissessar in the House of Representatives, speaking in the Appropriation Bill, read out an entire letter that she wrote to the Integrity Commission complaining that there “was undue preferential treatment” to groups and individuals inside and outside of government in contravention of the aforesaid code of conduct and that the Opposition had not been given similar airtime or money.

But Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who each Member of the Government gets up and lauds how great a Prime Minister she is and she is the best Prime Minister since sliced bread—

Sen. G. Singh: Since roti.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Or she might be the best Prime Minister since roti.
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Lambert: In 2015 onwards.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: My colleague Sen. Lambert is saying that they will continue to do so. As Sen. Ganga Singh says, she is the best Prime Minister since roti, and if that is the way they feel, go ahead. But in 2005 she was very, very concerned over a series of votes that—and I repeat—“vote for entertainment, vote for overseas travel, vote for hosting and publicity” that she dubbed the “propaganda vote”.

In 2015, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy: Official Entertainment, \$320,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$533,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$931,000; Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Conferences, \$500,000. The propaganda vote for the Ministry of Finance and the Economy is therefore, \$2,284,000. That is the Ministry of Finance and the Economy’s propaganda vote.

The propaganda vote for the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development: Official Entertainment, \$60,000; Overseas Travel, \$1 million; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$700,000; Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Conferences, \$1,500,000. Total propaganda vote for the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, \$3,260,000. Tobago Development: Official Entertainment, \$350,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$400,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$1,200,000; Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Conferences, \$1 million; total propaganda vote, \$2,950,000.

National Security: Official Entertainment, \$2 million; Official Overseas Travel, \$8,700,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing—Mr. President, I am hoping that this figure is incorrect, but Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$20 million, under the Ministry of National Security; Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Conferences, \$7 million. Total propaganda vote for the Ministry of National Security, \$37,700,000.

Attorney General: Official Entertainment, \$100,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$1,100,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$300,000; Hosting of Conferences, \$1,200,000. Total propaganda vote for that Ministry, \$2,700,000. Ministry of Food Production: Official Entertainment, \$100,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$1,700,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$4 million. Food Production; Hosting of Conferences, \$5 million; total propaganda vote, \$10,800. Local Government: Official Entertainment, \$200,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$600,000; Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$1.6 million; Hosting of

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Conferences, \$1.5million; total propaganda vote, \$3,900,000. Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources: Official Entertainment, \$50,000; Official Overseas Travel, \$470,000. [*Interruption*] The rest of yours is in WASA. [*Desk thumping*] Promotions, Publicity and Printing, \$100,000; Hosting of Conferences, \$470,000; total propaganda vote, \$1,090,000.

Sen. G. Singh: Very small for a big Ministry. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: No, for Environment and Water and Resources. [*Crosstalk*] The total propaganda vote for this Government is over— [*Interruption*] WASA—yes, it is a different issue but it is there. It is in WASA, Mr. Minister of Water Resources. [*Crosstalk*]

7.30 p.m.

I have to take a drink of water for that. [*Crosstalk*] Again, this Government is clearly pretentious, overly pretentious. And you know what is extremely pretentious with regard to this Government? What is extremely pretentious is the fact that there are 38 Ministries in this Government, and one, two, three, four, five, six, seven I chose eight Ministries and that is a propaganda vote of \$64,684,000 eight of 38 Ministries, eight of 38 Ministries. And they want to talk to us about propaganda vote—eight of 38.

Mr. President, they continue to be so untrustworthy, and if, as my colleague is pointing out to me, if we were to extrapolate eight of 38, it comes up to over \$307,249,000. We could extrapolate. We will go through each figure, but if we were to extrapolate, that is the amount it would come up to—over \$300 million in propaganda.

But, Mr. President, you know what is even more amazing with the Government when we talk about propaganda and misleading the public, the Minister of Food Production got up here—[*Crosstalk*] nah, he did not say everything. I still have more to say.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Hold back some for him.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. President, the Minister of Food Production got up and tried to castigate Clarence Rambharat—[*Crosstalk*] you tried, but it did not work.

Sen. Al-Rawi: In your mind it worked. Delusion.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: He tried to castigate Clarence Rambharat. And the candidate for Mayaro—[*Interruption*]

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Sen. Maharaj: The losing candidate.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—who will win the Mayaro seat [*Desk thumping*] said on his facebook page—

Sen. G. Singh: “Count chicken in fowl belly.”

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—under the heading “Candidate’s diary” on his facebook page, and I quote:

“Devant Maharaj’s attack on me today in the Senate and his lack of research is amazing. First, Caroni (1975) Limited’s restructuring and VSEP was a negotiated agreement with the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers’ Union.”

Sen. Al-Rawi: So, Rudy Indarsingh betrayed them?

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: “My role was to implement that...”—[*Crosstalk*] you want to read it?—“agreed VSEP. Second, a year after the VSEP, the President General of the All Trinidad Union accepted a National Award.”—for his role in the VSEP. [*Crosstalk*] “In 2005 I declined a National Award for my role in Caroni (1975) Limited. Devant needs to tell the country who in Caroni (1975) Limited accepted the National Award.”

Mr. President, with your permission [*Crosstalk*] I would like to quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* of Friday, September 02, 2005, and it says:

“Indarsingh laughs off national detractors...”

Sen. Al-Rawi: Which Indarsingh?

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: “Medal won’t change me” and it is a story by Corey Connelly. And I continue to quote:

“Chaconia medal (Silver) recipient Rudranath Indarsingh...”—[*Crosstalk*] Are you all familiar with that name, Rudranath Indarsingh? [*Crosstalk*]—“says he is making no apologies for accepting the award.

Indarsingh, president of the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers’ Trade Union, was one of two trade unionists who were awarded the Chaconia medal (Silver) for their contribution to the movement at the annual Independence awards ceremony at President’s House, St Ann’s, on Wednesday evening.

However, Indarsingh has been criticised by some for accepting the award, in light of his strong stand on the Government’s handling of the now-defunct Caroni (1975) Ltd.

Hon. Senator: “Yuh” make him Minister boy.

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Yesterday, though, the outspoken trade unionist said he was not concerned about criticisms.

People have never agreed with all that I have done and criticism is part of life, whether it is in public or positive or negative criticism...

‘An award does not change me...’

He said he had the right to make his political choice and support whomever he wanted.

‘I consulted with the officers of the union and they gave me the go ahead. It’s something I didn’t just go and say ‘yes’ right out,’...”.

Sen. Al-Rawi: And he is in Government now.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: And he is now Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy—Rudranath Indarsingh, member of the UNC who accepted a national award for his role in closing down Caroni. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Mr. President, so when they stand across there and pontificate about the PNM being this, and the PNM being that, and PNM did not do this and that, I want to just tell them that facts are facts, and that is a fact. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, your Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy accepted a national award for his role in closing down—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: And instructing Clarence Rambharat to do what he did.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—Caroni (1975) Limited. [*Crosstalk*] So do not come to us, do not come to us in this Parliament and try to pretend. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, you know in 2010 [*Crosstalk*] this group of persons—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Maharaj: Which group of persons?

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: That group [*Senator points to the Government Benches*] the UNC, the COP, the TOP—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: It had no TOP.

Sen. Cudjoe: It had no TOP in Tobago for—

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: In 2010.

Hon. Senator: It had no NJAC either.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—the NJAC [*Crosstalk*] all came together and said to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the PNM was engaged in wanton overspending, in wanton waste, and they focused their attention on Calder Hart who was the head of a special purpose company. And they were up and down this country talking about new politics and accountability, and they said that there was squandermania and corruption and that would be a thing of the past if they were elected.

But, Mr. President, I do not know if you recall that sometime ago a Minister of National Security indicated that we had to have an SoE because the information that they had was that the coup would look like a tea party. But the squandermania, if it existed under the PNM, looks like a tea party compared to the squander mania and wanton wastage under this PP Government. [*Desk thumping*]

And Mr. President, no matter what they say, history and facts are facts. The PNM is the party that built Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] no matter what they want to say or what they want to do. And with the money that the PNM had, we constructed nearly everything that exists in Trinidad and Tobago today [*Desk thumping*] as the infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, I would like to point out what is wanton wastage and squandermania. Under the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Sub-Item 57, Caribbean Airlines (CAL), the estimates show significant payments in support of CAL for OPEC support, debt repayment and equity injection. In 2013, the amount was \$477 million. In 2015, it is estimated to be \$733 million, and this data excludes the equity injection of \$318 million in 2014. What is amazing is that there was no mention of this in the Minister's budget statement, no mention of this at all. I move on.

Under the Office of the Prime Minister, under Current Transfers and Subsidies, Non Profit Institutions, there is a new sub-item, just so out of the blue, no explanation. And what is that new sub-item? Religious Organizations; just so, no explanation, out of the blue, and the sum of \$50 million is proposed to be spent in this fiscal year.

Mr. President, there is another new sub-item, just so, out of the blue under the Office of the Prime Minister with an allocation of \$355,600—just so. We do not know. What is this for? It is a new sub-item. And you know, interestingly under the Office of the Prime Minister now is the NOC. It is not under the Ministry of National Security. It is under Office of the Prime Minister. [*Crosstalk*] So is it that the Prime Minister will be directing the operations of the NOC?

Sen. G. Singh: Operations are under national security.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Garvin Heerah whose name is being called in the “Flying Squad” issue, is he still the head of that?

Hon. Senator: Yes. He is head of NOC.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Right. Yes. And, Mr. President, you know on top of that \$355 million, the Office of the Prime Minister will also be spending the sum of \$90 million on the National Security Council. In 2015, the sum of \$50 million was what was allocated for that National Security Council; it is now \$90 million. And they are talking to us about squandermania.

Hon. Senator: It is in a vacuum.

Mr. President, under the Ministry of National Security—but if it is in a vacuum, you all give us an explanation. The Minister has said nothing. We just see new sub-items and new sub-heads appearing with no explanation, and money allocated. Money where previously—[*Crosstalk*] not conspiracy theory. We have learnt from how you all have operated from 2010 to now. [*Desk thumping*] So it is not a conspiracy theory. I repeat, facts are facts. Facts are facts.

Mr. President, under the Ministry of National Security, suddenly travel by helicopter seems to be the preferred way of travel by certain Ministers. In 2015, they are spending \$44 million on helicopter travel because under Maintenance of Vehicles which includes air vessels—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Maharaj: Do not hear wrong.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—of the Air Guard expenditure moved from \$20 million in 2013 to \$44.5 million to date. You are talking about squandermania and wanton wastage.

In 2010, under the Ministry of National Security there is a transfer to the SSA. And, Mr. President, let me remind you that this is the same SSA that Resmi Ramnarine, the telephone operator was supposed to head up, [*Desk thumping*] and listen to the amount of money, Mr. President. In 2010, the expenditure was estimated at \$23 million; in 2012, \$30.3 million; 2013, \$107 million; 2014, expenditure \$110million, and they plan to spend \$135 million through the SSA.

7.45 p.m.

And, Mr. President, I ask the question, what have we got for the expenditure last year, of \$110 million from the SSA? Crime is still rampant in Trinidad and Tobago. Persons are still being beheaded. The crime has not gone down, murder rate is up, and this is the kind of expenditure on wanton wastage. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing of any quality has come from the SSA. And, Mr. President—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Lambert: The Commissioner said crime gone down.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: There is more, but, Mr. President, as my colleague mentions the Commissioner, you saw today in the newspapers, and I am glad you mentioned the Commissioner. Mr. President, I am sure you saw today in the newspapers, where the Commissioner is objecting at this time to buying out the leave of one of his senior officers. But information coming to us has revealed that this is not the first police officer whose leave has been bought out. This Government is in the habit of buying out—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Lambert: That is normal.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, but they do not want to buy out the leave of this particular officer. It is Acting Senior Superintendent Gould, his leave was bought out. Assistant Commissioner Ramsubhar, his leave was bought out and 24, I repeat, 24 junior ranked officers of the Special Branch, their leave was bought out. But you know what is painful in this circumstance, Mr. President, the issue is, that when you buy out leave of certain senior officers the junior officers have a problem because they cannot see promotion in sight. And in the police service—*[Crosstalk]* Sen. Lambert, you know that that is true. You know that that is true. *[Crosstalk]* You are still in the union, right?

Sen. Lambert: I am the head of the union.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: They bought out your leave. *[Laughter]* But I am not saying it may not be a standard thing, but it is a usual occurrence under this particular Government. It is not usual for 24 junior ranked officers, and it was on instruction, bypassing the Police Commissioner, *[Desk thumping]* in circumstances where the Police Commissioner, because of the new way that the police service has been set up, is supposed to be in charge of his officers. It is not right.

Mr. President, I want to continue talking about—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Senator: It is late.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: I know it is late, but I must—*[Laughter]*—let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that it is a budget of wanton wastage and squandermania. *[Desk thumping]* It is not my budget to defend. It is my position to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand that you, for the past four years, have been squandering their money, have been wasting their money and have been mamaguying them on every level, on every level. *[Desk thumping]*

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So when you want to come here and talk about the PNM did this and the PNM did that, we are saying, yes—we are not saying that things may not have gone perfectly, under the PNM, but there was never this level of deceit, wanton wastage and squandermania under any PNM Government, from 1956 till today, and when we return to office there will be no such level of wanton wastage and squandermania, because the PNM has a history of working in the interest of all the people, of all—[Crosstalk]—you gone back to Prevatt?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. President, and I thank my colleague, Sen. Ganga Singh, for being so accommodating.

Sen. Lambert: I support you too.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Well, Sen. Lambert, you did not get up.

Sen. Lambert: Yes, I was about to.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: You were about, all right, okay. Thank you very much, Mr. President, and I thank all my colleagues for extending my time. But, Mr. President, as I said, the objective of my contribution is to debunk what has been said with regard to doing all this for the people of Trinidad and Tobago when there is so much wastage and there are so many people who cannot say that they are feeling that this budget or anything that this Government has done since 2010 has worked in their favour. More than that, people have been living with a spectre of corruption, with a spectre of wastage, with a spectre of feeling totally fed-up with the Government that currently occupies the corridors of power. Yes, Sen. Lambert, and I know in your quiet moments, in your quiet moments, Sen. Lambert, I know, I know.

Sen. Lambert: “All ah we tief.”

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. President, I just wanted—

Sen. Al-Rawi: Confession is good for your soul, you know.

Sen. Lambert: “All ah we tief.”

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. President, no, “all ah we ain’t tief, nah.” [Crosstalk] I was not there. I might be in politics long, but I was not there. [Crosstalk] I was still in school. Anyway, Mr. President, I know I am here a long time, but I was not there then.

Mr. President, I want to go on where this Government has continuously talked about PNM with cost overruns and they have been bringing in projects within time and within budget. Again, this Government is not being totally honest with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, even with themselves. Let me point out the projects where there have been cost overruns. And I start with the state enterprise investment programme: UDeCOTT—the Government Campus Plaza. And the quote is, UDeCOTT spearheaded the construction of the Government Campus Plaza which is aimed at achieving Government’s goal of swift and convenient public access to services of five of its Ministries and agencies. In 2014, the total estimated cost was revised from \$2,567.5 million to \$3,344.1 million, a 30 per cent increase.

Mr. President, the Ministry of Education Tower, the estimated cost of the project was revised from \$638 million to \$749 million; a 17 per cent increase. The National Oncology Centre. In October 11, 2013 in a *Guardian* report, the corporate communications manager at UDeCOTT Roxanne Stapleton-Whymys said the facility will be completed by April 2015, and be ready for use by October 2015. And in June 2012 the Minister of Health announced that the project would cost \$663 million and be completed by November 2014. The new estimate is in the order of \$891.7 million, and there has been an increase of 34 per cent over the original estimate, and at this point the Oncology Centre is only 18 per cent complete. I have to also indicate, Mr. President, that with regard to the Couva Children’s Hospital and Multi-Training Facility which, as I said, has no approval, the sum of \$78.5 million was utilized during the fiscal year and the project is scheduled for completion in 2016. The total cost of the project was revised from \$1,003 million to \$1,520.9 million; an increase of 52 per cent.

This is the Government that talks to us about bringing in projects within time and within budget—a 52 per cent increase. Under the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, development and upgrade of grounds, parks and spaces, the estimated cost was revised from \$699 million to \$752 million. The construction of a liquid fuel pipeline, again an increase, the estimated cost of the project was further revised from \$823.8 million to \$1,105.5 million. The upgrade of the Beachfield Condensate Storage and Compressor Facility—again another overrun—the estimated cost was revised from \$182.5 million to \$497.8 million—from 182 to 497—and at this point the project is only 40 per cent.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Nah.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: At this point only 40 per cent complete.

Hon. Senator: Which Ministry?

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Under the National Energy Company. The upgrade of Berth II. They talk about LABIDCO, the upgrade of LABIDCO Berth II, and this project entails the construction of 300 metres of quay. The estimated cost was revised from \$180 million to \$260 million. Again with LABIDCO, access roads.

Sen. Karim: Your glass is empty.

Sen. Ramnarine: Your glass is half full.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: It is not even half full it is totally empty. [*Crosstalk*] For LABIDCO. I know if Sen. Singh were here he would have—

Sen. G. Singh: Provide the water.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: For LABIDCO upgrade of access roads. The estimated cost of the project was revised from \$4.7 million to \$15 million. That is a tale of woe for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because in all these projects there have been cost overruns and they are not being completed on time or within budget. It is sad, that with regard to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and Petrotrin which is our patrimony, we have, and my colleague, Sen. Lester Henry and my colleague, Sen. Al-Rawi, spoke about this. We have a daily executive summary from Petrotrin.

8.00 p.m.

And process units, number 4 VDU—

Hon. Senator: The date.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Oh, sorry, you want the date. It is August 15, 2014, 24 hour report, ending 5.00 a.m.

No. 4 VDU unit has been shut down. No. 2 VBU, the unit has been shut down. No. 3 VDU, the unit—

Sen. Ramnarine: Is back up.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Number 3 is back up?

Sen. Ramnarine: Yes.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: All right. Well, on August 15 it was shut down. The cat cracker: “Reactors standing filled with demineralized water”—sorry, that is the MTBE. Under the cat cracker, the recovery at that time was minus 27.76 per cent and checks

carried out indicated there were numerous problems with regard to the cat cracker, and the cat cracker is one of the most important facilities, for want of a better word, with regard to Petrotrin.

And with regard to No. 1 VDU, the unit was shut down. With regard to the D 3 column, the unit is shut down. D 4 column, unit is down. Bitumen blending, they said, thankfully, that this unit was steady.

Hon. Senator: Then.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: But with regard to the No. 2, HTU, that was shut down. The hydrogen plant, the unit was down. The SRU, the unit on hot standby. With regard to the plant operations, generally, it was said that most of the steam-generation and plant-operations were in a state of flux because most of the units were down.

Mr. President, that is a frightening snapshot because of the fact that energy, despite the fact that we may want to move to other industries, energy is our mainstay and it means that more attention must be paid to what is taking place at Petrotrin.

I think, as I bring my contribution to a close, my objective here tonight—because my colleagues have spoken about major issues within this budget, major concerns that we have with this budget. But my objective was to unmask what this Government has been saying about being the best at what they are doing, and that they are operating in the interest of the people. I repeat, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are in a state of being totally fed-up.

You know, it is interesting that the person who, perhaps, expresses this best, or what the people of Trinidad and Tobago are feeling at this time, is the Prime Minister. Mr. President, in this picture of the Prime Minister [*Holds up newspaper*] taken in the *Newsday*, we see the Prime Minister looking to heaven, and I think that is how all of us feel. [*Desk thumping*] We are looking to heaven for help because that is where we have reached. Heaven is the only place. I mean, we have looked elsewhere on earth but now we have to look to heaven to help us as this Government continues to ravage the Treasury and ravage the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to just point out to the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, that there were certain things that he mentioned that I was very concerned about. The Minister mentioned that they are introducing the CVQ, and I really feel that this Government has absolutely no shame because the CVQ was launched in 2007. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: I will have to ask you to wind up, Senator.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: I will, Mr. President. With regard to the OJT—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Karim: I am the architect of it.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. President, with regard to the OJT, the Minister claimed that it was for the first time that the OJT was involved in the private sector. This is totally incorrect. From the time the OJT started, the private sector was involved, so much so that there were times when the private sector—we had to be encouraging them to participate.

Sen. Karim: I did not say that. I said OJT sectoral.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: And, Mr. President, I want to also place on the record with regard to two things—and I am winding up. I understand my time has come to an end, but I just want to place two things on the record.

One, the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development talked about the CSO and that they would be doing everything possible to find a home for the CSO. But it was on December 03, 2013, where the Minister sent an e-mail to his Permanent Secretary, and he said—and I am not going to quote the entire thing:

PS

My intuitive sense tells me something and I should not ignore it. CSO has to be dealt with. I got word today that the IMF is not happy and this will be reflected in their Article 4 Report. As a consequence, I must have action from you with regard to CSO.

Now, only because of the IMF report that they would take care of the workers in the CSO, Mr. President?

Hon. Senator: Shame. Shame.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: This is shameful. As I did with Clarence Rambharat, let me indicate that with regard to Sherrie Ali, she has a certificate of good character from the US State Department—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Al-Rawi: You cannot get that if “yuh” deported.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis:—and you cannot get that if you are deported. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, this Government must continuously be unmasked and that will be our duty from now until they get out of office.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Well done.

Sen. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment and Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath): Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to join in this debate, the fifth progressive budget statement from this Government. Permit me, first of all, to congratulate my Cabinet colleague, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for his stellar stewardship, in what can only be described as very challenging times over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, this budget statement represents, essentially, a continuation of the policies started by this Government in 2010. I want to just quote a philosophy from Mahatma Gandhi that I think guides a lot of what we are currently doing and we have undertaken since 2010. He said:

“I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong.”

That is what this Government has been attempting to do, to make sure that the playing field is level for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It was on that basis that we developed our *Medium-Term Policy Framework*, essentially looking at poverty eradication, people-centred government, personal security, a knowledge-driven economy, diversification of the economy and our foreign policy, in terms of how we dealt with our neighbours and the wider world.

That is why, based on all of the work that this Government has been doing over the last four years, I feel compelled to denounce, in the strongest possible terms, some of the statements that have been emanating from the Opposition—not just here but in the other place—which, because they have no valid arguments, they seem to have resorted to statements which are clearly intended to mislead, to promote fear and to instil panic in the population.

Today is a very good example. The last speaker, Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis, made some statements which, clearly, were intended to mislead. Or if it was not intended, it certainly did. And by the time I am finished, I think that the population will have unmasked her for what she truly is. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, she stood here in this Chamber and told this honourable House and the population, by extension, that there was no approval for the Couva Hospital. That is an absolute fabrication. [*Desk thumping*] I have just confirmed with the director at Town and Country, that final approval was given on the Couva Hospital in 2012.

Hon. Senator: Ohhh!

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Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: That is the kind of politician that the PNM has there, talking about issues confronting the country.

Hon. Senator: Shame. Shame.

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: Mr. President, she said that Brian Lara was only made a sport ambassador when he went to India and we saw his popularity. Brian Lara, Dwight Yorke and Daren Ganga, were made sport ambassadors in January 2011. [*Desk thumping*] The State visit to India was January 2012, a full year later.

Hon. Senator: Shame.

Sen. Karim: Hit and run. “Where she gone?”

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: Mr. President, she talked about discrimination, where 3,000 employees were sent home almost immediately upon this Government assuming office. Mr. President, nothing could be further from the truth. Board members that were appointed by the PNM were left in place for over a year by this Government—for over a year! She did not talk about the discrimination against people like Marlene Coudray who had to go to court when, in fact, the then Prime Minister attempted to move her from San Fernando to Point Fortin. She did not talk about the discrimination that Ganga Persad Bissoon suffered at the hands of the then Prime Minister when he was refused the position—where his position for Commissioner of State Lands was vetoed. She did not talk about the discrimination of Feroza Ramjohn who had to go to court also because she was prevented from taking up a position in the High Commission in London. She did not talk about any of those, Mr. President.

Sen. George: The radio licence.

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: She did not talk about the radio licence not being granted to the Maha Sabha at the time when another PNM supporter got. That is the type of discrimination she should have spoken about because she had no basis to make the statement that 3,000 people were sent home—none whatsoever. The last statement she made just now with regard to my colleague here, talking about OJT and the fact that this was started under their watch, is not true. Minister Karim spoke about sectoral OJT, which is a new thing, including OJT medical, OJT environmental, OJT agricultural, OJT airport. OJT financial today was launched. [*Desk thumping*] None of that existed under the PNM!

Hon. Senator: Where she is? Where is she?

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Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: So, Mr. President, everything that the hon. Senator spoke about today, everything she said, there is a dark shadow over everything, because nothing can be believed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: And all untruths.

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: One hour of misleading the House and misleading this Parliament, Mr. President. Earlier, I think it would have been yesterday—customarily, I speak after Sen. Dr. Henry, but again, Sen. Dr. Henry yesterday, again raised alarm and panic because he had absolutely nothing of any consequence to say. [*Desk thumping*] He talked about a global financial collapse in two years, and then he went to quote this website—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Zero Hedge.

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: Zero Hedge. And then Sen. Al-Rawi defended this website called Zero Hedge earlier today. Mr. President, for every one positive comment on the Internet about Zero Hedge, there are 10 negative comments. Let me just read two of them because I know that Sen. Al-Rawi attempted to defend this. It is actually termed by many people as a “rogue website”, and just some of the descriptions. Described by many as:

“...a big fat hoax. And if you read it for anything other than amusement, you’re almost certainly a big fat sucker.” [*Laughter*]

8.15 p.m.

That is actually a website run by a gentleman called Prof. Noah Smith, who is a Professor of Finance at Stony Brook University.

A second quote at another website called avaresearch.com. It says that:

“Zero Hedge is part of a deceptive network of Internet ‘patriots’ who are only out to deceive their audience while receiving undisclosed monetary and other forms of compensation in return for pumping up gold and silver, promoting other clowns in exchange for ‘favors’ and other activities.

In short, the individuals behind Zero Hedge are NOT to be trusted.” There are to be—
“view...as dishonest clowns with no credible expertise in the investment world. ..”

That is who the PNM rely on for their information to come to this Senate to debate a budget presentation.

Mr. President, Sen. Dr. Henry went further. He talked about the PP Government destroyed confidence, we were bad-mouthing the country, we were lying about the state of economic data, we were spending money with nothing to show for it, fiscal mismanagement of the highest order, many of the same claims made today by Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis. I know that Sen. Dr. Henry is an economist, but I did not expect him to be so economical with the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

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You know, Mr. President, I will not dwell too long on Sen. Dr. Henry, but, you know, in many parts of the world—and you would know because you follow parliamentary process and protocol—you have situations where people actually jump across the desk and it comes to fisticuffs. Our only means of attack or offence here in Trinidad and Tobago, our only weaponry, our only armoury, is our words, our wisdom, our wit, our knowledge. These are our weapons and that is the only reason I chose not to pursue any response to Sen. Dr. Henry, because to do so, really would be to take advantage of an unarmed man. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] So, I would not say anything further about Sen. Dr. Henry.

You know, as a nation, I think that we have become tired of the incitement, of the innuendo, of the inflammatory bickering, the rumour-mongering, the issues just like, for example, that the Government is going to eliminate GATE which Minister Karim put to rest today, but, of course, it has a debilitating effect on the population. It tires them, it angers them, it depresses them, and just for the purpose of scoring cheap political points we continue to do those things, many of them with unsavoury undertones. Many of them attempting to—like today, where Sen. Robinson-Regis talked about the discrimination in the public service and so on, calculated to evoke the most repulsive of our emotions. The most repulsive of emotions, similar to the Calcutta ship remark. You know, it is created to evoke those kinds of emotions that separate us as people and polarizes this nation.

You know, one of the things in particular they continue to talk about is the economic development across the country, and they insinuate very clearly that there is a purpose behind the fact that we are now empowering people across the country, that we are involving everyone in the economic activity and the spirit of the country by spreading our development across the country, and there is an undertone related to that development. They say, for example, there is nothing happening in the East-West Corridor. But you know, from Chaguaramas—with the boardwalk in Chaguaramas; the Diego Martin Highway; Sen. Dr. Tewarie would have mentioned the 46 projects in east Port of Spain; the Valencia bypass; the Galeota port; the oncology centre that she spoke about that they spent \$100 million on the foundation alone and it was just concrete and nothing was built, nothing could be seen—\$100 million. That is in the East-West Corridor—the proposed new Arima hospital; the expansion of the Sangre Grande hospital. They did nothing, nothing in the East-West Corridor and they have the gall now to come and ask us what we have done after all of this work in four years. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, all that the good people of this country want is change that will meaningfully affect their lives, and that is what this Government has been doing since 2010. From the Children's Life Fund, the 75,000 laptops that were given out in the last four years, the record number of schools that have been built, the new and modern health facilities that are being constructed, road infrastructure, widespread water distributions, sport centres, mortgage relief and tax relief for the middle income earners and increase in the minimum wage and in old age pension, no other Government I can categorically and unequivocally say has done more in the history of this country to ensure that every citizen is now secured. [*Desk thumping*]

I will go even further. Sen. Dr. Tewarie would have mentioned when he spoke that over 90 per cent of the promises made by this Government in its manifesto have been achieved. [*Desk thumping*] Let me put it in context because, you know, in the days when we were in Opposition, Pricewaterhouse always did a report on government achievements, and I will read some of them for you. The Pricewaterhouse reviews began in 2005, and what they did, Mr. President, was they did an analysis of government promises and what they actually achieved. They did up to 2008, but they always noted the pitiful record of implementation:

In 2005, under a PNM Government, 18 out of 100 promises were implemented. Eighteen out of 100;

In 2006, it was 28 out of 137 promises;

2007, it was 27 out of 117 promises; and

Only 12 of their promises in 2008 were implemented.

Less than 10 per cent of their promises. Less than 10 per cent. We have implemented over 90 per cent of our promises in the last four years [*Desk thumping*] and that leads me directly into the issues relating to the \$64 billion budget that have been delivered by the People's Partnership.

We are confident that the programmes and policies that this Government has implemented and will implement over the next six years will position Trinidad and Tobago as one of the most admired countries in the world, and because this 2015 budget document represents a fifth in a series we started in 2010, we must not forget what we have accomplished in the last four years. That is based on the fact—you know, Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis talked about squandermania. I would not bother to go into all of the squandermania of the \$300 billion that was spent, a lot of it which cannot be accounted for. I would not go into that. I think we have had enough discussion on it and I think that is the reason why we are here today because the population saw that and decided to put the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago in responsible hands, but I want to remind this population what confronted us four years ago.

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We had an economy that was weakened and ravaged that was in the red. For the first time in 17 years, in 2010, this country suffered negative growth of negative 4 per cent. In fact, we had raging inflation well over 10 per cent at that point in time, an energy sector in decline. Regardless of what they will want you to think today, the energy sector was already in decline when we came into office. I remember very clearly the last budget at the time, Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira delivered, she talked about the maintenance programmes that were to come and the capital expenditure that needed to have been spent, that they had done nothing about in the previous nine years. They stood in inertia and status quo and did absolutely nothing.

There was inertia in the non-energy sector, there was an increasingly violent and fearless criminal element, there was the collapse of the HCU and CL Financial, there were refunds for VAT, there were moneys owing to contractors, there were outstanding negotiations with the unions. All of those are the things that confronted us when we came into office. Added to that, there was an \$18 billion hole in the revenue streams. Do you know why? Because in 2008 there was a surplus of \$12 billion in revenue, by 2009 there was deficit of \$6 billion. Within the space of 12 months, \$18 billion in revenue disappeared from Trinidad and Tobago, and let me put that in perspective for you.

In 2002, Mr. President, the total budget in this country was \$14 billion. Eighteen billion dollars disappeared in the space of one year between 2008 and 2009, and these are facts. This is not spin, this is no manipulation in fact. These are absolute facts that confronted this Government when we came into office. Of course, we knew there was mismanagement. Of course, we knew that a lot of money had been frittered away, but we could not for a moment have understood the unprecedented damage that had been caused. And, of course, as a lack of the country's unpreparedness at the time, as a result of the weakness in our buffers, as a result of the fact that we had failed to diversify the economy and as a result of the fact that we were hurtling along a road that was unsustainable, we fell into this situation whereby the new Government of the day had to find a way to stabilize the economy, but at the same time ensure that there was no social fallout with regard to our polices. But we did it, Mr. President. We did it under the leadership of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. We pulled this country [*Desk thumping*] back from the brink of disaster and we have now positioned it on a path of sustainable growth, and they want to come back now and go back to where we were. That is what they are trying to do. They want to come back and go back to where they were, take this country with devastation that took nine years as in four years being completely reversed.

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You know, and that is why when my good friend—when I listened to Sen. Al-Rawi, his stock speech. It is the same speech that is regurgitated week after week. He rolled it out again here today, but it never fails to amaze me, and more so to disappoint me. His laboriously woven, voluminous fulminations I call it, where as a previous—oh, he has just arrived in time—colleague of mine, Sen. Wayne Sturge, had said that Sen. Al-Rawi always manages to say very little, but takes a long time in doing so. Well again, it was very evident today. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, he reminded me of a character called Sir Humphrey Appleby, who is a character in a sitcom called *Yes, Prime Minister*. When Sir Humphrey Appleby was asked by the Prime Minister on the status of a particular meeting he had attended, Sir Humphrey said:

Well, it is quite—“...simple. Prime Minister, certain informal discussions”—were held—“involving a full and frank”—discussion—“of—all the—“views, out of which arose a series of proposals which on”—consideration—“proved to”—lead—“to certain promising lines of enquiry [*Laughter*] which when pursued led to the realization that the alternative...”—options could under—“certain circumstances, be susceptible to discreet modification, which could lead to a reappraisal of the”—previous—“areas of differences...which if bilaterally implemented with...a little give and take on both sides...”—and—“if the climate were right”—could lead—“rightly or wrongly...”—to a resolution that might be mutually acceptable.

To which the perplexed Prime Minister said:

In heavens name, Sir Humphrey, “what...are you talking about?” [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

8.30 p.m.

He said, “We did the deal, Prime Minister”. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] So, Sen. Al-Rawi, hitherto, to be known as Sen. Humphrey Al-Rawi.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “I will take that from you, doh worry. [*Laughter*] They doh let you out often, ramajay ah lil bit, breeze out ah lil.”

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: Mr. President, let me touch briefly on the global scenario because they are our trading partners and, of course, we no longer live in a cocooned environment, and our trading partners really are the world. The situation is not grim, it certainly improved over the last two years or three years, but the IMF and the World Bank have downgraded recently global growth simply because there have been certain issues: the adverse weather in the United States; of course, the crisis in Ukraine, and the political strife in many of the Middle Eastern countries. I would not go into the details because I have agreed that I will curtail the amount of time I speak for this evening so that we can complete on a timely basis.

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But, the fact is many of our trading partners, including the Caricom market, are finding it very difficult to recover and, as a result, of course, our own economy is somewhat affected. The domestic economy, as I mentioned, has come out of the sinkhole of the \$18 billion that we lost, and the energy sector has come up, after the maintenance issues, to show growth of about 1.6 per cent in 2013, and the non-energy sector also about 1.6 per cent. The IMF has projected growth in 2014 to be about 2.9 per cent and in 2015 to be 3.2 per cent. But encouragingly—and I am sure the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs will speak about it—the energy companies have predicted or projected that there will be injections of foreign direct investment of between \$3 billion and \$3.3 billion in both 2014 and 2015.

Mr. President, the other economic fundamentals are also increasingly positive and the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have spoken at length about those: the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which is now 60 per cent higher than it was when we came into office; our foreign exchange buffers which represent about 12 months of import cover; of course, inflation and unemployment below the 5 per cent marker. Some of it at historically low levels.

I want to talk, however, a little bit about the trade performance in the context of how trade and industry have steered our people and our economy out of danger. The trade industry investment sectors have recorded excellent results based on the post-2010 reform programme. The reason for this is not a complex one, it is very simple. No other Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on a more aggressive stance with regard to seeking new markets for our manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago: to be able to create the economies of scale, to reduce unit cost; to allow our companies, not just to be able to be competitive on world markets where they will be competing, but to allow them also to compete on the local market where they will be subject to competition from global brands and global companies entering the Trinidad market.

We have achieved the complete turnaround from decline to growth because we have reformed the business environment; we have reformed our incentive strategies for investment; we have successfully pursued strengthening of our institutional regimes and, of course, we have achieved great progress in bilateral agreements with many of our Latin American neighbours.

Just to mention a few, we have embarked on bilateral agreements and arrangements with Panama, with El Salvador, with Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and, of course, we also have a Caricom-EC partnership which is with the European Union which gives us access to over 500 million people. And we are

still at the point where we are negotiating, as part of Caricom, the Canada-Caricom partnership agreement which expired since December 2013, but we are having some difficulties because other Caricom partners are at different stages of development and so therefore, that represents a little bit of a challenge.

With our trade policy and strategy, Mr. President, for the first time since 1996, the Government has now launched its new trade policy and strategy for the period 2013/2014. This was done last year and a significant part of that will be a national export strategy which, again, will be the first time Trinidad and Tobago is developing a national export strategy. I want to run through some of these quite quickly, Mr. President—I am very cognizant of my time.

The fact is also we are strengthening our policy environment; we have a new national consumer policy for Trinidad and Tobago and that is based on the fact that we understand it very clearly that there have been dramatic changes in the world as far as doing business is concerned. And so therefore, the national consumer policy will allow us to ensure that we prevent unfair practices against consumers; it will ensure that consumers are sufficiently informed and empowered about new consumer issues; it will strengthen existing legislation and, very importantly, it will improve the redress that consumers in Trinidad and Tobago have access to.

There has been a standing committee on food price inflation which has come out of the national conversation that the Prime Minister had with the Supermarket Association, and that committee comprises the Customs and Excise Division, the Port Authority, PLIPDECO, the Food Distributors Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, the Supermarket Association, the Chemistry, Food and Drug Association and the Consumer Affairs Division of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, and, of course, the Ministry of Food Production. And as the line Minister for Food Production would have mentioned, the food inflation is also at a record low of 2.3 per cent for the first six months—sorry, for January to June, it is 0.9 per cent. I think it is a 20-year low, from what I gather.

There is also a scrap metal policy that we have developed which will improve the licensing and monitoring system for scrap metal in Trinidad and Tobago. It will increase the adherence of scrap metal dealers with regard to health and environmental standards; it will reduce the incidence of scrap metal theft, and it will improve the accountability and transparency as far as the tax administration is concerned. We also have a used-car policy—dealers policy, but of course, unfortunately that is a matter of judicial review and I cannot discuss it here today.

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With regard to our economic diversification, there have been several areas and sectors that have been identified—financial services, ICT sector, tourism, the creative industry sector, agro-processing and maritime sector. But the true measure, the best measure of the progress of diversification can be found in the analysis of our gross domestic product. Mr. President, for many, many years, this country has talked about diversification of the economy but it has only been lip service.

For the first time, since 2010, this Government has rolled its sleeves up and taken the diversification of the economy extremely seriously, and I just want to give you an indication of some of the analysis of the gross domestic—the percentage that non-energy represents now. In 2010, when the Government came into office, the non-petroleum sector of the economy accounted for 58 per cent of GDP which was \$51.5 billion. By the end of 2014, it is projected that the non-petroleum sector's contribution to national GDP will be 60.9 per cent which is \$56.7 billion. That is no mean feat. What that means is that we have added \$5 billion to the non-energy sector in a mere four years in Trinidad and Tobago.

Just quickly, a few of the areas that we have concentrated on: financial services where we have added 1,000 new jobs in the last 18 months by encouraging companies to place their back offices in Trinidad and Tobago. We have done that with Royal Bank of Canada and Scotiabank and we are now encouraging others to look at near-shoring possibilities here in Trinidad and Tobago.

The creative industries sector where we have now given new incentives for the development of that sector in film, fashion and music. The food and beverage sector, which is an integral part of Government's diversification process, we have launched several initiatives. I just want to name one of them which is the attendance of the Fancy Food Show in New York that took place in July and also last year. And out of that, the true success is what has actually happened, what the companies have reported back to us.

Mr. President, Carib Brewery has recently sold 30 containers of Carib Beer into the French market as a result of having attended that show and they now have serious enquiries from Italy, Australia and some of the Asian markets. K.C. Confectionery—and many of us get their sweets passed around here in the Parliament—they are now in 150 Stop & Shop groceries in the US. They have recently gotten into Walmart in Canada and they are also now in Tesco in the UK. All as a result of attending the Fancy Food Show with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment.

National Canners are in discussion with Amazon to have their products listed online. Charles Candy is now in Kmart, Walgreens, CVS Pharmacy and Rite Aid, and Smaks, a small company in Trinidad and Tobago, is now distributing its teas to the InterContinental Carlton Cannes Hotel for its 100th-year anniversary celebrations. And it is also now selling its celebrated Chai Rum to the European luxury group, Camper & Nicholsons, which, in fact, is the global leader in all luxury yachting activities. The Roti Factory, believe it or not, who attended with us this year has entered into an agreement to ship an initial 105 cases of roti skins to a distributor in New York. And these are all Trinidad and Tobago companies competing against international competition and against the best in the world.

Mr. President, exportTT will continue to assist these companies with regard to the certifications that they require to be able to get into the US, European and other markets. We have already had visits from the Food and Drug Administration of the United States who have already qualified 18 of these companies to allow them to get into the United States market. Mr. President, the maritime sector is a sector that I believe is truly exciting for Trinidad and Tobago because it truly represents an area where we can replace a significant part of revenue from oil and gas with revenue from this particular sector.

You know, there has been talk that we have two ports in Trinidad and Tobago and that they are sufficient. The port that we are talking about in La Brea, which is not a new idea—in fact, it is a port that has been mooted, it is an idea that has been mooted by previous administrations. And the port that we are talking about does not represent competition for the two existing ports. This is actually going to be a trans-shipment port where containers do not actually come into Trinidad and Tobago, but are trans-shipped from port to port, but also, it is going to represent what is called a dry-docking facility. With the opening up of the Panama Canal, there is not going to be any facility in this part of the world that can do dry-docking facilities in terms of repair and maintenance for those size of vessels. And we also know that the ports in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of productivity and in terms of the equipment and so on, are somewhat outdated with and, as a result, it leads to low productivity.

Just to give you an example, in the Port of Port of Spain, they move on average 15 containers per hour; in Point Lisas, it is 23 containers per hour. And to give you a comparison of what the best in the world are: Jebel Ali, which is just outside Dubai, 93 per hour; Shanghai, 92 per hour; Singapore, 76 per hour; even Jamaica is 50 per cent higher than we have here in Trinidad and Tobago at 33 per hour. So it gives you an indication, if we are serious about competing on the

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global market and even protecting our own local industries, what we have to do because there is a significant cost involved where freight is concerned and where movement of containers is concerned. I have a lot here with regard to marine maritime but I would not go through it now.

I just want to give you an indication also of the ease of doing business which the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment has taken the lead over the last four years. Mr. Howai would have mentioned a few of those. But I want to tell you that in the last four years, Mr. President, this country has moved in its rankings from number 97 in 2010 to number 66 today, and there are only three countries in the entire world who have done better than we have. They are Taiwan, Malaysia and Panama. Trinidad and Tobago has done as good as almost any country in the world. [*Desk thumping*]

8.45 p.m.

I have spoken at length about the time it has taken to start a business. Recently, we have proclaimed the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act which, again, will assist. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment has, since 2012, put 27 new e-services on our TTBizLink, making it a lot easier for consumers to utilize the service with regard to online services, getting a national insurance number, getting a BIR number, VAT registration. We are now interfaced with Customs and Excise to ensure that there is a smooth interface between five other Ministries and the Customs and Excise, whereas previously you had to get those documents stamped individually at each of these Ministries and then go back to Customs, now everything is done by an interface on the ASYCUDA system.

You can now apply, for example, through the e-Vendor registration to the Central Tenders Board as a company. You do not need to physically go in and make any applications. Similarly, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, we have installed a port scanner at the Port of Port of Spain which, of course, is a non-invasive way of inspecting what is in every container. We intend to install four more scanners which have been generously gifted to us by the Government of the United States of America. One of them is here already. The other three will come in. And the intention is to ensure that we can look at, invasively, all goods leaving Trinidad and Tobago and effectively goods coming into the country as well.

Mr. President, many of my colleagues have spoken about the transfers and subsidies, but I just want to highlight a couple of them, because when we talk about transfers and subsidies, many people get the impression and they have been led to those thoughts on the basis of what many people inside of here and the other place have said. The transfers and subsidies that make up \$31.09 billion in our budget,

many of them are for areas that we do not always contemplate: Public Transport Service Corporation, \$290 million; Constituency Development Fund, \$410 million; GATE, \$650 million; the University of the West Indies, \$684 million; University of Trinidad and Tobago, \$430 million. Well of course, the fuel subsidy, \$6 billion; the National Operations Centre, \$355 million; the Regional Health Authorities, \$3 billion; the Housing Development Corporation, \$400 million; the Tobago House of Assembly, \$2.2 billion; local government bodies, \$1.89 billion. These are all necessary expenditure and when you really take out of that, CEPEP, which is what most people rail against, is only \$594 million, as is the Unemployment Relief Programme, \$542 million, and together—[*Interruption*]

Mr. President: You have another five minutes.

Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath: Yes—and together they represent 3 per cent of social spending. So, Mr. President, when you look at, contextually, the amount of money that is being spent in CEPEP and URP, it is insignificant to the other necessary expenses that go towards creating poverty alleviation, a knowledge economy, for GATE, and other essential expenditure. I agree with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, that maybe we need to look at disaggregating the transfers and subsidies figure so that it is not a misleading number.

As I mentioned at the start, I wanted to try and conclude within the 45 minutes. I want to say that, based on the arguments that have been presented here by the Opposition and I also know in the other place, that this is probably the worst and the weakest Opposition this country has probably ever seen, probably ever had. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, there has been no valid argument that has been advanced by the Opposition, against the budget. They have argued for the sake of arguing. They have opposed for the sake of opposing. This Opposition is probably as weak and can only probably be rivalled by the one in 1971, Mr. President, when there was a no-vote campaign and there was actually no Opposition at all.

It is patently clear that they have absolutely no vision for Trinidad and Tobago. I heard a comment made by Mr. Imbert, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East on CNC3, on September 22, 2014, which, at the time, surprised me and shocked me a little, but in retrospect I realize he was absolutely correct. This is what he said, and I quote:

What happens with the PNM is we become arrogant. We stop listening and we get voted out. We go into Opposition and we listen. One of the problems that we have as a party is that when we get back into government we stop listening.

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Mr. President, that sums up those on the other side. [*Desk thumping*] It sums them up to a T. [*Desk thumping*] Their only plan is to attempt to strike fear and instil panic in the hearts of our citizens.

I am reminded actually of the cartoon movie called *Monsters, Inc.* It represents monsters whose daily job is to frighten and scare little children in the human world and the power grid in Monstropolis, which is the city of the monsters. It runs on power generated by the screams of these children in the human world. And the greater your capacity to scare, the higher you reach in the hierarchy of that system. And this is what I believe, it is how the PNM's present hierarchy has reached the leadership, by attempting to scare people as much as possible and to create as much panic so that they believe that that is what is going to get them to Government and into office.

Mr. President, leadership takes courage, courage to make tough decisions for the long-term benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and no other Prime Minister in the history of this country has had to make as many tough decisions as Kamla Persad-Bissessar has had to make, tough decisions like joining in the fight against terrorism, as part of the UN Resolution which the Opposition, again, has failed to understand. They suffered the people in Government and now they have deserted them in Opposition and this is why this country will always be with us. The people see what we are doing and they feel confident that there is a place here for everyone.

Mr. President, we started off with a vision of prosperity for all, and today, four years later, the people have won. There are no secrets of how we did it, there are no complexities, there are no hidden agendas. Mr. President, we did it by putting political power in the hands of our people. We did it by protecting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. We did it by delivering the broadest spectrum of training for anyone who wishes to improve their skills and income potential. We did it by delivering measures that will give young men and women a better chance of homeownership and we are continuing to do it, through measures to ensure that our elderly can live comfortably and with dignity in life after work. This, Mr. President, is what it means to secure the prosperity of all of our people. Mr. President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. President. We started in the House of Representatives on September 08, 2014, and we are here today on October 01, 2014, almost one month later. We have gone through four days of debate in the House of Representatives, four days of the Standing Finance Committee, which is

in itself an historic accomplishment, and this is the second day of debate on this budget in the Senate and I want to pay tribute, therefore, to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Larry Howai who must be at this point in time, although he does not show it, a tired man. *[Desk thumping]* I pay tribute to him and what we did not mention is that in the middle of all that he also had to pilot the Proceeds of Crime Bill through the House of Representatives. So it has been a very busy period for him and we recognize his contribution to Trinidad and Tobago on what is his third budget. *[Desk thumping]*

We also recognize the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and I want to resonate a bit with what Dr. Tewarie said about the Prime Minister, because it is something that had actually crossed my mind at one point in time. The Prime Minister has achieved what has not been achieved on three other occasions in the history of this country, and that is that she has held a Government together for the full term of five years. *[Desk thumping]* That is an accomplishment, because Mr. Manning was not able to achieve that with his 1991 term. Mr. Panday was not able to achieve that with his 2001 term and Mr. Manning did not achieve that when he was re-elected in 2007. His term ended prematurely.

This Government is now into, I think it is four years and four months roughly and it is very clear that we are headed for the full five-year term and the outer limit and a second term. So that in itself, holding a coalition together in a country like Trinidad and Tobago, with so many forces arrayed against you, is in itself an accomplishment and we pay tribute to the leadership of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. President, my contribution, like that of my colleagues before me, will not exceed 45 minutes, much to the relief of many of the Senators here tonight at 8.55 p.m. I, as many would know, was summoned to the House of Representatives to be the third speaker in the debate in that place, in response to a number of Members of the Opposition Bench treating with the issue of energy and it is clear that that was a part of the strategy in this budget debate of the Opposition, to treat with issues related to energy. So I am very happy to be given a second opportunity to respond to the budget.

I would start off by saying the energy sector—as those of you all who would have read the *Review of the Economy*, or who would have perused the appendices of the *Review of the Economy*—accounts for about 40 per cent of the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago at constant 2000 prices. And, according to appendix 21, page 85 of this document, the energy sector is expected to deliver some \$23 billion in revenue in fiscal 2014, which is the fiscal year ended midnight

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last night, September 30, 2014. But that figure could be slightly misleading and I would like to explain. That is \$23 billion but it does not include corporation tax, Dr. Mahabir, paid by companies at Point Lisas and by Atlantic LNG. So, should we include the corporation tax into that \$23 billion figure, it is going to be a lot higher than \$23 billion.

So the contribution of the sector to the economy continues to be robust from a revenue point of view. It contributes roughly 50 cents of every dollar of government revenue. We continue to enjoy the confidence of all the multinationals that operate in this country. Seventeen per cent of BP's global production is Trinidad, 12 per cent of BG's global production is Trinidad, and we are now the No. 1 business in the world for Repsol from a volumes point of view and we remain, as Sen. Small reminded us, a major exporter of liquefied natural gas.

On the issue of Sen. Small, before I forget, I want to first of all say Sen. Small's name was mentioned by Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis in her contribution, and before I come to what she has said, I want to say Sen. Small is a former Director of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs where he served with distinction for, I think something like almost three decades.

Sen. Small: Twenty-three years.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Twenty-three years, sorry. And he was also a Director at the National Gas Company for nine years and in both capacities I have never heard anything bad being said about Sen. Small. I have only heard good things being said about Sen. Small. [*Desk thumping*] I want to place on the record that Sen. Small, from what I have been advised, was not fired from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. He took the decision to retire from the public service and he is now in his private capacity as an energy consultant. So he was not fired. I want to put that on the record, because when you say somebody is fired, it is not necessarily a good label to attach to that person's career.

Hon. Senator: She said that?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes—Sen. Small was fired from the Ministry. So Sen. Small, I just wanted to put that on the *Hansard* record, on your behalf. That clearly was not true.

9.00 p.m.

I will come to some of the other issues that were raised but, again, staying with Sen. Small, in his contribution he made—his favourite topic being LNG because he was in that capacity on the NGC board.

Through you, Mr. President, we are totally aligned that Trinidad and Tobago needs to have a bigger share of the revenues that are generated by the entire LNG industry. When it comes to the 2018 renegotiation of Train 1, that is the position that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has articulated up front, that we will be coming for a larger equity position in Train 1.

We have also signalled to BP—this happened when Minister Howai was Chairman of the NGC—that we would like to market our LNG cargoes from Train 4. So there are three dedicated cargoes from Train 4 that belong to the NGC that used to be marketed by BP on behalf of the NGC, the NGC now markets those cargos on their own. There are also fractions of cargoes—as you would know—from the Train 4 contract that belong to the NGC. We have signalled to BP that we would like to aggregate those fractions—it will become six or seven more cargos, I am told, therefore the NGC portfolio of LNG cargoes would increase. The objective, of course, is to increase the NGC's presence in the global marketing of liquefied natural gas.

So, those are two of the things. The other thing, again, which we have alignment on is we have—as Sen. Small said—put in place a platform for the next evolution of the energy sector, and I will come to that.

Hon. Senator: Tell her LNG means “lying not good.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: The other issue which featured prominently—I had an audit done, actually, on the *Hansard* of Members of the Opposition in the House of Representatives to see what were the issues. I had my research staff go through the *Hansard* with a fine-tooth comb and the issue that featured most prominently was the issue of the curtailment of natural gas, not only to Point Lisas but also to Atlantic. There was a letter from the Point Lisas Energy Association, which was a confidential letter written to me, that was presented to the Parliament in the debate by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West and Point Lisas Energy Association has since written to me saying that they did not leak that letter to the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, but letters have a way of finding their way—and emails have a way of finding their way everywhere.

Coming now to the issue of curtailment, because our friend, Sen. Henry, the man we now know as Zero Hedge—I think that is a name that may stick on him—quoted from a *Guardian* article that was based on a press release that was done by BP. I have the actual press release here. I am not reading from the *Guardian's*

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interpretation of the press release, I have the actual BP press release. This press release was in response to all the noise that was taking place in the other place around gas curtailment. I would read what BP says, very carefully, because it is a very significant point.

BP says, September 19, 2014:

“The lower production that has resulted in the gas curtailments recently experienced by both [Pt Lisas Industrial and Atlantic LNG] is primarily a result of a pause in new investment in recent years by upstream producers, including BpTT, due to the culmination of many factors which created an unfavorable investment climate.”

So, that is the first sentence.

Now, what are the recent years to which BP is referring? The recent years to which BP is referring could not be the year 2014, could not be the year 2013, could not be the year 2012 or the year 2011. I have a very good friend, whose name I shall not call, but he told me keep repeating facts and they stick.

This is Central Bank data: energy-related foreign direct investment—

I am starting off with the year 2008, just to give you a starting point. In 2008, Mr. President, energy-related FDI was US \$589 million. In 2009 it was US \$647 million. In 2010, US \$501 million. So, that is what it was 2008 to 2009. In 2011, US \$1.7 billion. So, there is an increase from US \$501 million to US \$1.7 billion in the space of 2010 to 2011. In 2012 it was US \$2.2 billion and in 2013 it was US \$1.4 billion. If we add the FDI for the period 2011 to the period 2013 it is US \$5.3 billion. If you look at the FDI for the preceding three-year period it is somewhere in the region of 1.4 or something like that. It has increased by a factor of three.

So, when BP talks in their press release about recent years, Sen. Henry read the article from the *Guardian* and, you know, he thought he had an “aha” moment and “I caught you, it is your fault. It is under you that this recent pause in investment took place.” The facts will always bear out that the pause in investment took place in that period before this Government came into power. In fact, I described it as an acute collapse in foreign direct investment in the energy sector. These are the facts; those are just the facts; this is what the Central Bank data says. Now, what are the reasons for that collapse in foreign direct investments?

I have said this many times and, apparently, some people hear, some people do not hear. The energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago spent a very long time lobbying the former Government for changes to the fiscal regime. I am going back all the way to an article in the *Guardian*, September 18, 2003. This is the

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Guardian and it is South Chamber Slams Manning on Taxes. This is 11 years ago. You see, what happens 11 years ago has an impact today, in this sector. What is happening today is not a function of yesterday in the energy sector. It is like if you get a heart attack today, it is not because of what you ate last night or the day before, it is what you have been eating for the last 10 years.

So, the article says:

The South Chamber of Industry and Commerce...

Now called the Energy Chamber.

...accused Prime Minister Patrick Manning of reneging on a promise for his Government to favourably consider the revision of the fiscal regime for onshore oil production. They also demanded an explanation for his decision pointing out if Manning does not reverse his decision the sector could face terminal decline and loss of thousands of jobs.

That was the Energy Chamber 11 years ago. You know research is a great thing. You come now to the year 2005, March 2005 an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* by David Renwick; it talks about "Tax reform may kill the goose." Again, it talks about the lack of movement on the reform of the fiscal regime that governs the energy sector. It goes on to say:

"If the sloppy handling of acreage allocation in the 2003-2004 bid round had damaged the credibility of the Government and the Energy Ministry As I suggested last week then so has the energy tax reform issue which has been dragging for years now."

I know what I am saying here, people are going to repeat the same thing next year. Right, but I have to keep saying what the facts are.

April 21, 2005, *Trinidad Guardian*, again; an article by the South Chamber of Industry and Commerce: "Tax Regime may scare off investors." It says:

"On March 11—2005-bpTT announced its plans to sell their Teak Samaan and Pouli (TSP) assets exactly one month later...Venture Production plc, the Aberdeen based oil and gas production company released their preliminary results for 2004, and included in their report a public statement that they are in the process of withdrawing from—Trinidad.

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Venture went on to cite that the anticipated fiscal reform did not materialize during 2004, which prompted the company to conduct the recently completed strategic review of its operations in Trinidad and Tobago and Venture withdrew from Trinidad and Tobago. So, there was a decade when there was little or no change to the fiscal regime.

In this budget there has been no change to the fiscal regime, but in every budget before this—the four budgets before this—the Government has brought to Parliament revolutionary changes to the fiscal regime that governs the energy sector. As a consequence, the sector has responded. I just read the foreign direct investment numbers to show that we have had an increase in foreign direct investment.

We have had an announcement today—if you read the papers today—by Nigel Darlow of Atlantic, where he is saying Atlantic plans to spend US \$2 billion or TT \$13 billion in the next five years on CAPEX and OPEX, but mainly CAPEX, for their Atlantic plant. We have had the recent announcement by BP of their decision to sanction the Juniper investment US \$2.1 billion to be spent over the next three years. Construction on that platform will start in the fourth quarter of 2014; construction is going to happen in the fabrication yard in La Brea. It is a great signal for the economy and for the south-west peninsula that the fabrication yard is roaring back to life; because the fabrication yard was, more or less, dormant for the last four years.

So, we have gotten the wheel of investment to begin to turn. Juniper will bring on 590 million standard cubic feet of gas per day by the year 2017. That is a significant amount of gas. That is 14 per cent of what we currently produce here in Trinidad and Tobago. So, if we have curtailment today, it is because of decisions that were taken, or not taken, in the last decade.

Hon. Senator: By the PNM.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: The second issue, which BP alludes to in their press release is, of course, the maintenance issue—the maintenance issue is a function of the April 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico which caused BP to go on a global maintenance programme of all their assets around the world. I think I want to also mention that the Ministry is pursuing, aggressively, full membership for Trinidad and Tobago in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. We received, yesterday, our second report from the Trinidad and Tobago Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative board, which is chaired by Victor Hart. Why is that relevant? Well, in the past we would know what the total tax figure is for the energy sector. So, we would know from the *Review of the Economy* that the total tax bill is around \$23 billion and I said that there was some more form corporation tax, royalties and so on, but what we never knew was what individual companies paid in terms of tax to the Treasury.

What the EITI report tells us is that the largest taxpayer, by far, in Trinidad and Tobago is bpTT followed by the NGC, which is a distant second and followed by BG, right behind the NGC, followed by EOG Resources Inc. So, our largest taxpayers are companies operating in the natural gas business. Can we get a larger share of the LNG business?

Sen. Small: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: The answer is, we must get a larger share of the LNG business going forward; it should be part of the policy of any government for the next 10 years because there simply is a lot more value to capture in that business.

BP goes on in their press release to say:

Measures have, however, been taken to improve the attractiveness of investment in the sector...

that is the measures that have been taken in recent years.

...such as improved fiscal terms and more frequent bid rounds.

And there is clear evidence that investment is returning. It will, however, take time to rebuild the upstream.

When we listened to the debate in the Lower House, we heard one Member of Parliament say Petrotrin is a refinery. I heard that being said by the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin.

Petrotrin is a refinery, Mr. Speaker, that is what it is; it is a refinery.

There are people who believe that is what it is because that is what they see, from the highway. When they drive down the highway they see. So, if Petrotrin is a refinery then Trinmar must be a popcorn factory. Right? Minister Marlene Coudray is from the Point Fortin area and she would know about Trinmar; and the land fields and so on, they ignore that. Petrotrin has an upstream dimension to it; and Petrotrin has featured, very prominently, in this budget debate. I want to say a couple things about Petrotrin.

First of all, we must understand where we are today and where we were in 2010. In 2002 the total debt of Petrotrin, total liabilities, was TT \$3.3 billion. By 2010 that had snowballed to around TT \$12.5 billion. The driving force behind that fourfold, or 400 per cent increase in debt, was the fact that the company had gone out for two bonds: one for US \$850 million and one for US \$750 million to finance the gasoline optimization programme and to finance things like the World GTL project. In that period there was little or no emphasis on upstream on Trinmar

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and Trinmar was allowed to run down. I heard it was said by the Opposition that we are deliberately running down Petrotrin so we could privatize it. Well, that is the exact conspiracy theory that I heard about them, that they were deliberately running down Trinmar to sell Trinmar so they could pay off for the GTL plant and be happy and so on.

I want to talk a bit about maintenance in the refinery because Sen. Al-Rawi raised the refinery saying that 19 of the 21 plants were down. *[Interruption]* That is a today's report? Okay.

This is from Petrotrin seven process plants—this is for the period 2005.

9.15 p.m.

I want to give an indication of maintenance; maintenance is important. For the period 2005 to the period 2010, seven process plants were taken offline in the refinery, at a cost of \$176 million. In the period 2011 to 2014, so that is a five-year period, you have, well, if you consider a six-year period, seven plants taken offline in the period 2005 to 2010. In the period 2011 to 2014, 15 plants were taken offline for maintenance. So the frequency of maintenance in the refinery has greatly increased because we simply had no focus on maintenance for almost a decade. Many of those plants are now in a state where they have to be taken offline, and they have to be taken offline for maintenance.

With regard to the current state of the refinery, Sen. Al-Rawi said 19 out of 21 plants are down. I am advised that three plants are offline at this point in time for maintenance. Six consequential plants are offline, which means that those three plants would feed, feedstock into other plants. So if you take one off, you have to take the one that is receiving the output of the previous plant off, and five plants are off for economic reasons. That is a total of 14 plants offline, out of a total of 25 plants on the estate in the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. So I just wanted to make that point pellucidly clear.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That concerns you, of course.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Of course, it concerns us. And the refinery has suffered from a long period of a lack of maintenance, and that is being corrected as we speak.

I also want to talk a bit about the deepwater, because in the other place, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East spoke a lot about the last deepwater bid round. We have had three deepwater bid rounds under this Government, and two of them have happened under me as Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. In total, we have had five bid rounds under this Government. I just want to say that in the first deepwater bid round that was held under me, we put out six blocks. We received bids on five blocks, and we received a total of 12 bids from which we signed four production-sharing contracts.

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There was a bid round last year, which is the one that was being referred to by the Member for Diego Martin North/East in the other place. We put out six blocks again, we received three bids on two blocks, and he said that is actually a failure. Well, again, going back into the research at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, in the archives, the 2006 deepwater bid round was a very interesting bid round, and the article says, December 16, 2006 deepwater block attracts only one bid. This was the failed deepwater bid round that was put out by the former administration, where they put out eight blocks, Mr. President, they got bids on one block, and that one bid withdrew.

What we have done is nothing short of historic. We have opened up the deepwater to exploration as never before. There are currently seven deepwater production-sharing contracts. Two more will be signed shortly, and in the last four years, the last three years in particular, we have signed 12 deepwater production-sharing contracts, and we have almost doubled the amount of deepwater production-sharing contracts that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs manages.

I want to talk a little bit about illegal diesel bunkering, which is something I know is very near and dear to the heart of our colleague Sen. Drayton, who is not here. Before I do that, I want to pay tribute to Insp. Sahadeo Singh [*Desk thumping*] whose funeral was today. You would notice that in the newspapers today, National Petroleum took out a full page ad celebrating the life of Insp. Sahadeo Singh. I will put on the record of *Hansard*, that Insp. Sahadeo Singh was very instrumental in breaking up a lot of the diesel racket in the Sea Lots area. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, I recall on a Saturday, calling then Minister of National Security Minister George and asking him to meet—I think it may have been a Sunday—asking him to meet me in the back of Sea Lots with Insp. Singh, where they were excavating a series of underground tanks that had hoses attached to them and so on. The data would show that in the year 2000—Ministers have spoken about the transfers and subsidies, and I will say the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs has been allocated about \$6.2 billion in this budget of which \$6 billion is for the subsidy. We expect the subsidy to run somewhere between \$4 billion to \$4.5 billion as it normally does.

But there has been a significant reduction in the demand or the sale of subsidized diesel in Trinidad and Tobago, from 649,000,000 litres in 2010, to 514,000,000 litres in 2014, that is a 21 per cent reduction in the sale of subsidized diesel. That victory, that achievement, is attributable to many people including the deceased Insp. Sahadeo Singh. So I want to pay my respects to him and pay my condolences to his family for the role that he played in law enforcement in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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The other issue which featured prominently in the other place, in the proceeds of crime debate, was the issue of illegal quarrying. The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East in the other place raised the issue of Sahadine Trace; I think it is a place in Vega de Oropouche and so on. But, illegal quarrying is not new. Illegal quarrying did not start yesterday. It did not start in 2010. We have been doing research at the Ministry that shows that there are newspaper clippings relating to illegal quarrying going back to 1979. It certainly did take off—and this is not targeting the former Government in any way—but it certainly did take off significantly in the period 2003 to 2010 during the construction boom.

I will just go through some of the newspaper clippings. They are very clear—newspapers clippings on illegal quarrying in the last decade. There is one here from the *Guardian*, Sunday, May 11, 2003, that is 11 years ago, Mr. President.

“An estimated \$24 million per year is allegedly being funnelled out of the Ministry of Works Tapan Quarry in Valencia as payback for election support by members of a Jamaat...”

They did not say “the Jamaat”,—members of “a” Jamaat:

“...in the 2002 General Election, said quarry industry sources.

The quarry, manned by men dressed in Muslim garb and supported by regional corporations of the Ministry of Local Government, has been slammed by quarry experts at both National Quarries and the Quarries Association.”

And there are many such articles in the archives. There is the *Express* of September 12, 2004, army crackdown on Jamaat Quarry:

Within weeks the army is expected to move into Valencia, Toco on Government-issued instructions to lock down the area and stop rampant lawlessness of the Jamaat al Muslimeen and other renegade operators who have all made fortunes out of illegal quarrying on state-owned lands.

So this problem that we are battling with today—and I want to say the problem did not start with this Government, but we will deal—we will either end it, or we will deal a very significant blow to it. I will talk a bit about what is in my allocation to deal with illegal quarrying.

One of the things that we have in our draft estimates of expenditure to treat with illegal quarrying is the establishment of a minerals ranger squad to work alongside the police, to protect lands which are rich in aggregate. We also intend to establish a Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs office in Sangre Grande, so that the Ministry could have greater oversight over what is happening in north-eastern Trinidad.

And finally, the Ministry together with the CPC are working on amendments to the Minerals Act, but this problem as I said, did not start yesterday. It is a very serious problem. I want to commend the Minister of National Security in his absence. There was a raid recently in the north-eastern area where certain pieces of equipment and so on were held, and those matters are—

Sen. G. Singh: Twenty-six pieces of equipment!

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Twenty-six pieces of equipment were held, and those matters are headed before the courts. In reading the history of this, through this very thick file, [*Sen. Ramnarine displays a thick manila folder*] I also see here—Sunday, 23 October, 2005—an article by the late Dana Seetahal. She was a person who was very concerned about illegal quarrying. She talked again, she said, when the details of the story were made known, in a June 2004 Camini Maharaj article, Camini Maharaj having reported that there was rampant lawlessness by the Jamaat al Muslimeen on state-owned quarry lands, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries then, Minister Eric Williams, made some vague allusion to an expired one-year licence.

So I, of course, being a very inquisitive person decided when I read that that there was some expired licence at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, I decided to do my own check. It turns out that I found a licence at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs here, [*Sen. Ramnarine holds up a document*] and this licence is a licence made on the 15th day of May in the year 2007, between Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith, hereinafter referred to as “the Minister” of the first part, and an organization called the Daar-Ul-Islam organization of Mucurapo Road, St. James, hereinafter referred to as “the licensee”.

So this is a licence to mine. This is a very valuable document. People in the quarry business will tell you that this is worth a lot of money. You could go to the bank—[*Interruption*] Mr. President, with this document and get a loan to buy excavators and backhoes and to buy heavy equipment and so on to mine, because this is a guarantee from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Government that you have the rights to mine.

The document is signed by, well, the Minister of Energy, of course, signs—

Sen. G. Singh: Who is that?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: This is Dr. Lenny Saith and he has a very interesting signature here. I looked at who is signing on behalf of Daar-Ul-Islam and it is somebody called Sunni Ahamad. So I do not know who Sunni Ahamad

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is, but apparently Sunni Ahamad was given what they call power of attorney by the real owners of Daar-Ul-Islam. I will read who has given power of attorney to Sunni Ahamad. This is dated May 09, 2006:

To all whom these presents shall come, I Yasin Abu Bakr, religious leader presently imprisoned at the Golden Grove State Prison, Arouca in the island of Trinidad, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby nominate, constitute and appoint Sunni Ahamad of box No. 14 Carew Trace, Fort George, Indian Walk, Princes Town, in the island of Trinidad to be attorney for me in my name and on my behalf to do and execute the acts, deeds and things hereinafter mentioned or any of them, that is to say—

And there is a lot of legalese here which I am not familiar with.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Who is the lawyer who prepared it?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Who is the lawyer who prepared it?

Sen. Maharaj: “Well, he in jail an he geHING everything? He in jail and he geHING quarry?”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: So there is a quarry licence that was—

Hon. Senator: “He in jail and he geHING quarry?”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah. So this issue of illegal quarrying, and this is not—this is actually not illegal quarrying eh. This is legal. [*Continuous interruption*] This is a licence. So when we hear that the Jamaat was illegally quarrying, that may or may not be true, because this is a legitimate quarry licence that was granted to an organization called Daar-Ul-Islam of Mucurapo Road, and power of attorney was given to somebody called Sunni Ahamad.

So what I am saying is that a lot of the issues that we have today in Trinidad and Tobago have a genesis in a period before, and I will come—Sen. Al-Rawi spoke about one of the pet peeves of the Opposition, SIS, and he referred to the Beetham Wastewater—

Sen. Al-Rawi: The real “mamu”, man.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah, well, Dr. Saith is your “mamu”, not so? Yes.

Sen. Al-Rawi: That is “mamu”, one and “mamu”, two.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: And speaking about “mamu”, now—

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Sen. Al-Rawi: Who is the big “mamu”, now? Who is the big “mamu”?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Okay. With regard to the issues raised with regard to SIS and the Beetham Wastewater project, I just want to read into the *Hansard* record, a press release that was put out by the NGC, and it reads:

In reports published in the *Guardian* newspaper on the Beetham Water Reuse Plant, several inaccuracies appear which we seek to correct. In an effort to correct the reportage and the incorrect interpretations that may result—

And these were stories carried in the *Guardian*.

—NGC provides the following clarifications: first clarification, the contract price is incorrectly quoted at TT \$1.6 billion. The contract price is approximately TT \$1.1 billion as previously reported.

The second area of clarification concerns the questions posed on the need for subcontracting of work on the project by SIS. The contract between NGC—and this is the response—the contract between NGC and SIS is based on the FIDIC conditions of contract for design and build plants. As is standard in any contract, with the scope and complexity of this kind, subcontracting is permitted [*Desk thumping*] once there is prior agreement by both parties.

9.30 p.m.

So subcontracting is permitted.

It would be unusual and unreasonable to expect that any contractor would carry out all works of this magnitude and range of requisite activities without the need for my subcontracting.

Mr. President, if you have to build a house, there is no one contractor who will come to build the entire house and do the roof and the plumbing and the electrical and so on.

The other issue raised by Sen. Al-Rawi, which I enquired about, was the issue of this payment of \$100 million. I am advised that that payment was made on the premise of the proper paperwork being submitted to the NGC.

How much more time?

Sen. Ahmed: Say about two or three minutes in original time.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Two or three minutes in original time. Thank you very much. Mr. President, I said I was not going beyond 45 minutes and I intend to keep that promise to the Parliament.

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A couple other issues—I just want to wrap up by saying: Sen. Al-Rawi said one thing which I think was correct and resonated with me when he was winding up his contribution. He was talking about the huge task that it is to be a Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the huge task it is to carry the energy sector, and I agree with him. It is a significant task.

I have been supported by the Prime Minister and I want to commend the Prime Minister for the support that she has given, not only to me, but to every Minister in her Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] She has always been very receptive whenever advice is needed and, again, that is the reason why we will run the full term of this Government and run into a second term, 2015—2020. And I think the PNM is aware that the UNC—well, the People’s Partnership, to be corrected—is very, very difficult.

Sen. Al-Rawi: “Nah, yuh good dere.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Well, I am a member of the UNC, so I could be forgiven; but the energy sector is strong; it is robust. I do not want to read out the almost 20 newspaper clippings I have where people have endorsed the health of the energy sector. We have restructured the National Gas Company. We have vertically integrated the NGC. The NGC has now recorded its highest profits ever in 2013. We have re-engineered the fiscal regime in the last five years. We have completed the Port of Galeota. We found that project stalled. We started the project and we completed the project at the cost of US \$85 million.

We have refocused Petrotrin on the upstream where its focus should have been. We have reduced the incidence of illegal diesel bunkering and we have stabilized the decline in oil production. Oil production has basically been averaging around 81,000 barrels of oil per day for the last two and a half years. That in itself is an achievement because it means that we are replacing the decline.

I want to close by saying that September 2014 is the highest year for oil production in almost two years. We are now at the highest production that we have had in almost two years. Sen. Hadeed reminds me to talk a bit about some other issues, but I will leave that for the Minister of Finance and the Economy to treat with.

I just want to thank the Parliament for the opportunity to contribute. This is my seventh contribution to the budget. I have spoken now twice in two years, so you would have thought there would have been five contributions. This is actually my seventh contribution to the budget of Trinidad and Tobago and I look forward, Mr. President, to many more contributions on many more budgets in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ashaki Scott: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. President and thank you colleagues. It gives me great pleasure to contribute to this budget debate this evening. I must congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, as well as Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath and Minister Rudy Indarsingh for one of the most all-inclusive budgets of this administration—[*Desk thumping*] a budget that puts people first, a budget that represents the tapestry of our diverse socio-economic landscape, a budget that fosters our Government's sustainable development thrust.

Some would see this debate as simply just another debate—another year, another budget, another debate—but we must realize that we are creating history. Let us understand the dynamics, the context that surrounds this budget, so we can understand some very pertinent issues that must be raised and brought to the attention of the national community.

Mr. President, our debate on this budget cannot go on without us realizing how historic it is for the People's Partnership Government. This is the fifth budget presentation of this administration—the fifth. I must underscore this because when this Government was first elected into office on May 24, 2010, many of the Senators on the opposite side sought to convince the national community that this coalition would not go beyond a year, six months, two years, but here we are standing strong, delivering to the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Our presence here today and the mutual commitment of the constituent parties of the People's Partnership underscore the powerful and viable force that this coalition politics brings, and that there is a growing demand for coalition politics under which many people can have a voice, a space and the rejection of the win-alone, die-alone, haughty political arrangements of the past, which the other side still subscribes to.

This budget is also the first to incorporate into the operations a Standing Finance Committee of Parliament. I noted colleagues from the other House on the other side were able to scrutinize and analyze our projected financial expenditure in a way that opposition parties have never been able to do before. If this is not a historic milestone on the journey towards greater transparency in public affairs, then none of us can know what is.

Having expressed my view on some of these new, recent and innovative developments, which define the context in which this budget was presented, permit me to express my great pleasure with some of our achievements.

Again, I must pay tribute to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, and also former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Dookeran, for their ability to sustain commitment to the medium-term development framework that has guided budgetary allocations for the last four years.

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The major components of this framework are education, health, national security, agriculture, economic growth, job creation, diversification and social sector support. This budget, the last before an election year of 2015, is a manifestation that this People's Partnership Government, under the astute stewardship of our hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has stayed the course of sustained, rational, economic development—no new taxes, no levies or removal of key operative subsidies and, as Sen. Vieira earlier on highlighted, no austerity measures.

This posturing assists in maintaining a comfort level for the average taxpayer, while allowing for economic restructuring behind the scenes according to the medium-term development framework.

In our People's Partnership manifesto, we clearly outlined the framework for sustainable development. We are guided by the principle that the highest mission of society is the development of its citizens. Accordingly, the commitment of our Government is to promote a process of people-centred development. To achieve our mission, we have built our policy on seven development pillars, which are interconnected and which constitute the cornerstones of our strategy for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our Government has embraced the richness and beauty of our people's great diversity to nurture a more humane and cohesive society. Unity in diversity will inspire the harmony which is so vital to national progress. Our commitment to sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago is informed by our commitment to our declaration of principles and our declaration of values.

Mr. President, we understand sustainable development to mean that we leverage our resources and apply our effort in such a way that we produce more than we consume and that our development strategy will take fundamental principles of environmental sustainability into account and that, as we accelerate the pace of development in the society, we will also secure the best interests of future generations.
[Desk thumping]

There are various aspects of this budget that are very close to my heart and I must take the opportunity to highlight a few of the achievements and the programmes of our People's Partnership Government.

Infrastructure for human connectivity is the backbone to engineering a knowledge-based economy. In this regard, information communication technology is fundamental to our developmental thrust. Improvements in the ICT infrastructure have continued with investment under the Public Sector Reform Computerization Programme.

These improvements will facilitate greater efficiency and quality in the delivery of government services. I must highlight just a few ICT initiatives under our administration that falls in line with the ICT plan 2014—2018, and over the lifespan of this plan, we will seek to realize key benefits under five key thematic areas: innovation and human capital development; access and digital inclusion; e-business and ICT development; infrastructure development; and e-government.

Mr. President, these are just a few areas regarding ICT development in Trinidad and Tobago and, in the not-too-distant future, in every nook and cranny, we will have Internet access.

All-inclusive education and training leads to prosperity for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Under this People's Partnership Government, no one shall be left behind. I therefore must commend Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim, Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, for increasing access and opportunity via the expansion of skills training and aligning education and training with the job market.

I want to highlight two key institutions: the MIC, which is the Metal Industries Company Limited, and they have been at the forefront of training and development in Trinidad and Tobago. I must commend them for the Mechatronics Unit, which was formalized on August 08, 2011. I must also commend them for coming third place in the Excellence in Institutional Research Capacity.

I go over to another institution, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, better known as YTEPP, which has expanded, not only geographically, but also expanded their menu of courses all over Trinidad and Tobago. These include: data operations, heavy machinery operations, music production, screen printing, festival arts, sound engineering, just to name a few.

I now refer to the arts and multiculturalism. Earlier today in the Senate, my colleague on the other side, Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh, shared a few concerns about the National Carnival Commission. I must inform citizens that when the People's Partnership came into government, we met the NCC in a state of mess in 2010. The institution was failing as with many other institutions under the last PNM regime—no proper procurement practices, cost overruns, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, hence the reason the Ministry embarked on a study to diagnose the problems facing the carnival sector.

9.45 p.m.

The NCC contracted the internationally recognized PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct a diagnostic study on the NCC which was presented to the Board of Directors and the Ministry. This Government had the foresight to clean up the mess at the NCC, and I am happy to say that the NCC is now on the road to recovery. Mr. President, I am heartened that

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this budget also seeks to deliver on increases in infrastructural development across the country. Over the past five years we have seen a focus placed on infrastructural development across the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Before, you would see underdevelopment in so many areas. Non-urban areas which have been long neglected have seen new networks of roads, drainage, public lighting, and the list continues.

For long, many on the opposite side believed that development applied only to certain parts of the country but now, under this administration, we see that Longdenville Old Road is being redone for the first time in years. We now see the new Diego Martin Highway, not even done by any of the three PNM gatekeepers who always had Diego Martin under lock for the past couple of years. We see so many examples of basic services being delivered to our people.

Mr. President, indeed, I am happy to be here this evening and to be part of this forward movement in our Government. It appears that the Opposition is at a loss for words. They have been unable to meaningfully critique this budget, so much so, that the Leader of the Opposition has resorted to grasping at straws and has chastised our hon. Prime Minister's reaffirmation of our country's commitment to the global fight against terrorism. The Opposition Leader advised that we should not have supported the UN Security Council Resolution which criminalizes travelling abroad to fight for extremist organizations, as well as recruiting for or funding such groups.

Mr. President, I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to note that this resolution was adopted by all 15 members of the United Nations Security Council. I must congratulate the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and their team for representing our nation, internationally, and standing up for the people who have been ravaged and displaced by acts of terrorism. [*Desk thumping*] Our Government continues to promote love, compassion, tolerance, respect for differences and peace.

Mr. President, as I conclude, I must highlight the fact that just a few days ago the PNM MP for Diego Martin North/East admitted that when the PNM was in Government they failed to listen to the people. In the People's Partnership Government not only do we listen to people, but we act, we deliver. I must commend our hard-working Ministers and MPs who have delivered over the past four years and continue to deliver.

Mr. President, the theme of this budget is Empowering our People Through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity; we are now seeing the manifestation of this as we continue onward and in an upward trajectory of development where no one shall be left behind. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Marlene Coudray): Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity of joining this debate at 9.49 p.m. on this budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, entitled Empowering our People Through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity. I take the opportunity at this time to commend our hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for yet again a super [*Desk thumping*] budget for this country.

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to inform this honourable House that the Ministry of Local Government intends to continue to play a pivotal role in the realization of the theme of this 2015 budget of this Government led by our visionary Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] I am here to account for the stewardship of the Ministry of Local Government and also to inform of the process the Ministry will take in playing its role in this budget, but before I do so I need to put on record, and to correct some of the misconceptions and misinformation of those on the other side, about the performance of the Ministry of Local Government and, by extension, some issues in terms of the performance of this Government.

Mr. President, Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh, I think early in her contribution she spoke about the local government system, the poor budget to local government, as well as the—she said the current CHIKV challenges have not seen any robust intervention by either local government or central government intervention. I want to put on record that this is the furthest thing from the truth and, again, the PNM, those on that side, continue to mislead this population. After several discussions with officials of the Ministry of Health there was in July, I think, on July 02, an inter-agency meeting with the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders in the health sector at the Normandie Hotel where a strategy was laid out in terms of addressing the CHIKV in Trinidad and Tobago, and the 14 local government bodies have been working on this since July 2014.

Mr. President, I want to take the opportunity to commend those corporations for the work that has gone into this programme so far, and without exception there was the Diego Martin Regional, Sangre Grande, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Princes Town and, particularly, the rural communities, the staff and the councillors have been working tirelessly in an effort to abate this nuisance. So I want to just talk too about the decreases in local government funding that the goodly Senator claimed took place with the this year's budget.

Mr. President, I want, for the record again—I did it in Standing Finance Committee—I indicated that in terms of recurrent expenditure the decreases that appear to be against these corporations are as a result of the payment of back pay, arrears of salaries, so that there is in fact no decrease. I want to also indicate, under the PNM administration, in 2009—and I

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think I would have done this before but, apparently, as someone said, some people, like “stick break in their ear”, they do not listen or they do not understand. In 2009 the allocation under recurrent expenditure to the Port of Spain Corporation, \$146.3 million. In 2015, the allocation to the Port of Spain Corporation is over \$200 million, it is about \$280 million or thereabouts—I do not want to give wrong figures—sorry, Mr. President, that is \$257,508,000, and it goes on: San Fernando Corporation in 2009, \$74.7 million; in 2015, \$140 million; Arima Borough Corporation, 2009, \$51.9 million; in 2015, \$86,897,000, and those are just a few.

Under the PSIP, similarly: in 2009, the allocation, PSIP, Port of Spain Corporation, \$11,450,000; in 2015, \$24 million, more than double what they were getting then; Arima Corporation, \$9,620,000, in 2009; \$16,100,000, in 2015; San Fernando, \$10,200,000, 2009; \$18 million, in 2015; Point Fortin, \$9,050,000, in 2009; \$17,700,000. So those are just a few and it continues in that vein.

Mr. President, we heard so much talk about “misallocation”, Sub-Head 62, no allocation for printing, promotion and publicity. The goodly Senator indicated that governance is not a walk in the park, it is serious business, no media glitz, but she is also complaining that not one cent was allocated to Sub-Head 62, under Ministry of Local Government. Again, Mr. President, that is incorrect, totally incorrect; every single corporation, as well as the Ministry of Local Government, has money allocated for printing, promotion and publicity.

There was some comment about the St. Michael’s Home, but let me stay with local government for the time being. You know, Sen. Small mentioned about his concern about how things are interpreted, it is the similar vein, we said it at the Standing Finance Committee. I do not understand, apparently people do not understand this budgetary process, and maybe Minister of Finance and the Economy you need to do a course. How far have we reached? Sen. Karim is not here. 105? We need to do 105 in understanding our budget, understanding the figures in the budget. To quote Sen. Small again, the cognitive dissonance, and I wonder if it is a deliberate attempt to continue to mislead this population and not acknowledge the good work that this Government has been doing.

Sen. Al-Rawi talked about—well he said a lot, according, if I may quote a colleague—the Children’s Authority building. I am saying again for the record, it was the most absurd, most ridiculous rental that I had come across in my several years in the public service where—[*Interruption*] Mr. President, it was a question of a Government just before election entering into contracts with the private sector for rental of a building that they knew they could not use. Two buildings were tenanted, only one was in use and, again, I make no apologies for saying that we had to get out of that arrangement where we were “tied up like Sunday crab” for 16 years in an arrangement to pay \$7.5 million per year, and that money should have been spent on the children of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

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That is the improper spending that those on that side should be talking about, and that resonated throughout the public service. I know a colleague was talking about—we had the One Alexandra, we had another building that the Ministry of Sport was renting, and all of them, and the common thread through all those buildings was, as he described himself, as the one who prepared the agreements—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Al-Rawi: All?

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Yes.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Sport?

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: The three buildings.

Sen. Al-Rawi: You should get your facts straight.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: You always know about people's facts.

So improper spending, Mr. President—*[Interruption]* You know, when we want to talk about improper spending and we have to bring it up and regurgitate—and I heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs talk about the mining licences to the Jamaat al Muslimeen, and the improper spending during their tenure was the funding of the Muslimeen through the Rose Foundation. Minister of Finance and the Economy, you need to examine these records and bring that information to this House. Several millions were passed through a company, and Sen. Robinson-Regis is talking about how much money under the Prime Minister's Office for religious bodies and all that. Find out how much the PNM Government spent on the Rose Foundation and where that money went, where those millions went.

10.00 p.m.

That is the improper spending you should come and tell this country about. The spending this Government is incurring, the expenditure this Government is incurring is on the people's needs and the people's issues, the less fortunate in this country, and this is where our money is going.

We have several issues in terms of local government. Before I get into the meat of my discussion, I need to deal with some of those issues because of the statements and utterances people are making. The question of no local government and no Ministry of Local Government, and the Ministry wants to dictate what happens in the corporation—I am saying there must be an oversight body to deal with local government corporations. The Minister of Local Government has the responsibility in law for the financing, for the funding and for reporting to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy on expenditure. When we do not do that, they are out there on their own frolic.

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There is an issue I want to bring to the table in terms of this misspending of allocations—and they talk about our presiding over wanton waste and corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. I want the PNM to tell this country why is it—Atlantic LNG constructed a building in the Borough of Point Fortin at a cost of \$7 million, a beach facility at the Guapo Beach in Clifton Hill—\$7 million. This building was handed over to the Point Fortin Corporation for the use of the burgesses of the borough of Point Fortin. You know what? They are talking about “mamu” and UNC financiers—my information is that a financier of the PNM was allowed to operate and manage this facility. I have been asking my colleague—*[Interruption]* Sorry?

Sen. Hadeed: I went and opened that.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: And I told you, you should not go. They called you in to legitimize what was taking place.

Sen. Hadeed: “They mamaguy meh, boy.”

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Yes, I told you do not go.

Listen to this—a \$7 million facility handed over to a citizen to operate and manage, and not only that, all the Trinmar/Petrotrin lands around the facility are now being bulldozed by that operator and several structures are going up on the facility. No approval from Petrotrin, and despite letters and complaints by Petrotrin, I understand that the corporation has given the operator—the manager/operator—verbal approval to descend on state property like that. I have asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs to investigate the use of this land, and who becomes the owner of that facility if a private developer—and the goodly Sen. Robinson-Regis was talking about no Town and Country approval. There is no Town and Country approval for what is taking place in Point Fortin. And Sen. Dr. Tewarie as Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development—

Sen. Ahmed: Prime property.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Prime, prime property by the seaside in Clifton Hill, a private operator is just—all the mangroves and everything is cleared. I drove down there myself and looked at it, and everything is being cleared for the expansion of this facility. I would love to know who is looking after the interest of the people of Point Fortin in terms of this facility. Some of them have complained that they cannot even afford to go to the facility now.

So those are the things you need a Ministry of Local Government to deal with, the oversight of those facilities, and it certainly warrants an urgent investigation. *[Desk thumping]*

Sen. Hadeed: Quite so.

Sen. The Hon. M. Coudray: Mr. President, in terms of local government councillors, we are talking about responsibility, fiscal and other responsibilities. My information is, and I have been trying to—we have had to deal with several roundabout methods. In one corporation, I believe it is the Arima Corporation, there are two persons who are teachers under the Teaching Service Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, who are operating as members of the council in that corporation. At the Port of Spain Corporation—and you know people asked the question: Why is it that certain things are not happening in the public service, in Government Ministries; why are we getting so much resistance? When certain reports come out, people question where the information came from.

My information is that an alderman at the Port of Spain Corporation, Alderman Callender, is an employee of the Auditor General's Department, of all places. So I wish they would speak to that, and let this country know how that could happen in Trinidad and Tobago with the current laws as we have.

Mr. President, I have some other issues. I talked about the ALNG. Sen. Baldeo-Chadeesingh said everything a budget was not. A budget is the policy document of this Government indicating how the Government intends to undertake its policies and programmes for the ensuing fiscal year.

I know it is very late, but I need to talk about the Ministry of Local Government and in terms of our role in empowering our people through sustained economic growth and prosperity, how we will continue to do so in fiscal 2015. The revised estimates for fiscal 2014, Recurrent Expenditure, \$2,307.8 million; Development Programme under the Consolidated Fund, \$318.1 million. Under the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$337 million.

How have we dealt with this money during fiscal 2014? In my contribution in 2014, I promised this honourable House that the Ministry through the municipal corporations and the Special Purpose State Enterprises would have implemented a number of projects. This promise was overachieved in fiscal 2014. The highest number of projects was implemented compared to a similar period through the history of the 14 municipal corporations in this country. These projects, totalling some \$1,323 million, spanned across all the constituencies of all the Members of Parliament. They involved the road repairs, retaining walls, slipper drains, pavilions, upgrades to recreational facilities, landslips and bridges.

Among the work was the construction and rehabilitation of 494 drainage and irrigation projects. I have the details, but I cannot, in the interest of time—the rehabilitation of 130 recreational facilities; the rehabilitation of 39 cemeteries and

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cremation facilities. Twenty-seven projects were undertaken in markets and abattoir facilities throughout these corporations; the construction or rehabilitation of 460 local roads and bridges; restorative work on 27 local government buildings, and 51 projects that relate to disaster preparedness within municipalities across Trinidad.

Mr. President, to complement the work of the regional corporation, the Engineering Unit of the Ministry of Local Government also undertook a number of roads, bridges and landslip projects. These included the restoration of 12 local roads; the construction of seven retaining walls, as well as the restoration of six local bridges.

Mr. President, the Ministry also utilized the services of the special purpose companies to undertake infrastructure development geared at improving the quality of lives in towns and communities. In this regard, the Rural Development Company Limited, Community Improvement Services Limited and Palo Seco Enterprises Limited, collectively undertook over 599 projects within the municipalities: and these include, but are not limited to, the upgrade, reconstruction and resurfacing of 537 road projects; the construction of 30 pavilions; the construction of 30 bridges, and some of these rolled over from the last financial year, and the construction of five major retaining walls.

Mr. President, also permit me to inform this honourable House of the work of the National Commission for Self-help that also falls under the Ministry of Local Government. This programme under Self-help is demand-driven and consists of a variety of community projects that help vulnerable persons in communities; namely, rehabilitation, expansion and construction of access roads, and drainage; the laying of water mains and electricity distribution lines; construction of retaining walls, walkways, bridges; repairs refurbishment of school buildings, places of worship, social care facilities, community centres and recreation parks and also facilities.

In fiscal 2014, the National Commission for Self-help provided important services, completing 1,359 projects as at August 31 this year, with an additional 1,356 projects in progress. Projects in progress include minor repairs and reconstruction grants, 948; emergency relief reconstruction assistance grants, 166 projects; low cost houses, 53 projects; community infrastructure, 189 projects, and it is anticipated that on completion of the projects, the lives of 22,600 beneficiaries would be positively enhanced. This is how we are getting the social work to help communities and empower communities. In addition to all the hard work in terms of the roads and drains and bridges, we also do work through the National Commission for Self-help.

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The Ministry continues to work towards the modernization and transformation of our local government system and, as such, in fiscal 2014, the Ministry embarked on four major projects, namely, the review of municipal development plans; the establishment of local economic development units, LED units in each municipal corporation; the development of an institutional strengthening programme for monthly paid employees for each of the 14 municipal corporations and implementation of the Dangerous Dogs Act. Most of these projects are ground-breaking projects, as we will explain.

Review of the municipal development plans—Mr. President, in 2008, the Ministry of Local Government under the previous regime, embarked on phase one of its regional planning programme involving the preparation of Municipal Development Plans, which we call MDPs, for each of the 14 municipalities. These plans were intended to give strategic directions to municipal corporations to enable systematic mechanisms for their project implementation.

Realizing the insufficiency of this modality to achieve its purpose, the Government's 2010 Local Government Manifesto had prescribed a fundamental paradigm shift in policy. The shift saw the move from general decentralization to devolution, which entails granting of substantial administrative authority to each municipal corporation.

To this end, the draft White Paper on Local Government Transformation and Modernization has proposed amendments to the organization structures of municipal corporations, which will include local economic development and spatial planning and development approval units. These units will ensure the unification of development planning and development control and implementation. Noting that the level of project detail for subnational planning must cater for municipal corporations to make investment decisions and choose between developmental projects, the Ministry embarked on a supporting series of municipal investment plans. This constituted phase two of the Regional Planning Programme.

10.15 p.m.

These strategic plans serve as guide tools for investment planning and project implementation. They translate the strategic proposals put forward in the municipal development plans into tangible, localized and implementable projects and programmes. Each municipal investment plan is an economic tool for critically assessing and prioritizing the key spatial and thematic issues highlighted in the related municipal development plan.

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Mr. President, this project continues to be a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development through the National Planning Task Force and the Ministry of Local Government with technical consulting support where necessary, and I take the opportunity to put on record my appreciation and thanks to the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development for all the support given to the Ministry of Local Government to accomplish what we have so far.

Mr. President, I will need to go in—we do not have the time now, but in terms of the municipalities, these planning authorities will, I hope, end the sort of discrimination and corruption in how building applications are addressed in certain local government bodies, and certainly facilitate development with developers, and work together with our citizens and developers as facilitators in their bid to or in their effort to develop certain municipalities.

The establishment of Local Economic Development units, the LED units in each corporation, these units are intended to assist each corporation in investment planning and project implementation, as well as the translation of the strategic proposals put forward in the NDPs into tangible, localized and implementable projects and programmes within the framework of national economic growth centres.

The units will help to build the capacity of medium, small and micro enterprises in regions. Mr. President, the review of the municipal development plans in the aforementioned proposals focuses on strengthening the relationship with the Caribbean Local Economic Development Project, CARILED. In this regard, the Ministry has received technical assistance through CARILED in July 2014, and each corporation will, therefore, be institutionally strengthened to be drivers of these projects.

Mr. President, as we continue to build on the work already done for four pilot municipalities, the Ministry of Local Government will be spearheading efforts to complete local area economic profiles for the remaining 10 municipalities. This will encourage the development of the medium, small and micro enterprises, and promote entrepreneurship within regions. In support of this initiative, the Ministry has hired four Local Economic Development officers on contract for attachment to the municipalities of Point Fortin, Chaguanas, San Juan/Laventille and Princes Town, and we are dealing with all municipalities on an equal footing. As you would see, they are not all municipalities controlled by this People's Partnership-led Government.

Mr. President, through the technical assistance of CARILED, the Ministry of Local Government will facilitate the implementation of these LED units in each corporation. The Ministry is also developing an institutional strengthening programme for monthly paid employees for each of the 14 municipal corporations, as I indicated. The Ministry has identified the need to address certain weaknesses in the organizational structure of the municipal corporations. The current organizational structure is inimical in meeting the systemic demands placed on each corporation by the communities they serve. Further, the Ministry is aware that as needs and expectations of communities change, so too local government must be able to adapt to serve their ever changing needs. As such, the Ministry intends to develop a system that is robust enough to provide a holistic response to the business of local governance that benefits all citizens irrespective of ethnicity, gender, religion or social station or political affiliation.

And, Mr. President, I could go on and on in terms of the work. We have hired a consultant to develop some institutional strengthening programmes for the employees of 14 municipal corporations, and this new structure must adequately meet the requirements for the evolved operations and good municipal corporation governance. At the core of the new system of governance will be acceptable principles of accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, equity, value for money, quality service delivery, participatory democracy and responsiveness.

The new structure will continue the need to establish responsive political and management structures reflecting the new roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Local Government and municipal corporations.

And, Mr. President, I must put on record that after this—the new Municipal Corporations Act came into being in 1990, in 2014 the regional corporations still do not have a dedicated establishment, and they depend on the Ministry of Local Government to assign staff, and this has been part of the problem in local government for decades, and this new arrangement will assist in addressing all those issues, and allowing the corporations to be a little more autonomous, and really deliver to the people as we have promised in our manifesto.

So, Mr. President, there is not one single person on the other side who in deep search of their conscience would not agree that the Ministry of Local Government over the past fiscal years has performed, and has at least outperformed the projections we made. I think the best is yet to come under this People's Partnership Government, and I assure you that as we approach our second term that we will continue to enhance, we will continue to put the systems and structures in place that will enhance the performance of our local government corporations, and improve delivery to our citizens.

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Mr. President, I took office at that Ministry in September last year, and during that period I received over 200 complaints coming in from the 14 corporations from citizens, aggrieved citizens, who had been making representations about local government issues. Of course, some of them are other issues that do not relate to local government, but we at the Ministry, are trying to set up a proper oversight body involving engineering, public health services, as well as general administration services, so that we can support and help to strengthen the municipal corporations to enable them to improve performances out there to its citizens.

With those few words, I thank you sincerely, and thanks for the opportunity, and again, Mr. Minister of Finance and the Economy, I look forward to, while we may appear to have a decreased allocation this year, I look forward to very prompt—we intend to take all our money, to utilize all our funds within the first quarter of the new fiscal. I thank you, Mr. President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh): Thank you. Mr. President, it is not my intention to be lengthy at this hour because as Leader of Government in the Senate, I am acutely aware of the length of time that we have spent on this budget debate. It started on September 08 in which the mover of the Motion, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy participated in that process, and then we went into a very lengthy and detailed Standing Finance Committee meeting.

I want to pay particular homage to Sen. Larry Howai. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. President, he piloted the Miscellaneous Provisions (Proceeds of Crime, Anti-Terrorism, Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago) (No. 2) Bill, 2014 in the Senate and in the House, and then subsequently went into the budget debate, and went for three days into the budget debate, and then dealt with the Standing Finance Committee. And in the Standing Finance Committee he had to respond to questions from the Standing Finance Committee for 10 institutions other than the Ministry of Finance and the Economy: the Office of the President; the Office of the Auditor General; the Judiciary; the Industrial Court; the Parliament; the Elections and Boundaries Commission; the Tax Appeal Board; the Equal Opportunity Commission; Pensions and Gratuities, and the THA.

Mr. President, when I listened to what the hon. Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe had to say, I recall the Standing Finance Committee. And perhaps the Minister of Finance and the Economy responding to the questions on expenditure of the THA, was perhaps the most egregious insult to the Minister of Finance and the Economy. Because eight of 10 questions they had to go back and find the answer. Honestly, the Chief Secretary ought to have been there. [*Desk thumping*] And I had to pay particular attention to that, Mr. President.

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So it is clear that we have in our Minister of Finance and the Economy—what was captured by another hon. Senator—knowledgeable, congenial and accommodating. [*Desk thumping*] He has conducted himself throughout this debate, and throughout the Standing Finance Committee, and in the Senate with aplomb, grace and competence. But let us look at the shadow Minister of Finance and the Economy on the Opposition side, Dr. Lester Henry. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President, when the hon. Sen. Dr. Lester Henry made his contribution yesterday as the shadow PNM Minister of Finance and the Economy [*Crosstalk*] there was an incoherent hodgepodge of untruths, half-truths and innuendoes. No alternative proposal, no alternative measures, no articulated vision as a Minister of Finance and the Economy where he would lead the country in the unlikely event that he becomes the Minister of Finance and the Economy under a PNM administration. It is clear from his contribution that he lacks the gravitas, the competence or the knowledge to do or to conduct himself as the Minister of Finance and the Economy or to conduct the economy of this country. And I say so having regard to his utterances that he made for the purpose of seeking news. And he got that news, but he did not know that I was also going to take the opportunity to respond to his attempt to make news by half-truths, untruths and innuendoes. In the *Express* today, Singh says \$600 million loan above board:

“Minister Ganga Singh has denied there was mismanagement at the Water and Sewerage Authority which forced the State utility to seek a \$600 million loan.

...at the Senate sitting yesterday, Opposition Senator Lester Henry said WASA was taking out a...loan to help with cash-flow problems which he said were brought on by a hiring surge and...rogue employee who racked up bills accumulating to more than \$180 million.”

Mr. President, and I will go into the *Hansard* to refute what the hon. Senator—it is clear that without doing the rigorous work required of him, he went into becoming a pedlar of misinformation, a huckster of untruths, a hawker of deception [*Laughter*] and a “potick” of propaganda. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I want to indicate that in the period 2002 to 2010 these were the loans, under the PNM administration, which WASA acquired, and there is no difference with the \$600 million loan. I will go—I will demonstrate in this session here, in the short period I have, to show the approval process of this loan, and how it goes through the whole process and how you arrive at it.

10.30 p.m.

But just for purposes of the record and for the knowledge and for the benefit so as to dispel the ignorance demonstrated by hon. Sen. Dr. Lester Henry, I will indicate to him, that for the period 2000—2010, Citicorp loan of TT \$413 million, issue date, June 27, 2003, all

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loans to WASA. Secondly, Fincor loan of \$271.4 million, issue date December 31, 2003. Thirdly, Citicorp Loan, TT \$145 million, issue date May 14, 2004. Fourth, Fincor TT \$500 million, issue date December 21, 2004. Fifth, First Citizens Bank, US \$60 million loan, issue date February 2, 2005. Sixth, Central Bank, \$432.22 million loan, issue dates June 6 2005 to October 10, 2005; Central Bank TT \$360 million, issue date June 20, 2006; RBC Merchant Bank, US \$30 million, issue date, November 30, 2007; Central Bank, TT \$304.47 million, issue date, June 6, 2009.

Mr. President, so you have an array of loans that is the normal practice in dealing with the deficit financing in the recurrent expenditure required for the Water and Sewerage Authority. But the hon. Senator in his contribution yesterday, had to say there was something amiss about that, something sinister, something perfidious about the acquisition of this loan. But you see, that is when you get a huckster of deception, a pedlar of political propaganda. He then went on to indicate to this honourable Senate and to the national community, and I quote from the *Hansard* yesterday:

“...salaries increased—but the problem is, not only salaries. There are actually bodies on the floor there, in the institution, have not really gone down. It was an IDB conditionality to get the loan. So they mamaguy the IDB and pretend that they are sending home people and hiring back other people to replace them.”

Mr. President, this “potick” of propaganda, this huckster of deception, let me tell you the facts, let me state the facts, because the hon. Sen. Camille Robinson-Regis indicated that facts are facts, and facts cannot be easily erased. What are the facts?

As of—in 2010, the total number of employees at the Water and Sewerage Authority was 4,386. And, Mr. President, when we demitted office in 2001 the number of employees at the Water and Sewerage Authority was a little over 2,200, with a view by a policy—there was a VSEP Programme—a policy of attrition to go down to 1999/2000, that was the policy. But they did not add a drop of water, but they increased the number of employees to 4,386—

Hon. Senator: And borrow money too.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh:—and you see the borrowing as I have demonstrated.

The current number of employees at the Water and Sewerage Authority from 4,386, is now 3,374. [*Desk thumping*] Contract, 1,336; temporary, 342; permanent, 702; daily rated, 994, so that the numbers of employees are not there. So once more—lie is unparliamentary—so “untruth” is what is required, this huckster and hawker and pedlar of untruth, deception and misinformation. He said in the thing, I know where he is getting his information. I know he has some friends in WASA and they go liming, and perhaps after a few drinks they give him this information that he comes here to talk about.

Mr. President, then he talks about the increase in the quantum. The hon. Sen. Lambert, as President of NUGFW, he will tell you about the social dialogue in WASA, where the unions participated with management in bringing about stability and industrial peace in that area. Since 2012 there have been six collective agreements: One, PSA, for the period 2008—2010, totalling \$183 million. Two, PSA supplementary, 4 per cent for the period 2008—2010, totalling \$72.3 million. Thirdly, EPA for the period 2008—2010, totalling \$5.4 million. Fourthly, EPA supplementary, 4 per cent for period, 2008—2010, totalling \$1.5 million. Fifthly, NUGFW for period 2008—2010, \$46.7 million. Total payments for the period 2008—2010 \$308.9 million. NUGFW for period 2011—2013 at a cost of \$110 million. This payment is to be effected mid-October 2014, total of all six agreements, \$418.9 million.

So when you see a spike in the salaries it is because of the arrears and the collective agreements entered into—and so this is a shadow Minister of Finance and the Economy. Shadow Minister of Finance and the Economy who is one of the principal subscriber to the Zero Hedge, that conspiracy, apocalyptic, blogging Financial Intelligence Unit of the PNM. That is what you have. That is what you have, and hon. Sen. Bharath explained to you. But what was the process for the loan, Mr. President? And I would demonstrate it. You had a series of loans, over 10 loans prior to that, for the period 2008. You have to go through an approval process, the state enterprises do not borrow money. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy runs a very tight ship in dealing with this issue.

One, the approval. Cabinet by Minute No. 966, dated April 11, 2013 gave permission for this. Approval was obtained in November 2013 from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy to invite financial institutions to submit bids to provide short-term funding in the amount of \$600 million. Approval was obtained from the tenders committee of the board of commissioners on November 29, 2013, to invite proposals for the provision of the \$600 million short-term funds from the following: Scotia Trust and Merchant Banking; First Caribbean International Bank; Republic Bank; First Citizens Bank; Citicorp Merchant Bank; RBC Merchant Bank; Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago; Intercommercial Trust and Merchant Bank; Bank of Baroda; Bespoke capital limited.

Mr. President, so you had open tendering to raise this money. There was then an evaluation process, and then at the end of this process with its proper evaluation with various elements there was an approval. So based on the criteria, there was an approval. And the approval then went through a process from the evaluation committee. It was obtained by the tenders committee of the board of commissioners at the 236th tenders committee meeting on February 20, 2014 for the award of contract to Scotia Trust and Merchant Bank, Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the provision of \$600 million short-term loan to the authority.

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Subsequently, on February 24, the board of commissioners approved the award of the contract to Scotia. The award of the contract to Scotia was made on February 26, 2014. And on August 29, 2014—so the award was made in February, but the money was provided on August 29, 2014, by Scotia, almost a six-month delay in the process. So what is there? What is sinister? What is perfidious about this? But this hawker of untruths, this huckster of deception, you know, how can you say these things?

Sen. Al-Rawi: Mr. President, I hate to do this, but 35(5). I do not know if it is quite proper to call a Member of Parliament a hawker and a huckster. I can understand what my learned colleague is driving at, but it is grating against my conscience. Perhaps you could rule on it.

Mr. President: Minister, you are touching on the edges of what might be permissible in terms or whether the language being used to describe Sen. Henry constitutes what perhaps under 35(4) might find difficult. So I will ask you to—

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: I think the language is very clear. Whilst I abide by your ruling, Mr. President, the language is clear. He is peddling misinformation and untruths and things, but you can call a pedlar a huckster. You can call a huckster a hawker, so by any other name, Mr. President, it is still lies, half-truths and innuendos. That is what it is, being peddled. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. President, so you have—so it deals with that kind of thing. But you know what is really concerning, the People's National Movement and its administration?—it is that you have had a success story in the Water and Sewerage Authority. And under my colleague, the hon. Minister of Justice, and I continued that development. Is that true? We have moved this authority from where it was a moribund state enterprise to one of achievement in the country, when that administration [*Desk thumping*] both in 1995 and in 2009 into 2010, starved the institution of talent and gave it up to foreigners.

In 1995, just prior to the elections, they signed the management contract with Severn Trent. No faith in the local capacity, no faith in the people of this country, 1995 Severn Trent, and we could not get out of that contract. Try as we might, and that is what they did. And just prior to the 2010 elections they then entered into another contract with Merhav, Mekorot, an Israeli company who is well-known for denying the people of Palestine water. That is what they do. [*Desk thumping*] Well known. So that is what they engaged in, put it in the hands of foreigners. And that is the attitude. So what it is—always in the hands of foreigners. No faith in the local capacity. And this is what we have done.

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Mr. President, and that is what they cannot understand. They cannot understand that through a prudent policy, through enlightened leadership, through articulated visions, [*Desk thumping*] we have been able to transcend the moribund institution and lack of morale which the PNM left as a legacy. And I want to say this, Mr. President, it is not often that we “toot our horns”. But Sage Yogaswami said:

A turtle lays a thousand eggs and weeps silently. A hen lays but one egg and cackles incessantly.

10.45 p.m.

In life, be like the turtle, and I have tried as much as possible—as you can be ambivalent in the political environment—to be like that, to be able to be invisible but get your work done.

Sen. Coudray: Done! That is right. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: But it is necessary for us to point, as people talk about transcendental leadership and that therefore it is necessary, as if this is not what is happening in this country.

In the text “Modern Groundwater Exploration”—I go to page 153, “Case Study—Tobago, West Indies, 1999—2000

Unprecedented Groundwater Discoveries in a Small Island Developing State (SIDS)”

I will read only two paragraphs, if you indulge me, Mr. President:

“Space-age technologies incorporating images from satellites orbiting the Earth and a novel public-sector private sector partnership were used to discover and develop enormous quantities of high-quality groundwater for the island of Tobago. This is the first Caribbean application of these technologies and of this type of partnership, and Tobago’s long history of conventional groundwater investigation, failed well drilling attempts, combined with a critical 2-mgd”—two million gallon shortfall per day—“made it a ‘worst case’ island test venue for new groundwater discoveries. Nevertheless, the use by the client of a ‘shared-risk’ contracting approach, combined with the application by the contractor of the novel ‘megawatersheds’ paradigm, and an advanced state-of-the-art exploration program resulted in the identification of 66 MCM/Year (398mgd)—66 million cubic metres, 39.8 million gallons daily—“of previously undetected, renewable groundwater resources in the

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prevailing crystalline bedrock of the island. The contractor subsequently drilled and actually developed over 6.6 MCM/Year....”—6.6 million cubic metres—“of sustainable, spring-quality groundwater all within one year. Under the contract, the contractor was only paid for water actually developed (and tested) and warranted the wells for one year.”

And I continue:

“Tobago’s present and future water problems were resolved in a single year’s work, using best-available technology at minimal risk to the client.” [*Desk thumping*]

I go on to the second paragraph and I will explain why.

“The contracting team was led by Earthwater Technologies International Inc. (ETI), which designed and supervised the project in joint venture with a Trinidad water and oil drilling firm, Lennox Petroleum Services Ltd, which also accepted the risk of financing this unprecedented Caribbean exploration project.”

So, Mr. President, Tobago, which had a problem, we resolved that problem using a different paradigm—totally different. And you know what that PNM did when they came back into office? They hounded Lennox Petroleum—hounded him! And whilst we had the solution to the problem in Tobago, they refused to continue that. Refused! Today, Lennox Petroleum is back and we are doing deep mega watershed—deep-water drilling in Tobago to sustain the water supply. So this is what it is.

It is also written about in the Water Encyclopedia, at page 267. It is also written about there, so when we do things, we do things so as to improve, for generations to come. So we solved the water problem in Tobago. And what they do, since they gave up on that—and I will come back to it, but I am dealing with the question of how you bring change in the public sector and how you galvanize the public sector, and this is what we, in the People’s Partnership, have been able to do. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, then we went on to deal with the postal sector. You know, the postal sector was regarded by the World Bank as a model for small island states. We took the postal department from a government department into a postal corporation, and in three publications by the World Bank: *Redirecting Mail* by Kumar Ranganathan, and then *The Postal Industry in an Internet Age: Case Studies in Postal Reform*, from page 33 to 35, directed towards Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Hadeed: That was Singapore.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: This is Trinidad. And I read from the article: The Postal Industry in an Internet Age: Case Studies in Postal Reform, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development at page 35:

“A productive combination of policy framework adjustment, commercialization, restructuring and rehabilitation of the national operator and increased private sector participation have produced rapid and dramatic changes in terms of improved financial and operational performance. Major improvements to universal service coverage, overall quality of service, and customer satisfaction have been achieved in just one year. And perhaps most importantly, improvements in postal services are already benefitting remote rural areas of the island and will continue to play a critical role in increasing access to communications.”

Much more written about it.

The Postal Sector in Developing and Transition Countries— Contributions to a Reform Agenda, edited by Pierre Guislain, another World Bank of September 2004.

So this is another reform and how you get the public sector to work makes the island much more competitive. It is in that light that I want to now make reference to the approach of the PNM. When we transformed the postal sector, and in accordance with the wishes of Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir, but we did so some 15 years ago, the study by Booz Allen Hamilton indicated that you ought to locate the postal corporation in close proximity to the airport because the movement was away from surface mail into courier packages and so on. And we went on to make linkages with FedEx, UPS,— and I cannot recall the other courier package.

Hon. Senator: DHL.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: DHL—made critical strategic linkages with them. You know what the PNM propaganda was? The seven point something acres of land in which the current postal corporation is located, was my land. That is the approach they take! They taint a world benchmark reform project through lies, half-truths and innuendoes. That is their approach.

Hon. Senator: Pedlars and hucksters.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: Yes, pedlars of that! Pedlars and hucksters of that, and hawkers of that, and “poticks” of propaganda. So that what they do— and you have a continuation of that as they seek now to taint the transformation of the Government and the contribution of the Government, but in particular, the Water and Sewerage Authority.

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Mr. President, what was the inheritance we bequeathed to them in 2001 in the water sector? I have a detailed analysis done by the RIC, and hon. Sen. Dhanayshar Mahabir will tell you about the rigour there in dealing with stats and so on. We left significant improvement in the water supply in 2001 but when we returned to government in 2010, notwithstanding all the gains we had made over the period, the PNM administration reversed those gains. The amount of water people were receiving regressed and that therefore now, you had 18 per cent who had 24/7 in 2010.

Where have we taken that? Through investment, through mobilization of the people, through the human capital that lies within the Water and Sewerage Authority, through the tremendous talent within that sector, we were able to move it. So, today I can tell you that we have in the water sector—and we can show it by way of graph and by way of investment in the water sector—that we have moved from 18 per cent, which is our inheritance from the PNM administration; and I know they had problems because they ran down the sector to give it to the Israelis. What do you have? From the 18 per cent in 2010 that we inherited—18 per cent—today it is now 62 per cent in Trinidad, 24/7, [*Desk thumping*] and from the 23 per cent getting a 24-hour supply in Tobago, today it is now 69 per cent, [*Desk thumping*] getting a 24-hour supply in Tobago. Tobago, you will see, we are tackling other things in Tobago, in addition. Tobago will be the first to receive a 24/7 water supply.

So this is what they are against. And, Mr. President, I can go constituency by constituency, project by project, street by street, to establish that what we are saying is, in fact, so. This is a data-driven analysis. This is data-driven, and when I hear the hon. Member, Sen. Lester Henry, who does not like to be referred to as a pedlar—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Zero Hedge.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: Zero Hedge for you.

Hon. Senator: Nah, man.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: But whilst we are dealing with the water sector, we understand the toxic environmental issues associated with waste water. Currently, only 30 per cent of the country is served by proper waste water disposal. You have some 200 plants spewing sewage into the environment, and our neighbour in Venezuela, cholera is alive. Cholera is there. Cholera is at our doorstep, so we had to take an initiative. But we started this initiative back in 1999 with the north water project. It is because of the last UNC administration you have the Beetham

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Sewerage Plant, treating sewage from Diego Martin to Petit Bourg, in there—tertiary treated sewer. Otherwise the inheritance then was four ponds—open latrines. They just go in there—they enter there and then they flow one into the other. That was our inheritance, and we built—which was completed with the PNM administration in 2002. But we started it because under their administration they wanted to continue the pond. Their approach was to de-sludge the pond. You will recall, Minister George.

So what have we done? We recognized that we needed to make investment in this sector, and that, therefore, if we allowed that to continue, this environmental hazard will capture us and will cause decay and death to the environment and will be a health hazard for the people of this country. Simultaneous as we move with water, we began to deal with the waste water sector. First we got a loan of US \$50 million through the work of the Ministry of Planning. We fulfilled all the conditionalities of that loan from the IDB because we recognized if we were to move with alacrity in dealing with that loan, we will be able to get further loans. Then we translated that US \$50 million loan for Maloney into a loan for US \$546 million to deal with the sewer plants in Malabar and in San Fernando and that whole catchment area.

11.00 p.m.

And that is where we are. We have awarded the contracts, all with international tendering in accordance with IDB rules, for the Malabar and for the San Fernando plants, and then there will be expansion of that network. It is a four-to eight-year period in which to complete that, and then that will move us from 30 per cent with sewerage cover to 60 per cent because the millennium goal is total sewerage coverage by 2030. We intend to achieve that long before 2030. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, you know, tourism is so important for the Tobago economy and for Trinidad and Tobago, but the unfortunate reality is that you had a 20-year-old wastewater plant in Scarborough and you only had about 400 persons connected to that plant. So we got a CREW funding through the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development and we are retrofitting every home in Scarborough to bring it into the system. Because you see, Mr. President, it is that raw sewerage that is impacting and impacted on two occasions and gave rise to coral bleaching in Tobago, and it is our intention to deal with that and we are dealing with that from that end. But further, in south-west Tobago, we will continue to deal with the wastewater reality in south-west Tobago, and under this budgetary allocation we are dealing with that.

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So south-west Tobago, the problem of sewerage will also be solved by this administration, but there is one problem in Tobago, major problem in dealing with the sustainability of water supply. The Hillsborough reservoir requires desilting. The allocation is \$20 million. I have been attempting—and that is why I was interested to know how much money the THA has been putting back into the account. I have been talking to the THA for about three years now with a view to collaborating with us, with a view to desilting the Hillsborough dam. A few months ago when the dry season was very harsh, the Hillsborough dam was in a serious problem. So that is a problem we have to deal with and it is something that we expect to get collaboration with the THA.

Mr. President, when we look at what is happening in the water sector, there is only a projection and the trajectory is for us to solve that problem, but we must keep in mind that regime sustainability is very important. I indicated to you what happened in 2010 that there was regression notwithstanding the gains we made in '95 to 2000, and every time the PNM comes to deal with any sector and they sit, there is inertia, there is stasis and nothing happens. So regime sustainability is important. In other words, you have to keep the People's Partnership in power to solve the water and wastewater problems in this country. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. President—*[Interruption]*

Sen. George: They talk, we deliver.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: All the time. And whilst we are doing that, we are not only making the investment, we are also bringing about institutional change—systemic change, institutional change. How do you preserve the gains you have made? Under the IDB loan, we are also changing the system with WASA. We are corporatizing it. Under the FAO, we are changing the forestry department from a 113-year-old department to a Forest and Protected Areas Authority. Under the IDB loan for the Port of Spain flood alleviation programme, we are confronting another reality in this country through the excellent work of the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. We have a defined scope of works for the flood alleviation programme for Port of Spain. PNM has been in control of the Port of Spain City Council since we have independence and prior to independence, and the practice for garbage—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Senator: Faris was a councillor.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: Oh, yes. The hon. Senator I understand was an alderman in that corporation and he will be quite familiar with the management practices in how they proceed, that the salvaging staff pushed the garbage down the water inlets and they clogged the drains. We have been cleaning that through the use of vacuum cleaners from the Water and Sewerage Authority.

It is not our portfolio responsibility, but it is against the grain of being a Trinbagonian to see your city flooding. We have collaborated with the city council and with this Mayor in particular, Mayor Tim Kee, and we are cleaning out the city. That is part of the work, but as you see we are also dealing with the cove. That cove, right next to the lighthouse, never cleaned, never desilted, an eyesore to the gateway of the city. We have embarked on a programme and when you pass there, take a look. Take a look, you will see the kind of works we are doing. Amphibious, where significant desilting is taking place there.

In addition, we are cleaning the underground drains that lead to that, but that is only short-term. The medium to long-term works is that we have nine packages to change the underground drainage of Port of Spain, and work is expected to begin in the dry season. Request for proposals are going out for prequalification, then request for proposals and then they will award contracts in accordance with IDB procurement rules. We have the plan to solve the problem in Port of Spain for flood alleviation.

Mr. President, and whilst we—there are only two more points I want to make because we can talk all day on this, all night. From time immemorial, we talked about the Mamoral dam. From time immemorial, we are talking about the Mamoral dam and that nothing was done. Nothing was done with respect to the Mamoral dam. Absolutely nothing.

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

Motion made: That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. F. Al-Rawi]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. G. Singh: Thank you, Mr. President. So what we are doing, we are building—in fact, I would say through divine intervention a lake was created in Ravine Sable, but we call it Ravine Sable, and utilizing that divine creation it is our intention now to build a reservoir. That reservoir will be dealing with flood mitigation in the Caparo area, but will also allow for potable water treatment; it will allow for the management of the water supply for farming communities in the area. The potable water supply will be 2.2 million gallons per day. It will open up that area.

This is what it is about—sustainability—and we have a construction of the water treatment plant, the construction of the northern embankment protection, the expansion of the Ravine Sable sand pit and construction of inlet and outlet. The projected funding is in the vicinity of \$150 million. We have \$15 million for this year and projected as we go along. We had discussions already with the residents in that area, so we will be providing—that is another initiative to deal with the whole question of sustainability of supply.

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We also have to deal with the question of comprehensive drainage plan for the national community. We have a comprehensive national drainage plan which requires significant investment in the construction of retention reservoirs in the Northern Range so as to prevent rapid runoff, prevent flooding. We are studying each river basin and we are coming up with recommendations for each. But, Mr. President, under the National Environmental Policy and under the various other subsector or sectoral policies, national climate change policy, national forest policy, national protected areas policy and national wildlife policy—all in accordance to our 2010 manifesto—there can be no sustainable development without respect for the environment. So I want to deal with two issues. One, this question of wildlife.

The Cabinet in its enlightened approach took the decision to have a moratorium on hunting and part of that decision was that there ought to be a density count of the animals in this country, and I want to quickly provide this honourable Senate and the national community with a preliminary report of the wildlife survey. It is not good for wildlife in this country. It is not good!

One, the design of the survey was done such that several permutations of the data analysis would be possible. On the macro level, the objective of estimating population abundance and determining population distribution of all species were observed, but focusing on five game species. At the sample areas only the agouti was observed in sufficient numbers to allow for the use of distance analysis techniques. The fact that other game species were not observed in sufficient numbers to estimate abundance may more likely to be related to their scarcity or lower population levels due to hunting pressures over the years and their life cycles. This is of critical importance to note as the survivability of these species will seem to depend on a period of no pressure to low for population levels to stabilize. The only wildlife survey data prior to this was the central ring study.

As previously indicated, agouti numbers have increased while the other hunted species have declined. The comparative above seems to suggest that the hunting pressures have led to decline even further than the last study and this is a cause for concern. The hunters who participated in this process, together with the community groups, have suggested there are areas that were considered hunting sites and less hunted sites and suggested that the areas not so identified should be allowed for reference. The data analysis thus far shows no difference between the hunted sites and the reference sites. This may be indicating that hunting is ubiquitous and that in this area there is no less hunted or reference sites. So the sanctuary, there is no sanctuary, there is no reserve. There is a predatory practice, you hunt everywhere.

So therefore, what is really required is that it continues, but there is no lifting of the moratorium. What we will do in this period now is greater enforcement—greater enforcement. It is our duty to protect the wildlife for generations to come. [*Desk thumping*]

The second thing I want to deal with before I conclude my contribution, Mr. President, is the Beverage Containers Bill. As you will recall, in the beverage container there were certain fundamental flaws in it. So we went back and consulted with the stakeholder community. Every soft drink manufacturer, every importer, every bottled water manufacturer in this country, we consulted. We had discussions, we had meetings, lengthy, and we came up with a plan. But the fly in the ointment was the parallel imports and how are you going to deal with the parallel imports and who is going to take the responsibility for the parallel imports. When we went to customs, customs indicated that if they have to charge a refund fee, then that money has to go into the Consolidated Fund and it cannot go back out to the private sector. So it required a rethink and that is where we are at, with a view to establishing a new authority called the recycling authority with beverage containers being the first stream, and that legislation will be coming to this Senate.

11.15 p.m.

But, in the meantime, we have not sat idly by and allowed the beverage containers to grow in the environment. We fashioned a plan utilizing the IMA for drafting and data analysis of the necessary forms, the EMA for supervision and funding control, the CEPEP for collection throughout the country and SWMCOL for disposal in an environmentally-appropriate fashion; not dumping on the landfill. Mr. President, from March to September of this year, we have collected through various sites in Trinidad over 521,000 kilograms of beverage containers in Trinidad. It is our intention to continue that programme. It is our intention to continue that whilst we deal with the legislative aspect, so we clean up the environment.

We are also dealing with a plan for natural accounting to be part of the accounting in the country so that the natural accounting will participate in the national accounting, because there is a cost to the maintenance of water sheds and there is a benefit for them in terms of the national accounting. So there are a lot of things that we are doing, Mr. President, time does not permit.

I merely want to indicate at this stage that the Chinese have a saying: water is the blood of the earth and water is a vital prerequisite to all forms of life, and we in the People's Partnership have demonstrated the capacity to provide water for all. Mr. President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):

Thank you, Mr. President. I want to thank also Members on this side for the sterling contributions which have been made, which has left me with very little to say this evening. [*Desk thumping*] I think, you know, a lot of the points that have been made. I would also like to thank Members of the other side, the Independent Bench, for the sterling contributions made, for the insights provided and so on, and, of course, the Opposition for the comments made. As the Desiderata says, listen to others, even to the dull and ignorant, they too have their story. [*Desk thumping and laughter and crosstalk*]

But, Members, perhaps, I do not want to spend too long going through too much of what has been said but I do have to make a comment, because I really believe that Sen. Dr. Henry was—unfortunately he is not here—but I thought that his contribution was full of hyperbole, full of, “yuh know”, in a sense, going outside and perhaps creating a kind of a panic scenario which is important. I know that my other colleagues have indicated and spoken about it and so on, and I think, have dealt with the issue of Zero Hedge and so on.

But I just want to, just for the record at least, put back into the record some measure of balance in terms of what is happening with our economy at the moment. The IMF, in their Press Release number 14, July 2014, they indicated that on June 16, they had concluded the Article IV Consultation and this is what they said:

“Trinidad and Tobago’s economy is embarking on a sustainable growth path. Maintenance-related slowdowns in the energy sector are ending, while non-energy growth is robust, with economic slack being used up.

Headline inflation is trending down...” at that time.

Since then, we know we have had one month where it has been reversed but I know—

Sen. Maharaj: “Ah fixing it.”

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yeah—we have a commitment to ensure that by next month, the figures are looking better.

“The unemployment rate has fallen to only 3¾ percent...The fiscal balance is likely to improve in fiscal year 2013/14, with the deficit falling to only 1½ percent of GDP...The external current account surplus has rebounded to over 10 percent of GDP and reserves are at 12 months of imports.”—cover.

I do not need to go into all of the details. I mean, they also did indicate that there are areas where we need to pay attention but basically the position is that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago remains strong, and the metrics remain well-managed. It is not that we need to fall asleep at the wheel, there is a lot still to be done, but I think that, by and large, we are heading in the right direction. We have started to rebound from the lows of 2009 coming into 2010, and we continue to grow from strength to strength.

With respect to debt, there has been a lot of talk about debt and the fact that there was a discussion that seemed to suggest that everything is out of control, and it is just growing, and there is this huge number of loans from the IDB and everybody else. When you look at what is happening, our total debt has increased from \$50 billion in 2010 to \$78 billion currently. The debt-to-GDP ratio has also deteriorated. Prior to 2009, it was about 37 per cent; it is currently 43 per cent. But the metric is still very good in relation to what is being experienced in other parts of the world, and Trinidad and Tobago remains an A-rated country by the international rating agencies.

But this is what the—and I should add that while the debt has gone up, I think a very important point to note, and that increase from \$50 billion to \$78 billion is that a little over 60 per cent of that increase was due to the fact that we had to acquire additional debt to deal with the Clico and HCU issue. So that there was considerable build-up of debt to ensure that we could repay the EFPA holders and a number of other investors in the CL Group and to stabilize the CL group. So that a lot of it did not have to do with some of the activities and work of the Government here but also had to do with how we were to stabilize the economy following the crisis which came about as a result of the failure of regulation for Clico and HCU. Now, that we expect will start to come back down.

One of the reasons in managing how we move forward and getting to a growth trajectory for the economy, one of the things that we did is we said, we understand that we will be getting back this money from Clico and from the CL Financial Group over time. So that what we are seeing is a temporary increase in our overall debt stock and a deterioration of the debt metrics, but that, for example, once we get the MHTL funds, approximately TT \$9.8 billion is what we expect to get from MHTL and MHIL, and that can be used to reduce the overall debt stock and therefore bring the numbers back down again. And then, of course, there are other assets to be disposed of in the CL Group and as those are disposed of over the next year or so, we expect to see that metric come down again based on the extent to which we can monetize some of the assets without creating any dislocation in the economy as a whole in any particular sector. Those are some issues that we have to address as we gradually realize or obtain the repayments on the funds that we have disbursed under the CL Financial arrangement.

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But, what I just want, again, for the record, Mr. President, is to speak to the statement which came out on June 13, 2014, the IMF statement, in Paragraph 29, where they say that:

“Even under the conservative baseline, a debt sustainability analysis indicates no major concerns through the projection period (Annex 2). Although the central government’s debt trajectory is of some concern, the debt ratio’s low initial level allows it to remain below 40 percent of GDP. Moreover, external debt remains at less than 20 percent of GDP by the end of the projection period, while the share of short-term debt is exceptionally low. Thus, rollover risks are limited and debt metrics are relatively insensitive to changes in risk parameters.”

I mean, it is some technical language but basically what they are again saying is that the debt sustainability analysis indicates no major concerns throughout the projection period.

Now, of course, again, things could change, you could run into difficulty and therefore, we have to continue to monitor these things. I get the impression sometimes that people are thinking that because we say things are—our metrics are reasonably well-contained that the suggestion is that, “Well, what we are going to do is we are just going to borrow ah set ah money and we just going to bankrupt the country”. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are not intending to do that in any way at all whatsoever.

What we are doing is certainly, we have had some increased debt as the hon. Minister Ganga Singh indicated. There are a number of things that we need to do as far as our infrastructure development goes. Water for all is a goal that the Minister has set and he is working towards that. The waste water problem that we have in our nation is something that needs to be addressed and that is being worked on. The road infrastructure is being addressed, and a number of other areas of the economy. We have a plan for the expansion of our electrification drive and our electrification infrastructure, and that plan runs us straight through to about 2024 and again, there will be some need for some level of debt as we build up our capacity in that area.

So, there has been some growth there but it has been done in a measured way—in a way that we understand how it is going to be reduced by way, as I indicated, of the repayments that will be coming in from the CL Financial restructuring and repayment arrangements and so on. And over time, we expect, therefore, to continue to keep our metrics reasonably well-managed.

So going forward, Mr. President, I just wanted to place on the record that in addition to all of the points which have been made by all of my colleagues on this side, you know, with respect to things like GATE, with respect to things like energy and so on—justice, trade and all of planning and all of the areas which fall under the respective portfolios of different Ministers. In addition to what is being done in each Ministry, I just want to say that with respect to the overall metrics in terms of what we look at, the economy continues to be reasonably sound.

Of course, we understand the risks and that there are risks, and we have identified some of those risks in our opening presentation to this honourable Senate when we went through some of the risks that we face, including on a global basis, the unwinding of monetary easing in some of the major advanced countries; potential vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the merging market economies; we are seeing some weaknesses in China and India, particularly, which can have significant effect on the world as a whole; the persistent fragilities in the Euro area; unsustainable public debt in developed countries; increased geopolitical tensions which hon. Minister Bharath mentioned recently; extreme events of weather and, of course, we ourselves, in Trinidad and Tobago, we are susceptible to the issues of what happens with the price of our major commodities of oil and gas.

So, those are all risks that continue to remain and that we have to continue to manage but, of course, we are not planning for a global economic collapse in the next two years. I have to say that. [*Laughter*] You know, it could possibly happen but we are not expecting that it will happen, and we are working towards ensuring that in a reasonably stable environment going forward with an average of what is projected by the IMF and some of the other international rating agencies that, within that context, we think that we can manage the process as we go forward.

11.30 p.m.

There were a few comments which have all been addressed. There was one on the Prime Minister's Office. There was mention of \$355 million in the Prime Minister's Office and there was not a direct connection to the National Operations Centre (NOC), which has been brought under the remit of the Office of the Prime Minister because of the need that was seen for a special particular attention that needed to be paid to this particular area and that those funds were provided there to ensure the full establishment of that centre, which will allow monitoring of things going on throughout Trinidad and Tobago and to be able to have rapid responses to any emerging crisis.

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There was a further \$90 million for the National Security Council, which relates to the purchase of sensitive equipment as well as salaries for persons in that particular area. And, again it seemed to suggest that this is some kind of, I do not know, allocation that, perhaps, might have had some sinister objective. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of course, we cannot discuss national security issues openly, but, nevertheless, the funds that are in there are properly accounted for.

There was also a comment made by Sen. Faris Al-Rawi, concerning Caribbean Airlines and the fact that, I think we tried to trick the Senate.

Sen. Al-Rawi: Could be perceived.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Could be perceived as tricking, and so on. I just want to quote from the *Hansard* what I said, just to make sure, because, you know, I mean, one thing I could say, we are not here to trick anybody. [*Desk thumping*] We are not here to mislead anybody. Right? What I said, if I can quote from the *Hansard* of September 22, 2014. I am quoting:

“With respect to the funding, you raised a point...”

And this is me speaking now to the Chairman, in response to a question from the hon. Mr. Deyalsingh.

“With respect to the funding, you raised a point which I think is important for me to make, in that there may be the need for us to break some of this funding out between some kind of an equity injection, apart from the transfers to CAL, but that is really a reporting issue. I would want to show it—‘show it’ is not probably the right term. I would probably want to have it classified that way, and the reason for that is that the brought-forward losses could significantly reduce the capital of the company and the equity of the company and I would probably want to ensure that without increasing the allocation that is given to them,”

And this is important.

“...without increasing the allocation that is given to them, that we manage the allocation in such a way that it deals with the issue of a potential capital deficit, if it could potentially arise. Because I would want to ensure that they maintain an acceptable debt to equity ratio. So I may want to reclassify this.”

What I was saying here, Mr. President, we have broken out the funds, the allocation to Caribbean Airlines in a particular way but I recognize the fact that, perhaps, I may wish to just switch the allocation somewhat, in order to ensure that the company is adequately capitalized. It is very important for the company to have a good and a sustainable debt to equity ratio.

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So I was giving advance notice that, notwithstanding the figure is there we may still wish to amend it slightly to ensure that the equity that the company has, when I get the final set of audited accounts, that if there is need to inject additional equity, that we could reclassify some of what we were originally going to put as loans into equity, to allow the company without changing the total amount. The total amount remains as it is. It is just to ensure that the funds that are made available to the company is injected into the company in such a way that you maximize the leverage that you can get out of the funding that is put in, and it is just a question of, in a sense, engineering of the company's balance sheet with the funding that you have to get the best possible rate of return.

So that is all it was, but the impression one had was that this is a major sinister plot intended to do something with respect to money from the—[*Crosstalk*] So, I think it is something that we would like to dispel and we have had to do that all evening, all day today and yesterday, in trying to correct a lot of the misconceptions that may have been communicated by the—[*Interruption*]

Sen. George: Misinformation.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—misinformation communicated by the other side.

I think, finally, Mr. President, the issue of diversification has come up and the fact that, perhaps, we are not seeing the results we want to see, as quickly as we should see it. But I want to say that the other side has been diversifying for 50 years and still, today, we are at a point where diversification is a major issue and we need, therefore, to—I mean, certainly the hon. Minister Bharath, to me, has been given four years, less than four years. Minister, I think two years you were Minister of Agriculture. So, you know, it is a work in progress. It is an embryonic work in relative terms, as compared to the number of years that the other side has been working on this. I think from what we are seeing and the results and the successes we are seeing—Minister mentioned the thousand new jobs which were introduced into the financial services sector. So we are seeing some movement in that particular area, and I think if we had another 10 years, Minister, we should be pretty good. We should be fully diversified by that time. We do not need 50 years. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, I do not intend to keep us any longer. [*Desk thumping*] I think we have had a long—[*Desk thumping*] I might decide to start over. Mr. President, with those few short words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

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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.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time and passed.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of the Environment and Water Resources (Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Senate, to wish you happy birthday tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*] And whilst I am aware that you would be in another capacity, a higher capacity, doing your duty to God and country, we hope that you will take some time for introspection and enjoyment. On behalf of all of us, happy birthday to you, Mr. President. [*Desk thumping*]

I now wish to adjourn the Senate to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.40 p.m.