HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 12, 2015

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the order for the consideration of the Heads of Expenditure in the Standing Finance Committee was submitted by the Leader of the Opposition on Friday, October 09, 2015 in accordance with Standing Order 84(2). This should by now have been circulated to all hon. Members via email. As provided for in Standing Order 83(1), five days are allotted for Standing Finance Committee to examine the estimates of expenditure together with the Appropriation Bill.

The proceedings of the committee will formally commence on Thursday, October 15, 2015. However, time permitting, I suggest that the Motion to resolve into Standing Finance Committee be moved on Wednesday, October 14, 2015 only to permit Standing Finance Committee to finalize the agenda and hold preliminary discussions on the procedures to be followed. I do hope that Members will find this arrangement to be in order.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 09, 2015]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: I now call on the Member for San Fernando West.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): [*Desk thumping*] Much obliged. Madam Speaker, it is a sincere privilege and an honour to be an elected Member of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago. I am extremely grateful to God the Almighty for having taken us through the journey that brought us here. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the people of San Fernando West who so resoundingly broke every record in San Fernando West to place me here as their representative for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I wish to express my profound gratitude to the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, the Member for Diego Martin West the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, for allowing me to perform the functions of the Attorney General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Certainly it is not lost upon me, Madam Speaker, that this is the first time in quite some time that an Attorney General has been appointed from the House of Representatives, and therefore, one has a very careful balance to observe in the conduct of discharging the duties for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at ministerial level, at Cabinet level, and certainly constituency level, bearing in mind that we must all pay homage to God the Almighty and give respect to our families as well.

Madam President—Madam Speaker—it would take me a little while to transition from my five years in the Senate. The Bill before us is an Appropriation Bill. It is set by the formula in Parliament; we are guided by the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Appropriation Bills are meant to be an account of the moneys spent in Trinidad and Tobago from the financial year prior and then a layout of moneys for the financial year ahead. In this exercise we are intended to speak, through you, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and in speaking to them there is an inherent requirement that we give an explanation for that which we have managed and that which we intend to do. Indeed, coming into the saddle of Government as we did on September 07 we have inherited a portfolio.

And may I remind Trinidad and Tobago that we in the Government now stand to give an explanation to Trinidad and Tobago of the Ministries which we now as a Government are obliged to give. I know that this has caused some degree of elevation of temperature in the Chamber. No doubt there is a heartfelt desire from the Members opposite to try and justify the stewardship, but we in the Government wish to reside in a very simple parameter and that is to try to give an explanation of value for money. This after all is what the taxpayers who put us here, who fund us, expect from us.

So, Madam Speaker, the Appropriation Bill says that of the 22 new Ministries that occupy Trinidad and Tobago moving down from 33 Ministries, that I am in charge and conduct of Head 23 described as the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. This Ministry, as now presently constructed, is a combination of what was called the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of the Attorney General, and there has been some incorporation of the Ministry of Justice. In fact, the allocation prescribed for this purpose is $442,735,550.

That is quite properly, as my friends opposite may notice, a combination of two large Ministries, the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of the Attorney General. But for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago I think it incumbent to reflect upon the roles and functions ascribed to the Attorney General. It is true that the Constitution does prescribe the basic parameters for the role of the Attorney General being, of course, set out in section 76(2); and that is, that the Attorney General shall be responsible for the administration of legal affairs in Trinidad and Tobago and legal proceedings for and against the State. That is a very large, all-encompassing structure. The areas of responsibility, as I see it, as is quite my reflection, involve three substantial areas: the administrative side of the Ministry, the legislative side of the Ministry and then the substantive side of the Ministry.

In the administrative arm, Madam Speaker, I was very interested to zone in upon the figures of the people, the human factor that we are responsible for in this Ministry. And the human factor in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs now comprises 1,867 persons. Of that 1,867 persons, 948 are at the Ministry of the Attorney General, five coming from the Ministry of Justice, and 669 at the Ministry of Legal Affairs. And I wish to flag now a point which I will come to a little bit later, the fact that there is a serious disparity existing in the Ministry between permanent positions and contract positions, and there is also a desperate need, Madam Speaker, to deal with, of the contract positions, the number of vacancies that are open. There are, after all, in the Ministry of the Attorney General of the 370 contract positions, 202 vacancies; and of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, of the contract positions 390, there are 198 vacancies. This, Madam Speaker, has to do with the manner in which our system is operating to fill vacancies, something which we intend to do in a very serious measure as a Government.

Madam Speaker, by way of explaining the tenure passed, it was interesting to note that in the five-year period prior to this Government's tenure, in the period 2010 to the last financial year ending, that the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Legal Affairs—and in particular I will add because there has been an absorption of part of that portfolio, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development—that these Ministries collectively received some $5,472,388,581. That is a lot of money. And what is left for us in Trinidad and Tobago right now is to appreciate how that money was spent in terms of a value-for-money production on the administrative side, on the legislative side and on the substantive side.

On the legislative side, Madam Speaker, it is well known that the Attorney General pilots a vast majority of legislation, but is responsible for the supervision of legislation which comes to the Cabinet and the Legislative Review Committee. In dealing with that therefore, it is incumbent to have as a Government an oversight and responsibility for the legislation which comes to you; much the word legacy used opposite is true to that description.

On the substantive side, Madam Speaker, the office of the Attorney General is responsible for the construction, previously, of court facilities for the Judiciary, the appointments to quasi-judicial bodies, law reform, the legislative agenda, the Office of the Chief State Solicitor, the Office of Solicitor General, the Office of Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Intellectual Property, Registrar General, the criminal justice system, quicker-justice initiative programmes and about 17 statutory bodies.

On the substantive side it is critical insofar as we have a coordinated role with the office of the DPP to factor the management of the criminal justice system, and to make sure that we in Trinidad and Tobago, who are desperate to make sure that we live in a safe environment, that our people can feel that our Government is genuinely focused upon the deliverables that the people want. After all, Madam Speaker, coming out of an election surely there is agreement on both sides of the House that corruption is a scourge which must be eliminated from this country, [*Desk thumping*] that crime and the scourge of crime must be eradicated from Trinidad and Tobago. That fairness and equality must be delivered to Trinidad and Tobago, and that when a government spends money that the government must do so to bring an outcome which is beneficial to the people in the most efficient fashion.

So, when one adds the Judiciary in terms of the construction and the development programme et cetera, a total of approximately $13 billion has been spent in these sectoral heads. Madam Speaker, it is now—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Over what?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—over the five-year period. It is now important upon us as a country to say: what have we purchased for this? Madam Speaker, may I respectfully say that I am speaking through you to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. May I respectfully say that the PNM Government, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, as now constituted, is interested in this appropriation in demonstrating efficiency. We are of the view, in the month that we have now

been into the chair of government, that there is a lot of room to improve the efficiencies of governance by way of improving expenditure efficiency.

The first thing that I want to come across, Madam Speaker, is the fact that in this wide array of supervision that the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs must have, the first thing is, how much of it goes towards institutional spending in terms of budgetary allocation, year on year? How much of it goes towards developing the structures of government to make sure that the wheels move well? How much of it goes outside in terms of resources to be purchased outside of the Ministry and what is the outcome for it?

10.15 a.m.

Now, Madam Speaker, sometime ago by way of answer to question posed in the Parliament by the then Opposition to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago led by the Member for Siparia, we were told in Trinidad and Tobago that the Ministry of the Attorney General spent a total of $444,444,197. That is close to half of a billion dollars in expenditure in the Ministry of the Attorney General. That is to legal fees only. One half of a billion dollars to external counsel. These are lawyers hired by the Ministry of the Attorney General who do not work full time or on contract for the State and are external lawyers. So, the period 2010 to 2015, half of a billion dollars was spent by one Ministry alone.

I looked at it insofar as the constitutional mandate prescribes in section 76 that the Attorney General is responsible for the legal affairs including state enterprises. The language of section 76 of the Constitution gives you that in section 76(2). And I called, Madam Speaker, for a list of state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago will note that there are 107 reporting state enterprises, some of them are wholly owned, some partially owned, some where there is a minority interest by the State, and that of these 107 I can now say, having done a review, which is an initial review but in terms of figures, which I have confirmed so far, that of the 107 state enterprises I have received a report from 60 of them. In examining 60 of these state enterprises, that is where 47 have not yet reported, I am now able to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the sum of money spent by 60 state enterprises quite apart from the $444-odd million is $292,266,523.39.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: On legal fees?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: That is on legal fees in 60 out of 107 state enterprises. I am able to say further that of the 22 Ministries now constituted, that four of them have reported as to legal fees. And of the four Ministries reporting, that we have a

figure of a couple million in addition, but that the Ministry of Public Administration has confirmed $8,545,000-odd; Ministry of Finance $155,382,000-odd; Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise $1,968,000-odd. Four only, of 22 Ministries reporting.

I did a tabulation of the amount of money that we have now spent to date and I can tell you that it is a figure very well close to what we warned Trinidad and Tobago we were coming upon. We have arrived at, and there was an error on this because there was an inclusion of pounds sterling stated as dollars and not pounds sterling, Trinidad and Tobago dollars. Taking a £10 million figure as TT $10 million, the figure with 47 state enterprises yet to report, 18 Ministries yet to report, is $892,607,271. Let me put it closer, if you add the $10 million error we are now at $900 million in legal fees spent over five years.

Hon. Member: Oh good lord, Jesus Christ!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Conservatively, I do not think I would be doing any injustice to say that $1 billion nearly was spent in legal fees.

Dr. Rowley: But when the others report.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: When the others report, that figure will be produced to the Parliament with details. But I want to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Dr. Moonilal: Shut your stink mouth!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I am sorry, I just heard—

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I protest.

Miss Mc Donald: Oh gosh.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: I have heard the comment from this Chair and I would like all Members to be guided by the Standing Orders and at least show each other some respect.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "All yuh can't be making disrespectful comments".

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I expect a lot better than that.

Dr. Rowley: Forget it, just get on with the debate.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let us get it back straight, $900 million in legal fees. And I want to say, Madam Speaker, because I have raised the concept of value for

money, it would be incumbent upon me to say, well, look, what have we got for $900 million? Perhaps there is an explanation for it. Perhaps it is a deserved explanation.

Certainly, that $900 million spent by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, administration, the legacy left behind for Trinidad and Tobago has to be factored in the context of what have we purchased? What outcomes have been delivered in the five years under which there was a stewardship? And I want to claw us back to 2010 when the Member for Diego Martin West was the Leader of the Opposition, and he, in the first budget, cautioned, as a result of statements made by the then Attorney General, that Trinidad and Tobago should be cautious not to enter into a witch-hunting exercise where there was an inclination, and in fact a direct statement that an A team would be hired to prosecute matters on behalf of the State. Because the Leader of the Opposition was not condemning then that you should not spend fees appropriately, he was saying be careful that the exercise of expenditure on external fees does not itself become the scandal.

That, Madam Speaker, in the second budget turned out to be the expansion of legal fees in the Office of the Attorney General, the one area which doubled. And in fact it was noted then that that is where the expansion in the budget had come from in terms of growth, in legal fees. Today, in looking at this exercise, I want to drill down a little bit further, and I want to tell you that of the $900 million, nearly $1 billion spent in those agencies that have reported so far, I was able to pluck out 11 attorneys who acted for the State—just 11—and I took some of the matters that they worked on and not all, because there are vast volumes of work. I would not in this Parliament disclose names of people, but I want Trinidad and Tobago to know firstly in looking at value for money what the distribution across the sector was.

I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, lawyer number one, $58,167,495.93; lawyer number two, $35,818,703.16; lawyer number three, $13,383,000; lawyer number four, $26,574,235; lawyer number five, $24,541,670; lawyer number six, $13,773,402.58; lawyer number seven, $16,565,083.65; lawyer number nine—skipping a bit—$50,073,040. In adding up 11 lawyers only used by this Government, past, I can tell you the figure is for 11 human beings, $245,201,908.25. That is 11 people only. And one of these lawyers was eight months out of law school.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Eight months out of law school had earned a figure of $1,363,888.89. One lawyer, eight months out of law school. So that is distribution. That is quantum.

Let us look at what we purchased. Because, after all, one may say, perhaps there was a proper expenditure and there was value for money involved in that. I looked at some of the material relative to expenditure and suffice it to say that what the Government spoke to, the past Government, and what they did seemed to be far from the case. Let me address an issue frontally that one of my learned colleagues mentioned, there was a criticism and cry amongst the UNC members in their post-budget analysis, that the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development had been savaged and that there was no reflection on gender, and that this was something that had to be looked at carefully, and that we had to make sure to give an explanation for it. I would like to tell Trinidad and Tobago that the reorganization of Ministries was a purposeful exercise to deal with efficiency. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to give you an example of efficiency which relates to how some of these legal fees were spent. We know that the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development managed the Children's Authority, and in fact they had responsibility under successive Ministers: Minister De Coteau, Minister Marlene Coudray, Minister Verna St. Rose-Greaves and Minister Mary King, because it started in Planning. They successively had the responsibility to manage the entity known as the Children's Authority, and particularly to make sure to deal with the proclamation of the suite of legislation concerning children: the Children Act, the Children's Authority legislation, the community residences—if I abbreviate that Bill. That package of legislation as was met by the Children Act 2012, when we did it.

We have heard this Government, past, the Opposition now, tell Trinidad and Tobago repeatedly that you must separate out areas of responsibility, because by their submission you had better efficiency. Well, I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, that I hold exactly the contrary view. And I hold the contrary view because what happened to Trinidad and Tobago in a particular instance that I am about to speak to is scandalous. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in May 2015, by Cabinet Minute 1154 of May 14, 2015, specifically dealt with the proclamation of the Children's Authority Act, the Adoption of Children Act, the Children Act, 2012, its proclamation as well, and the Children Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Act, 2000, its proclamation.

The Minister with responsibility then brought a Note to Cabinet dated May 12, 2015, and in it specifically identified those sections of the law which should be proclaimed. I want to remind Trinidad and Tobago that when Minister Clifton De Coteau came to deal with the foster care regulations together with two other pieces of regulations, that in the debate which ensued in the Senate in particular, I took great care to ask the Minister then about the proclamation of the legislation. That debate resulted—that was on January 21, 2015. And Minister De Coteau had some very unfortunate things to say about my contribution, one of which included the fact that I should learn to not be so concerned essentially about all of these matters, and what he said was, in respect of proclamation that he wants to assure the Senate that the proclamation of several pieces of legislation is an absolute priority for the Government, and I do not think only of the Government but of the Members here in this august Chamber. Proclamation of the Act is simply awaiting the completion.

So, we warned the Government then that proclamation was to be carefully done. It came up again when we were dealing with the family law division of the High Court which was abandoned by the Government coming down in the month of May 2015. We again raised the issue of proclamation. Specifically, I raised it as a Member of the Senate in the committee stage. To my surprise, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, with Senior Counsel then as Prime Minister, with a separate Ministry responsible for gender affairs, proclaimed parts of the Children Act and parts of the Children's Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act.

10.30 a.m.

Let me tell you what that resulted in, Madam Speaker. That resulted, after careful consideration by way of separation of Ministries, by eminent counsel sitting no less than positioned as Prime Minister then, in a terrible proclamation. Such that, the YTC, the Youth Training Centre, the St. Michael's Home, the St. Jude's Home, none of them, as we stand in Trinidad and Tobago, are capable of lawfully housing people detained in those centres.

It is, therefore, unconstitutional because the law has been proclaimed to house children—that is, offenders under the age of 18 years, in the YTC, in St. Michael's, in St. Jude's and very importantly in the Women's Prison. What does that mean? Any big deal there? Guess who is prosecuting the case on behalf of child offenders? Who has approached the court to say the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is in breach of the law? They have proclaimed the legislation. They

have now made it unconstitutional to hold in remand, in the YTC boys, to hold in St. Michael's, St. Jude's, to hold in the Women's Prison, no less a person than my predecessor the hon. Anand Ramlogan of Senior Counsel.

Dr. Rowley: Oh my Lord.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: That is not the only thing that he is prosecuting. I will come to a couple of those. So a member, past Attorney General of the now Opposition has gone to court and is seeking to get orders of the court, including a declaration that you are held unconstitutionally and damages for unconstitutional detention.

Now it is a fact, the law is that they are unconstitutionally held right now. It is known to the Members of the Opposition. They had a whole Ministry of gender affairs to manage that subset. You cried about it when the budget was presented. You said, how could you get rid of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development. Lo and behold, the attorney-at-law acting for the Opposition in matters including being Senior Counsel in election petitions for the Government, the same AG is in court right now making sure that the State of Trinidad and Tobago pays damages to people who are incarcerated. And let me tell you, as a result of his Government's proclamation.

So the handbook on awards of damages for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution in Trinidad and Tobago, a handbook produced by the Judicial Education Institute of Trinidad and Tobago just published, it says at page 35, and I want to tell the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago what their value for money got. At page 35, Madam Speaker, listen to what we have. There is a table giving you the assessment. If you were to look to detention between 84 days and 186 days, depending upon when we get there, mind you, let me put it clear, detention from May 18, 2015, when the proclamation happened under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia's guidance. That proclamation has resulted in unlawful detention and we as taxpayers—listen to this one, in the case of *Curtis Gabriel v the Attorney General*, general damages $125,000, exemplary damages $50,000.

In the case of *Steve Dyer v the Attorney General*, general damages, unlawful arrest, detention, $250,000. Let me put this into further context—I am sorry to borrow some of your space. What does that mean for us? Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, where we are. We have right now a situation where, let me tell you an example of how many people are actually detained. We have under the

supervision of the last Government and now, 54 young men detained at the YTC. We have a further 16 detentions, and when we get the total amount we have 72 persons incarcerated at YTC.

Needless to say, the number of cases that are now coming forward are growing like a mushroom after a nuclear event. And if you take $250,000 and you multiply it by 72 and you let that amount be a factor which can raise the longer they are in detention. That, hon. Members, is the legacy purchased by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, administration. [*Desk thumping*] One matter alone. Madam Speaker, it does not end there, because that is an ongoing saga, and I wish to say in respect of solution, that that particular mention, the solution to that is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago now has to move as a matter of emergency status to deal with the situation at St. Michael's, at St. Jude's and at YTC—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 49(1), for consideration. Just for the record.

Madam Speaker: But in terms of, hon. Member for Oropouche East, I believe you are raising the issue under sub judice rule. But one, it is not that there must be ongoing proceedings, it must be that it affects, it has the possibility of affecting the outcome of the matter. [*Desk thumping*] I therefore rule that he is not in breach of the rule.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your ruling. I will move on, time is short. Madam Speaker, I know that my learned friends opposite may be a little bit uncomfortable about this, but I am talking about accounting for the money spent, by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I am on the point right now of saying, how much money, apart from damages, I am about to say how much money it is going to cost to fix it. You see, while that proclamation was happening in May, and while the Member for Oropouche East was sitting in the Cabinet then, reading the Note that came to him then, that warned that there was to be a capital outlay. In June when the matter came back to Cabinet it was estimated that nearly $300-odd million would have to be spent to deal with the development and building of two new centres which would take a couple of years to get done.

So if they knew that it would take years to get done, if they knew it would cost hundreds of millions of dollars, why proclaim the legislation in that fashion? You see, Madam Speaker, to fix it now requires either a legislative invention, an intervention which may involve applying something with retrospectivity, which

the courts frown upon. We may be met with the allegations that it is ad hominem, that it is geared only to cure a problem with certain litigants, but more particularly, Madam Speaker, we have to find a physical solution to this.

So I want to tell Trinidad and Tobago that under the PSIP spending that we are going to have to deal with this by way of an interim solution, by way of an immediate outpour into facilities, and then we are going to have to take it and hope that we will meet the requirements of the Children's Authority. You see, it is an emergency situation and the Children's Authority segregated out, as it was, from the supervision of the real legal arms of the State. We are in a very anomalous situation, not that I can complain about it, but in Trinidad and Tobago the Children's Authority has just sued for a similar matter. So we have the State suing the State as they must, because the law was proclaimed in circumstances not too far different from a section 34 explanation or proclamation. Because there is nothing to make logical or clear how this thing was proclaimed. So that is legacy item one.

Madam Speaker, I would like to tell Trinidad and Tobago that we have had an expenditure, again, to be incurred as a result of the proclamation of the Proceeds of Crime Act. This Opposition when in Government came to the Parliament, they proclaimed the law dealing with the amendments that we made to the Proceeds of Crime Act. We did it in the Finance Bill, Madam Speaker. In that piece of legislation there was a requirement that you have to have regulations and forms prescribed. Needless to say, the legacy purchased by those opposite was that there was no regulation and no prescription to deal with the forms, et cetera, for detention of moneys. And, I would just like to tell Trinidad and Tobago, there is another matter under the conduct of Anand Ramlogan of Senior Counsel challenging the constitutionality of the Proceeds of Crime Act as amended looking for a declaration that there has been wrongful seizure and detention, because the past Government did not do what it was supposed to do legislatively.

So the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago have inherited liability and the people that are prosecuting these cases are not only their own lawyers acting for them, you know, but their past Attorney General, one could even say the very culprits are now profiting off of the position. But I want to be fair, Anand Ramlogan did not leave as the Attorney General. We had another Attorney General sitting in the saddle then. And so it would not be fair to say that he alone would have known this. But Madam Speaker, when you look at the prisongate litigation you then wonder how it is we spend $900 million on legal fees and we

have attorneys that come to know the system well and lo and behold they end up in court profiting off the same structures that they came to know. How does that rank side by side?

Madam Speaker, we do know that Donaldson-Honeywell wrote to the Prime Minister then, bypassing her line Minister, the Attorney General, to deal with that. That is on public record. There is another matter. Trinidad and Tobago has inherited a legacy item, I am sorry the Member for Princes Town is not here with us to understand some legacy items. All of us remember the assassination attempt, allegation that there was an assassination attempt against certain Members of the past Government.

Madam Speaker, I instructed the attorneys at the Ministry of the Attorney General to write to the Member for Siparia, the past Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, the past Minister of National Security, Brig. Sandy and one Mervyn Richardson to tell them that they have an obligation to give evidence which is outstanding in these matters. Because Trinidad and Tobago is now facing a case where we are in court and we cannot get the evidence as to the root of what caused people to be detained. The past Prime Minister has not condescended to giving evidence. The past Attorney General, the past Minister of National Security, none of them will, so I instructed the lawyers in the office of the Attorney General, write them and if they do not respond subpoena them in court and treat them as hostile witnesses. [*Desk thumping*]

And I do not say that other than to say that the ultimate people who will pay the award for damages are taxpayers. Perhaps it is that the Member for Siparia may say she did not know about it, if so then we will hear from her. But the fact is, my obligation, the Government's obligation, the role and function I must perform is to deal with the taxpaying dollars of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

How did we spend some of our money? The same situation prevails in the anti-gang matters, you know. There are 22 anti-gang matters, people locked up. Again we have an evidential problem. And I am imploring those opposite who want to speak to their stewardship to please find the time to make sure to give the outstanding evidence that is required, to make sure that the taxpayers of this country are not intruded upon more than they need to be.

How did we spend the moneys in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, please.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We do recall that the hon. Prime Minister then, the Member for Siparia, called for a Commission of Enquiry into the Las Alturas Project. And I would like to tell Trinidad and Tobago that I instructed and that the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs wrote to the Commission of Enquiry into Las Alturas.

10.45 a.m.

We wrote asking them to indicate whether they needed an extension of time to carry out the work of the Las Alturas commission of enquiry because, as a Government, we intend to make sure that commissions of enquiry that have started, continue and that we have, as a Government, a commitment to ensure that there is transparency in projects. [*Desk thumping*] So we have written to ask on the Las Alturas project for that to continue.

But I would like to say that the Las Alturas project which occupied concern, because $26 million was at stake, I would just like Trinidad and Tobago to know that the Las Alturas commission of enquiry, in pursuit of $26 million, has cost the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago to date, $18 million—

Hon. Members: What? Nooo!

Dr. Rowley: Legal fees.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—in legal fees and some operating expenses.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hinds: That was the purpose.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Eighteen million dollars! But that is not enough, you see, because the commission has now written for an extension and uplift in the fees. So that is to date.

Mr. Hinds: Feeding frenzy.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The project, $26 million; we are halfway into the enquiry, the bill is $18 million. But we are people in this Government committed to ensuring transparency.

I will remind that it was Patrick Manning as Prime Minister that called a commission of enquiry into himself. But what was the legacy we inherited from this Government?

Mr. Imbert: What about the limitation period?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, thank you, Minister of Finance, for reminding me. It is a matter of concern in the Las Alturas project that the contractor who had a design/build contract was not pursued and that there is an issue as to whether the statutory period of limitations has run out. It is the same contractor who was awarded the contract to build the campus in the south of Trinidad and Tobago.

So you know on a design/build contract that you can pursue people who have the responsibility to design and build, and if there is a defect, you collect your money from them. The insurers alone would have dealt with that. But so far, commission of enquiry, pursuing $26 million, we have spent $18 million and the bill is going to climb.

Madam Speaker, what did the past Government's legacy leave us with respect to how they pursued matters? I want to touch on something called LifeSport. LifeSport was brought to the national attention by way of then Minister Gary Griffith's insistence that the programme was feeding criminality. The only people that did not listen to that insistence was the Government in the saddle then, now Opposition. It took the Member for Diego Martin North/East to bring a Motion to the Parliament which was brought in June 2014, recanting and dealing with matters in the public domain since April and May. It took the Minister of Finance in his position then as Member for Diego Martin North/East, in Opposition, to bring a Motion.

That Motion was met with contributions from the Minister of Sport then, Anil Roberts. And I want to remind Trinidad and Tobago—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for San Fernando West, your 45 minutes have expired. Would you like to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I would just like to caution, within that 10 minutes you are expected to wind up.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Much obliged. Madam Speaker, there is so much to account to Trinidad and Tobago for, I would happily take advantage of this. Let me just give the summary points in the 10 minutes. The LifeSport programme produced a report. The statement in Parliament then was, "Long live LifeSport"—round of desk thumping. Leading the charge, I believe, was the Member for Oropouche East who spoke in the debate as well: "Long live LifeSport."

Madam Speaker, when I came to the Ministry of the Attorney General, I want to tell Trinidad and Tobago that I met 100 large garbage bags of shredded paper.

It occupied a space from ceiling to floor about the length of this entire Parliament Chamber.

Mr. Imbert: Shredded paper.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Shredded paper, government property. To this day, I cannot yet get an explanation why the shredders on every single floor of the Ministry of the Attorney General were at work over the weekend. Nobody knows who shredded it.

But when I came across matters in the description of legal fees, I noted that there was a report on LifeSport done—a legal opinion done. No file could be found, no file in the Ministry of Sport, checked by my learned colleague. So I called the lawyer who did the opinion directly and found it, because the item was there on "fees paid". To my shock, a legal opinion given to the hon. Attorney General, November 26, 2014 which says, in conclusion:

> Further investigation—a forensic investigation—is required in order to compile the evidence necessary to determine whether sufficient material exists to discharge the legal and evidential burdens in order to maintain civil actions against public officers, persons employed by the State or third parties, which have a reasonable prospect of success and a real as opposed to a fanciful chance of recovering moneys paid out under the LifeSport programme.

This legal opinion goes through chapter and verse of the compelling and obvious need to look after the recovery of $500 million nearly, of expenditure. The report produced by the Ministry of Finance alone is a report which reads as if there was no tomorrow. Everything possible that could be breached by way of procurement, was breached, and the public servant named in that report, instead of being investigated by recommendation of a legal opinion to the Attorney General, which went to the office of the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, that public person was simply put into the office of the Prime Minister and I have checked with the Ministry of Finance. No forensic audit has been called into this matter. Half a billion dollars in obvious expenditure—and I am hearing across the floor, "well the police have it".

Madam Speaker, I would like to say, as the new Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, that I certainly intend on being very measured in my approach in the discharge of my responsibilities for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but that we intend to think outside of the box. I would like to indicate that we intend to

make immediate revision of a number of matters that are occupying the State's attention. We will do so objectively, [*Desk thumping*] we will do so by benefit of open and transparent advice.

We are very mindful that cases such as UTT occupied Trinidad and Tobago's attention and fell apart. We are committed to ensuring that there is institutional strengthening in the office of the Attorney General. Because, Madam Speaker, $1 billion spent could be spent on training the staff [*Desk thumping*] and attorneys that work for the State. One billion dollars spent could make sure that we took care of the disparity in salaries that are across the system; $1 billion spent could mean that we could take care of the inequities between contract and permanent positions in the State; $1 billion spent could be done by way of civil investigation and beefing up what is so much in need of attention, the DPP's department.

I want to make an open pledge to the office of the DPP that the legacy that the PNM intends to leave behind, as a Government, is to have strengthened the institutional structures [*Desk thumping*] of the criminal justice system as we intend to do. That is why we have, in this budget, given the Judiciary the undertaking that they will have financial autonomy for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago. That is why we have attempted to identify the projects which we will put with lay magistrates; that is why we intend to make sure that the administration of justice is dealt with.

Madam Speaker, I wish to say, in relation to murders, I have established a tracking committee and of the matters that are now in the Assizes for trial, Trinidad and Tobago can expect that there will be an explanation as to why people have not faced the hangman; there will be an explanation when they do face the hangman, because if you have the laws of Trinidad and Tobago they must be applied and we intend to apply them with due process. [*Desk thumping*] But that due process can only happen by way of institutional strengthening.

Madam Speaker, there is a mountain of material that we could have dealt with today, and I am sure that the days ahead will allow us for that. May I say a few things in relation to San Fernando West. San Fernando West is the area of Trinidad and Tobago that time stood still in. We have suffered from institutional rot, from a lack of attention and a lack of dedication. All that San Fernando purchased for its development by way of administrative complexes, et cetera, all of it have been reduced to naught. That is why I am very proud for the Minister of Planning and Development's assistance in ensuring that the San Fernando Waterfront Project has been catered for in this fiscal year and that it will mark the transformation of the city that time forgot. [*Desk thumping*]

We intend, in San Fernando West, without fear or favour, without any form of discrimination, to deliver for all of our people. Our river embankments have been eroded. There are no community centres; the vagrancy population has grown; the traffic is gridlocked and unbearable, and as the representative for San Fernando West I intend to leave an institutionally-strengthened environment where the pride of San Fernando can resonate once again.

Madam Speaker, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, on the issue of fees, the Attorney General's office has implemented, as a matter of immediacy, that state attorneys are the first attorneys to act in all matters. [*Desk thumping*] Senior counsel will be required only in cases where they are required with juniors coming from the State by way of first order. [*Desk thumping*] All of the expenses are being reviewed and all of these attorneys who have managed to send in requisitions which are outstanding, I look forward to their participation in finding a solution, because the method which we will apply is one of a quantum meruit basis. That means attorneys' fees will be paid on an objectively assessed standard where you can vouch for your hours of work by virtue to the scale of fees prescribed by the hon. Chief Justice, as has been set out in the rules.

It is incomprehensible—[*Interruption*]—if the Member for Oropouche East will allow me to speak in quiet. It is incomprehensible that one attorney in Trinidad and Tobago could have earned $60 million.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It is incomprehensible.

Mr. Imbert: And for what?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Do you know what $60 million could do in the Ministry of the Attorney General?

Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Do you understand, Madam Speaker, what $60 million can do? When we look at $900 million, I can give the assurance as the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, that objectivity and value for money are going to be the hallmarks. Because you do not need those things to have fair procurement, and you do not need a proclaimed piece of legislation, which we will proclaim and operationalize, and that is, of course, the procurement legislation—you do not need that to have acted responsibly.

Clearly, some of the examples that we have brought today evidence that, and the Ministry of the Attorney General is intent upon acting with an identifiable, objective standard for the pursuit of goods and services so that we can give it.

Madam Speaker, there are two people who joined several others, who have been investigated by the last Government. One of them was Prof. Ken Julien, who has been exonerated without question by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago, in what has turned out to be a trumped-up case, brought, not by the board of the UTT, but instead by the Ministry of the Attorney General in inexplicable circumstances. The same thing happened in the Bamboo Networks/eTecK matter, and in those matters, I wish to tell Trinidad and Tobago that we are applying an objective arms-length investigation, as I wind up—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your 10 minutes have expired. You have three seconds to end.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. There will be an objective assessment laid bare for Trinidad and Tobago and I wish to compliment you on your ascension. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I call upon the hon. Member for Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Lackram Bodoe (*Fyzabad*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate for the fiscal year 2015/2016. First of all, I would like to thank the citizens of Fyzabad for their endorsement as their Member of Parliament and to give the assurance to all 25,000 people who live in the constituency that I will represent them to the best of my ability.

May I also take this opportunity to congratulate all the other elected Members of this House, especially those who, like myself, are here for the first time. I would also want to congratulate all those Members who have already made their maiden speeches. Madam Speaker, I also wish to congratulate you on your election as the head of this august Chamber and to wish you the very best as you seek to oversee the business of this House and maintain its decorum.

11.00 a.m.

Madam Speaker, I believe that the role of all Governments is to facilitate the development of a country and its people. A Government is expected to provide goods and services, to develop policies and programmes and to create the environment in which its people feel creative, committed and most of all safe.

Good governance means that adequate and appropriate infrastructure is provided for citizens, but more importantly good Government ensures that citizens are provided with the benefits and opportunities that allow them to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I wish to draw reference to this House of the contrasting views of two 16th Century English political theorists regarding the role of Government. Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, please.

Dr. L. Bodoe:—I refer to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Both men lived around the time when, through different struggles, the people of England replaced the monarchy and installed Parliament as the supreme law of the land. Thomas Hobbes considered self-interest to be the predominant motive in man and proposed that centralized power should be given to the State and to an absolute ruler by the people to ensure good governance.

On the other hand, John Locke recognized that man possesses natural rights such as life, liberty and property and proposed that Government really was a trust, whereby the people would enter into a contract with the State for the provision of goods and services, but with the understanding that the State would guarantee their rights according to the principles of natural law

Madam Speaker, as we embark on this budget debate, I ask us to consider carefully whether this budget is a contract with the people or whether this budget would be a reflection of an elected monarch deciding who gets what without respect for the needs. The question then, Madam Speaker, is whether the budget presented last Monday in this august House has the measures required to provide our citizens with the opportunities for continuing development and prosperity.

I am certain that the hon. Minister of Finance in his wisdom would have presented a budget that his Government believes would provide opportunity and promote development in an equitable manner for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. However, my analysis of the budget documents, together with consultations with the constituents of Fyzabad, has raised various concerns which I hope the hon. Minister will take into consideration going forward.

Madam Speaker, before I raise those matters, I wish to say that I expect and anticipate that all measures proposed by the hon. Minister will have as their underlying thread the principles of value for money, efficiency and effectiveness, and in fact those are the values and principles just enunciated by the hon. Member for San Fernando West.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member? May I please remind hon. Members of the provision of Standing Order 53(1)(f).

Dr. L. Bodoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, after listening to the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Siparia in this debate, I am of the opinion that Trinidad and Tobago is not in the precarious position that some of us may want us to believe. I am also of opinion that the sound macroeconomic fundamentals inherited by Trinidad and Tobago does not suggest a picture of gloom and doom. The figures show a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of over US $5 billion, foreign exchange reserves adequate to cover 12 months of import, inflation of less than 6 per cent, unemployment below 5 per cent.

Be that as it may, the global economic picture suggests that courageous, effective and efficient government will be required to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not experience the undue hardships that many other nations are currently experiencing. However, Madam Speaker, as a new voice in this Parliament, I am prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt that their plans as outlined in this budget will continue to give citizens the hope and prosperity that they experienced prior to September 7, 2015.

Madam Speaker, that aside, I wish to bring to the attention of this honourable House some achievements in the areas of health and a few questions on public administration. I now speak to the issue of health. I had the privilege of looking at the plans of health from the other side, from the Government, and I want to say that the Government is the beneficiary of tremendous momentum, with several landmark accomplishments and new initiatives, which can be built upon to provide health for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. First of all, I want to say with regard to providing patient care and customer service a lot has been done—and especially I am speaking here now to achievements in this South-West Regional Health Authority over the past five years—and one of the major achievements I would want to speak about is the alleviation of what we had as the bed shortage problem.

Madam Speaker, you will remember years ago—well maybe four or five years ago—there would have been a chronic shortage of bed space at the San Fernando Hospital. I am happy to report that now with the San Fernando Teaching Hospital and the increased number of beds that is no longer an issue [*Desk thumping*] and I am sure that the Member for San Fernando West will be pleased. He mentioned that there were no achievements in San Fernando, but I am sure he will be pleased

that there is now the San Fernando Teaching Hospital which is providing first-class care to the citizens of San Fernando and throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

I also want to draw attention as well and to also mention that to maintain this standard of care with regard to beds and providing proper care, that we also anticipate and expect that with the addition of the Children's Hospital in Couva, the beds there, and also with the building of the Point Fortin hospital, that again those would add and contribute to improvement in health care.

Madam Speaker, I also want to mention another initiative that addressed an issue which I met at San Fernando as Chairman of the South-West Regional Health Authority, and that would have been the issue of the long waiting times in the Accident and Emergency Department. I am happy to say that that is now no longer an issue. That has been addressed, [*Desk thumping*] and that has been addressed with physical improvements to the accident and emergency. There is now a new structure, a new addition to the accident and emergency. But more importantly, and more than that, has been the issue of addressing the customer service within the Accident and Emergency Department, where the addition of a manager to actually look at how customers are treated, how patients are treated in the accident and emergency. Now there is a faster turnover.

But more than that, and I am sure the hon. Minister of Health would be interested and perhaps would be advised—not advised, but would be inclined to continue this initiative because the fact that we now have a situation where a patient who is waiting for more than one hour, or feels aggrieved in any way, or feels that he or she is not being treated fairly can actually call directly a senior person within the hospital and get a response. This is not a clerical person, this is a senior doctor who can address the situation. This has been working very well for us at San Fernando, or has been working for the patients of San Fernando.

The other issue I would want to address would also be in terms of the value of the on-the-job trainees. I know a lot has been said about the OJTs in this debate, but at San Fernando we have had the OJTs trained especially in health, health service customer care, and that has made a remarkable improvement. Now you come to the outpatient clinics, you are greeted by someone. The benefit of that is that it does not take away from the nurses and the doctors who are trained to provide professional care, and therefore, we now have these trainees, these OJTs who are doing a wonderful job.

I was also pleased to see that part of the Government's policy would be to place increased emphasis on primary care and that is a commendable initiative,

and also to advise that that job is perhaps going to be easier within the South-West Regional Health Authority because we have already started. And in terms of providing leadership for primary care within the South-West RHA, a director of primary care was appointed who has the qualifications of training in public health. We have also started the process of extended hours at 11 health centres in the South-West RHA. This means that patients are now able to go to a health centre after eight o'clock or nine o'clock in some instances. They can also access health care on weekends including a Saturday and Sunday, and this was started for the first time under the previous administration. So it is an initiative which has been taken up by patients and which has contributed greatly to improving patient convenience, but also has contributed to decreasing the waiting time at the Emergency Department, especially at the San Fernando Hospital and the Couva District Health facility.

In terms of providing the facilities for primary health care, a recently expanded and refurbished health centre was opened in Point Fortin about two months ago. So I am sure the Member for Point Fortin would be happy to hear this. It is a brand-new facility which is in use, Member. We also have launched, opened recently, about a month ago, a brand-new health centre in Palo Seco and my neighbour, the Member of Parliament for La Brea, would be happy to hear that this facility is up and running. It has replaced the old facility which had been there for many years.

Also in terms of looking at the area of Cedros which is regarded as a distant area for providing health care, there is a refurbished health centre in Cedros, again with extended opening hours to cater for the long distance as sometimes patients would have to travel to come to the facility at Point Fortin. There is now an emergency medical team with a 24-hour ambulance service on standby. So again, I am trusting that that service can be continued for the benefit of the constituents and the residents of Cedros and surrounding areas.

There is one more issue I would want to address at the San Fernando General Hospital, Madam Speaker. When I assumed the position of Chairman there in 2010, we had a situation where there were no neurosurgeons for several years prior to that. I am happy to report that within the first two years we were able to get a team of neurosurgeons who are now performing, and there is also the training component being able to allow our local doctors to be trained in neurosurgery. So that is an initiative that came about because of the visit from the President of China and arranged by the former Minister of Health and the

Member for Barataria/San Juan. At this point I really want to take the opportunity to thank the Member for Barataria/San Juan for his contribution to the health sector in the last four to five years. [*Desk thumping*]

So before I move on, I would also want to commend all the staff at the South-West Regional Health Authority who have embarked and worked for the last five years to ensure that all these improvements took place, and also to invite the Minister to provide the necessary leadership—and I am sure he will—and the direction for them to continue to achieve and to bring back the care into health care.

One of the underlying themes at the South-West Regional Health Authority was that we aimed to bring back the care into health care, because there was a situation and perhaps there is still a situation in many of our health facilities where the main complaint is that you go to a health facility but yet you do not get that caring feeling and that is what we were trying to achieve in terms of improving the customer service. So, through you, Madam Speaker, I invite the Minister to say let us do this together. There are many things that can be built on in terms of the momentum for health care.

Moving on from the South-West Regional Health Authority, there are just a couple of issues in health that I want to address which could be of benefit at a national level, Madam Speaker. One of these—and again, I am glad to hear and to see that the underlying theme in this budget is value for health care, and I just want to touch briefly on value in terms of health care delivery because that is important. It is important to recognize that no matter how much resources are provided, sometimes it is thought that expenditure in health care is a bottomless pit because the needs and the wants always increase.

11.15 a.m.

So obviously it is important to determine and to decide what is important, and also to provide health care in an efficient but also effective manner.

One of the issues that is still a problem in Trinidad and Tobago is to actually cost the services in the public sector. In other words, it is difficult to tell. Although in the private sector that costing is done, in the public sector it is difficult; for example, to know the exact cost of an operation, for example, a hysterectomy. I am pleased to report that a survey has been undertaken, again, at the San Fernando hospital by the Health Economics Unit at the University of the West Indies, and hopefully these results will be available to inform decision-making with regard to health care.

The other issue would have been the issue of procurement of goods and services in the RHAs and I am pleased to report that under the last administration, and with the intervention by the previous Minister, that legislation was passed in this honourable House that now allows one RHA to procure goods on behalf of the other RHAs. The benefits of this measure, of course, would be efficiency, speed and the savings by bulk purchasing.

The other issue I want to raise, and again I feel strongly about this—and the question has to be asked, and I know that this would have come up for debate in the Tenth Parliament when a Motion was brought by a previous Independent Senator Victor Wheeler in terms of reviewing the RHAs. But I think the question has to be asked at least in terms of whether having four RHAs in Trinidad—and I am talking about Trinidad, not Trinidad and Tobago—instead of having four RHAs is, in fact, a cost-effective and efficient arrangement. I am just saying that this is perhaps something to be looked at.

And the reason I said that is because at South-West RHA, because of the arrangements with one particular RHA, even though the patients from the eastern part of the country would have belonged to the Eastern RHA, from a practical point of view, many of those patients were cared and treated for by the South-West RHA. And again I suspect the same would have happened in the north-eastern area where patients would have gone to north-central. So I just think it is something that perhaps needs to be looked at and it is something that can be raised and discussed, and again, I would encourage the Minister of Health to, perhaps, look at it from this point of view in terms of cost savings and efficiency, whether it should be rationalized.

I just move again and just one more point I would want to make as far as the health sector is concerned and that is to address the issue of maternal and child health. And again, I am very pleased looking at the manifesto for the PNM, which is now official government policy, and I see that maternal and child health has been highlighted as one of the areas to be addressed. I am very pleased that this is an area to be addressed because, Madam Speaker, the death of a pregnant mother is a very tragic event, and as the new Minister would have recently encountered very early in his tenure, there is an issue of the tragedy of a maternal death.

It is a very, very difficult issue. I myself, as an obstetrician/gynaecologist, feel strongly—it is a sad event but also there are many things that have been done over the last four or five years in terms of strengthening how we can deal with this issue. And I am happy to see that the Minister of Health, through you, Madam Speaker, would have given the commitment to appoint a director of maternal and

child health for the country. This was, again, an initiative that came through—was on the cards and came through the previous Minister and I want to, again, commend the previous Minister for bringing that initiative. [*Desk thumping*]

But also to say, Madam Speaker, that this position came about through the work of a committee of 12 dedicated citizens of this country and that work took about maybe a two to three-year period to analyze and to look at the whole issue surrounding maternal and child health in Trinidad and Tobago. I would want to commend, without calling names, the members of that committee who worked tirelessly, and without any financial reward, to produce a comprehensive report, and I would want to invite the Minister, perhaps, to have a look at that report. There is no point really in reinventing the wheel, through you, Madam Speaker.

So again, and following that report, I would want to say that the members of that committee would have included representation from both Trinidad and Tobago, and would have involved a variety of professionals—nurses, doctors, health-care administrators—and a variety of organizations—regional health authorities, the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Midwives, the University of West Indies, the Ministry of Health and other bodies. So it was a wide consultative process and it is a document that can be an excellent platform for building and addressing the issue of maternal and child health, especially with regard to maternal deaths.

In addition to that, I am also pleased to say that many of those policies and protocols are already in place in some of the nation's hospitals, and again, this would have come under the guidance and direction of the Chief Medical Officer. So again, without belabouring the point, Madam Speaker, as I said, I feel strongly about that and, again, I am pleased to hear that the hon. Minister and the Government are going to place that as an area of focus. So, Madam Speaker, there is no question in my mind that elections are milestones in the evolution of a nation and neither this Government nor this budget will create something out of nothing; rather, there has been an inherited momentum which I hope will not be squandered.

Similarly, in public administration, there are a few questions and concerns which I would just raise, and I am sure that the hon. Minister of Finance will have some answers, but these would include: the decreased allocation for the e-government—a knowledge brokering programme; the fact that there is no allocation under public administration for the establishment of a virtual call centre in the public service. I would invite the Minister of Finance or, perhaps, the Minister of Public Administration, to clarify these in his contribution.

Madam Speaker, under the former administration, the Ministry of Public Administration was charged with the responsibility of transforming the public sector into a 21st Century organization that would provide the best and most accessible services at the lowest possible cost and the least inconvenience to the people of this country. In other words, it was to make it a more efficient and effective service. The issue of public service in this country has always been an issue and there have always been complaints of when you go to a government organization, sometimes—in fact, in many instances, we are not pleased with the service we receive. And just to say that under the previous administration, efforts have been made to try to improve customer service in terms of several initiatives. There is the Gold to Diamond initiative and the Diamond Standard Certification Programme.

There have also been issues with the human resource structure in the public service in terms of the issue of contract positions, the filling of permanent positions and the whole issue of revision of job descriptions within the public sector. Under the last Minister of Public Administration, the whole issue of human resource structuring was examined and updated to correct what was thought at that time to be a pyramidal structure where the public service, in 1962, as envisaged, would have had more of a bottom-heavy structure, but as time progressed and the role of the public service changed, it was felt that there was a need for more middle management in the public service to accommodate professionals.

In fact, I was surprised to learn that there were many positions that we now take for granted in well-functioning, efficient organizations that did not exist in the public service and I am speaking to opportunities, for example, in ICT, in project and procurement management, in communications, in facilities management and other areas were previously absent, and now some of these positions have been addressed and are before the Chief Personnel Officer awaiting classification.

Madam Speaker, just a quick word on the Diamond Standard Certification Programme which started under this previous administration, and to state that this programme, which was launched in June 2013, really aims to provide certification for those agencies that need certain service standards and to say, Madam Speaker, that the standards in this programme are aligned to the International Competitiveness Index, the Global Competitiveness Index and the Ease of Doing Business Index. And to say that several agencies from various Ministries have

participated in this programme and many of them have already achieved the standard required for the diamond certification.

Madam Speaker, I just want to raise an issue which was mentioned in—which was part of the budget document, and that is the issue of the graduate employment programme. The draft estimates for the recurrent expenditures for 2016 indicate an increase of $6,900,000 for contract employment over the revised 2015 estimates, so it is an approximately $7 million increase in the draft estimates. And there was a note to this estimate which speaks to the—it says includes provision for graduate employment. So I just want to ask that, perhaps, the hon. Minister of Finance could indicate whether this increase reflects the cost of the proposed graduate recruitment programme for the Ministry of Public Administration? And furthermore, would the hon. Minister be so kind as to explain the criteria for engaging these graduates? I would also want the Minister to perhaps explain to this honourable House what happens to these graduates after the one-year period comes to an end. So those are questions that I would want addressed, if possible, through you, Madam Speaker.

Before I leave the area of public administration, I just want to go on to some concerns that my constituents would have raised but I just want to touch a bit, under scholarships division with regard to public administration, and to state that the last administration had increased the number of scholarships available to our citizens and awarded over 2,000 scholarships over the three-year period ending September 2014. And also to say, in anticipation of the future health-care needs of our citizens, the last Government also expanded the areas in which these scholarships were awarded to include areas such as allied health-care professions, forensic science, pathology, cardiology, neurology and oncology. So, again, those would be professionals, local citizens, who would be trained in these areas and come back to serve in a modernized and 21st Century health sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

More importantly, the entire process of the scholarships, the awarding of scholarships is now open, transparent and merit-based, and to say that every one of these scholarships has an evaluation framework which is published on the website with objective eligibility criteria, and this accountability and reporting mechanism is the Scholarships and Advanced Training Information System, which is known as SATIS. And I would wish to enquire, through you, Madam Speaker, whether this Government intends to continue this open and transparent process implemented with regard to scholarships, the award of scholarships by the last administration.

Now, Madam Speaker, I wish to bring to this House and to the attention of the hon. Minister of Finance, some of the concerns raised by the constituents of Fyzabad when they met with me a few days ago. And if I may, Madam Speaker, with your permission, just to address what the residents have said and perhaps just to say verbatim because this is coming from my constituents. One of the concerns was that the reduction of the gas subsidy by 15 per cent would require greater monetary output from gas station owners and operators while the profit margin would remain the same. This increase and again, I am quoting from a concerned constituent whom I met with because I believe that the role of a Member of Parliament should be to meet with his or her constituents and, of course, bring their views to the Parliament, which is what I am doing here. And this constituent went on to say that this increase in financial output, coupled with the increased business levy fund and the NIS contribution, would mean a decrease in profits and as such may lead to staff reduction and unemployment.

11.30 a.m.

A concern of another resident was that the statement made of tax exemption for agricultural products has been in place previous to the budget, and as such has been represented by the Minister of Finance, and through you, Madam Speaker, I would want to give the Minister of Finance an opportunity to correct that, if in fact it is a misrepresentation.

The other suggestion was that there should be a greater focus on the agricultural sector, incentives such as grants for constructing ponds, for example, should be implemented and the money saved from the reduction of the fuel subsidy can be used for this.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, the *Hansard* reporters are having a little difficulty, so maybe you can speak into the mike. Thank you very much.

Dr. L. Bodoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am sure with practice I will cease to give the *Hansard* reporters trouble in the very near future.

Again, from another constituent, the suggestion was that there should be greater focus on the agricultural sector, incentives such as grants for constructing ponds should be implemented and the constituent thought that the money saved from the reduction of the fuel subsidy can be used for this measure.

Another constituent was concerned that even the 20 per cent of contracts being given to small and medium-sized enterprises, he was concerned that can they really expect these organizations to have the capacity and the resources to

access certifications such as the safety-to-work certification, which costs an average of $500,000 and was concerned about the tedious tendering and documentation procedures for accessing these facilities.

Questions were also raised regarding clarification on the evaluation methods and rates, which would be in effect concerning the proposed property tax and, again, perhaps, through you, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance will address this.

The other issue that was raised was that whether the health card would be continued. Residents wanted some clarification on that, and again, through you, Madam Speaker, I seek clarification on that, on behalf of my constituents.

The other issue that came about, again, my constituents have expressed concern about this, is the issue of the continuation of the Debe to Mon Desir part of the highway to Point Fortin. Madam Speaker, that continuation runs directly through the constituency of Fyzabad and is of concern to many of the constituents of Fyzabad.

And, again, with your permission, Madam Speaker, if I can read what the concerns were. The residents were pointing out that there are several benefits to the continuation of this part of the highway. There will be quick access to all villages along the route. They pointed out the relief of traffic congestion on the Point Fortin to San Fernando route. They pointed out the benefit of the relief of traffic on the SS Erin Road. They also mentioned that the Debe to Mon Desir Highway portion and completion will service all commuters to access the UWI south campus with much easier, less stress—again, fast access.

They also pointed out that with all this improvement there will be a reduction in fuel consumption and a reduction in the carbon emission footprint on the environment, something we are all cognizant of with development. Most importantly, there would be less stress to the people of the communities, more family time, more study time, less vehicle maintenance and cost savings generally to the commuters, and it will also provide the opportunities for the small and medium enterprises to open up, which would improve on the existing small and medium enterprise sector and to make business and trade more efficient as a whole. So, again, through you, Madam Speaker, I would await further information as to the Government's position on this project.

The other concern raised was the completion of a heroes park in Fyzabad, which I know has been started. Madam Speaker, as you know, Fyzabad is a very historic town. The labour movement started in Fyzabad. The name of Uriah Butler

is associated with Fyzabad and, of course, it is very historic in terms of the oil industry and it has provided tremendous resources for providing goods and services to other parts of this country.

So, as I close, Madam Speaker, I would want to say that I have no doubt at all that all 41 Members of this House have the country's best interest at heart and it is refreshing to see so many young, bright, intelligent and educated men and women in this Parliament. I can learn so much from them and I look forward to learning a lot from them.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say that, again, through you, that we must at all times be cognizant of the fact that our deliberations in this House are carried live on television, radio and the Internet, via the Parliament Channel, as well as to a live audience in the public gallery. Indeed, Madam Speaker, you would recall that we had the privilege of schoolchildren sitting in the Public Gallery on Saturday morning witnessing the way we conduct the business of the people, and to indicate, Madam Speaker, with your permission that we must never forget to lead by example and to debate with decorum.

Madam Speaker, it is not my intention to offend anyone but I know we are all capable of so much more in this House. I thank you for the privilege. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Stuart Young): Madam Speaker, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Members of this House, it is with a great sense of humility and responsibility that I stand here to make my maiden speech in the Lower House in this session [*Desk thumping*] and to contribute to the budget debate that is taking place.

Firstly, Madam Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your elevation to this position and your election to this position. [*Desk thumping*] I would then like to thank and congratulate the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in doing what was right and is right for Trinidad and Tobago on September 07 and to particularly single out my constituents of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West for their overwhelming support, as they broke the record in their election of me to office. [*Desk thumping*]

If you would permit me, Madam Speaker, to just reflect very briefly on the period in getting into office and what I experienced. I was very fortunate to be able to traverse and walk many areas in this great country of ours of Trinidad and Tobago. I walked in areas such as Bangladesh in St. Joseph; Enterprise in Chaguanas; areas of Laventille and Morvant; East Port of Spain; Belmont and

other areas and I bring this to your attention, Madam Speaker, to highlight some of what I experienced and saw on those journeys. I think it is critical to just lay this out here respectfully, because a mantra of my contribution shall be "value for money".

And it is important as we sit here, passing this important budget and reflecting on what has gone past and the amounts and sums of money that you will hear me talk about being expended in very reckless and disturbing circumstances, that we understand how it affects the lives of the simple citizens of our land.

Whilst walking in some of these areas, Madam Speaker, I saw things that disturbed me. I used these experiences to propel me and to give me even more fire to move forward to do what is right for Trinidad and Tobago. I saw the housing conditions and some of the lack and basic infrastructure that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should have as the normal and daily course of their lives, but they have been deprived of.

We have just heard from the hon. Attorney General a short while ago, a figure that I am certain will surpass $1 billion—once we have concluded our initial assessment and gotten all of the figures from the various Ministries and state enterprises that are still outstanding—expended of taxpayers' money in a five-year period to a very small handful of people in a simple profession of attorneys-at-law.

Madam Speaker, I have been fortunate to be practising as an attorney in Trinidad and Tobago for the past 18 years, so it is with a sense of experience and a great sense of disappointment I stand here today to report to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as to the wanton abuse and what can only be described as an unholy assault on the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] by a profession that I was once proud to be associated with, that is attorneys-at-law.

Madam Speaker, as I walked through my constituency and I saw some of the conditions that people live under I became very angry knowing the type of money that had been recklessly wasted and expended by those on the other side in the last five years. The People's Partnership's abuse of the Treasury with things such as LifeSport and one individual getting in excess of $34 million, having not given us the citizens as much as a shred of paper in return. This money, Madam Speaker, in my respectful view, could have been properly spent to improve the lives of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are in need. The sum of $36 million, which we have become numb to now, would make a massive difference throughout my constituency to improve the lives of the constituents there.

However, Madam Speaker, all is not lost. There is a community, Mc Kai Lands and environs, who have fought hard times and as a community they are bound together and they have gotten together to improve their own quality of life and there is not a "give me, give me" syndrome that they suffer with and they have made me very proud, and like the rest of my constituency, I have promised to work along with them hand in hand to improve the quality of life. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, moving to this concept of value for money, it is a concept that we, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, will return to and will be guided by, because it is our responsibility to ensure that we get value for money for taxpayers by the balancing of competing needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and balancing their needs along with the expenditure of the money that we are responsible for; something that I am about to get into, that I respectfully submit did not take place in the last five-year period.

We have found ourselves in a climate of declining oil and gas revenues with increased expenditure by the former administration and we, the newly-elected Government, must ensure that we get value for money.

I would just like to put the preparation and presentation of the budget in context, please, Madam Speaker. This Government was overwhelmingly elected on September 07. Our new Prime Minister was sworn in on September 09. His full Cabinet was sworn in on Friday, September 11. He summoned us to our first Cabinet retreat on Saturday, September 12. And at this retreat, we began to receive numerous texts, phone calls and emails about very disturbing circumstances taking place. We were being informed that even though a new Government had been sworn in you still had board members on state enterprises and persons in Ministries trying to rush through, even though it was a weekend, and sign contracts, committing the people of Trinidad and Tobago to further unreasonable expenditure.

11.45 a.m.

Another phenomenon taking place that weekend, Madam Speaker, that we were informed about was the shredding of documents in state Ministries. As you heard the Attorney General say, in our Minister alone there were over 100 bags of shredded documents removed in that first week of us being sworn into office.

We then had our first Cabinet meeting, Madam Speaker, on Monday, September 14, and we reported to our Ministries on Tuesday, September 15. Within three weeks, the Minister of Finance produced, prepared and presented a

budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and for that, Madam Speaker, I respectfully submit, he should be applauded. [*Desk thumping*]

Whilst this was taking place, we in our respective Ministries had to move quickly to get on top of things, and to go through files, and not only run our Ministries now—and our Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs was a merged Ministry, three now into one—but we also were having coming at us, many, many allegations and stories of corruption that disturbed me, and made my sleepless nights even worse.

In the first week, we met with the staff at the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, we met with the Chief Justice; we have met with the President of the Industrial Court, the Director of the Police Complaints Authority and many other of our stakeholders. But, what we found at our Ministries was that morale was at an all-time low. So, an immediate decision was taken by the Attorney General and myself, and we immediately told staff that what had become a custom and had become the norm would no longer be happening. We would no longer be retaining outside counsel at just the drop of a feather or the drop of a hat, but rather we would build the resources.

At the time we thought it was only $400 million spent at our Ministry. We quickly assessed it and said that money could have been spent on training, improvement of terms and conditions for the staff at these Ministries. The stories that our staff began to give us could not be described as anything less than distraught, disturbing and sometimes unbelievable. Fortunately for us, they all provided us with documentary evidence and we have the documents to support what we have spoken about, and what I am about to speak about.

Madam Speaker, before I move to the assault and the abuse of the Treasury via the use of payment of legal fees, and provision of particulars in relation to what took place over the last five years, I will like to take this opportunity to personally thank the two PSs who have done yeoman service at the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, [*Desk thumping*] in the short time frame that we have been there.

Madam Speaker, as this House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have heard, what began to be unearthed was a very disturbing trend. However, I cast our minds back into history. After the first budget presentation of the People's Partnership administration in 2010, the then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister alerted the population to what was then seen and predicted as an uncanny, unusual and disturbing rise in the amount of money provided to the Ministry of the Attorney General.

He told us that he was concerned. He identified an issue. He went on to prosecute this issue. We had the then Attorney General telling us it was his A-team, and he was putting into his A-team none other than his friends and close associates. He admitted that. He went on to commence legal action against the then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister. However, we now have the documents in hand and we have seen without a shadow of a doubt, the abuse and the assault that took place over those last five years.

I would like to provide through you, Madam Speaker, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago with but a few examples of what took place in the last five years. We start with over $444 million being expended in five years towards legal fees from one Ministry alone, the Ministry of the Attorney General. Under the then leadership of the former Attorney General Anand Ramlogan and towards the end, Garvin Nicholas. The disturbing trend is that we found but a handful of names and individuals were those who benefited from this feeding trough and frenzy.

We immediately requested of all Ministries and state enterprises to provide us with the particulars, the totals of the fees requisitioned by individuals in the fraternity of law over this period of time. And again we found, in going through the information provided to us, a few names comprising the vast majority of these fees.

Just a few examples: we unearthed within the first week of being in office that, at the Ministry of Finance, directions were given with respect to two arbitrations that a firm of lawyers in London, United Kingdom, be retained by the Ministry of Finance, paid by the Ministry of Finance over $1 million a month over a period of time, for arbitration for just instructing counsel in these arbitrations. Before we stopped it, the fee total was $18 million to one firm of lawyers in the United Kingdom, paid by the Ministry of Finance. I repeat it, Madam Speaker, $18 million paid to one firm of lawyers by the Ministry of Finance for two arbitrations that have gone nowhere. One that is completed and one that has not even commenced.

There were also a number of matters pursued by the former administration, one of which was concluded just before the election, and in which I participated, and that is the matter of UTT, the University of Trinidad and Tobago. It spectacularly collapsed after two days of cross-examination, with it being found and the case being withdrawn, because there was no evidence to support the allegations that were made. We estimate that this case alone would have cost

taxpayers approximately $10 million in fees, and that $10 million in fees, Madam Speaker, would not have been payment to the defendant's lawyers, but rather payment to the lawyers prosecuting the case.

One of the most disturbing aspects of that, Madam Speaker, was that it was admitted by the corporate secretary that the lawyers sent by the then Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, are the ones who told the board that they would be pursuing the case, to pass the case over to them, and that it would be paid for by the Ministry of the Attorney General, and it was taken away from them. They were no longer brought up to date on what was happening with the case. In fact, they did not even see drafts of the statement of case and the proceedings before they were filed.

We then had the termination of employment contract against CNMG that my colleague, the Minister of Communications is now in charge of. Over $600,000 expended for termination of employment. Madam Speaker, I have, throughout my career, done numerous industrial relations and termination of employment matters and I have never heard of that level of fees which would probably equate to more than the damages in such a matter. We had at the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation, $167,000 paid to one lawyer for an industrial court matter; never happens. I do not even know the name of the lawyer. It is not even familiar to me.

We then had one of these lawyers who is on the list that the Attorney General presented, a lawyer whose total cumulative amount that so far we have discovered is over $25 million in fees to this individual alone, charging $977,500, just short of a million for a few matters, and the provision of advice; $100,000 for a habeas corpus application; $750,000 for representing two police officers, and $166,000 for the advice provided up to the filing of a defence in a matter. [*Crosstalk*]

We then had the same law firm to which I have referred out of the United Kingdom, a favourite of the former Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, charging Petrotrin over $9 million for an arbitration. That same law firm that was charging $1 million a month that accumulated to $18 million, charged Petrotrin $9 million for one arbitration.

Two favoured Queen's Counsels of the same former Attorney General were paid over $5 million for two arbitrations for Petrotrin; and over $30 million, Madam Speaker, paid to a law firm for two arbitrations by Petrotrin. One of these arbitrations for Petrotrin, Madam Speaker, the lawyers, a foreign law firm, charged over US $3.7 million, accumulating a fee of TT $23.5 million.

Madam Speaker, from what we have gathered to date, and we expect to find more, the legal fees expended by Petrotrin for the period of five years totalled over $73 million. I repeat, legal fees expended to a few and handful of lawyers by Petrotrin over the period of five years totalled over $73 million. We all know the state of Petrotrin and the difficulties that it is in.

I then turn to the National Gas Company, a company that was highlighted by the media prior to the election as being involved in some unusual circumstances. We have gotten a preliminary view of their fees. A foreign law firm was paid the exorbitant fee of over £4.8 million for one matter—that is TT $48 million paid for one matter.

Another matter where once again all too familiar names and all too familiar favoured individuals, by that former Attorney General, were paid over $7.5 million for one matter, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*] Then one of the favoured juniors took home from NGC for four Equal Opportunity Commission matters the sum of $1.2 million. There was a Senior Counsel, a local Senior Counsel, Madam Speaker, paid $12.3 million by NGC for one matter that did not go to trial. [*Crosstalk*] And the total legal fee at this preliminary stage for NGC over a five-year period is $88.1 million.

So if we add NGC and Petrotrin, two of the energy companies that are owned by the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, under the former regime over a five-year period for legal fees alone, they expended $162 million in a five-year period. [*Interruption*] Add that to the $444 million expended by the Attorney General, as they laugh on the other side. [*Crosstalk*]

The Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, we found that a favoured junior, for four advices, legal advices, charged over $600,000. At eTecK we had pre-action protocol letters, the writing of letters a favoured Senior Counsel charging $86,250 for a pre-action protocol letter; for one letter $86,250. That same Senior Counsel charged $172,000 for an opinion.

12.00 noon

Madam Speaker, as we began to unearth this, and I threw my mind back to what I had seen in places like Enterprise and places like Bangladesh, and seen how people in our country have lived, and knowing the expenditure between Petrotrin, NGC and the Ministry of the Attorney General, just those three entities in a five-year period totalled $700 million, I take no pride in saying how sick I felt to my stomach.

And to listen here in this House, Madam Speaker, over the last few days at what I have heard from the other side, knowing what I do know now, and there is much more that we know, I think that this country and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago deserve to know how it is that one or two individuals decided over what I am sure will total $1 billion would be spent in one legal fraternity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another disturbing example was the retaining of an English QC who none of us knew of prior to his arrival on the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, and the due diligence done in relation and with respect to that English QC showed some very disturbing trends, and a lack of respect at certain bars in the rest of the Caribbean. This English QC charged recently over £250,000 for a Privy Council appeal on a procedural point in a matter that I have been involved in. Madam Speaker, £250,000 for a procedural appeal at the Privy Council level. More disturbing is the fact that this QC has charged us, the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, over £900,000, close to TT $10 million for an appeal at our Tax Appeal Board that was settled.

Mr. Imbert: What!

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, £900,000 for a tax appeal at the Tax Appeal Board of Trinidad and Tobago for a matter that was settled.

A very interesting matter that came to my attention is a charge on us the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by one Jwala Rambarran. He sent two invoices, one to the Ministry of the Attorney General. One in 2011 for $195,640 and one in 2012 for $868,620 for the forensic management audit into the sale of BWIA London Heathrow slots to BA, $1,064,260 charged to the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by one Jwala Rambarran. What was even more upsetting about this, Madam Speaker, is the payment to Mr. Rambarran of $868,620 by the approval of the former Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, was made on July 04, 2012. This individual became the Governor of the Central Bank on July 12, 2012. So eight days before he was put into that position, he was paid close to $900,000 for an advice that we still cannot find at the Ministry of the Attorney General. So he was paid over a million dollars by the Ministry of the Attorney General by the former administration a few days before he became the Governor of the Central Bank for an advice that we still have not been able to find.

Hon. Member: Is he a lawyer?

Hon. S. Young: He is not a lawyer. He was an economist, an analyst, I think, at the highest level.

Another disturbing payment made by the Office of the Attorney General, $3.5 million to some company called Tiger Capital Limited. Two of these favoured English Queen's Counsels got from the Attorney General's Office over the period of time one, $27.6 million, and he was not for the full five-year period—neither of them operated for the full five-year—the other $21.3 million. A total of approximately $50 million paid to two English Queen's Counsel and we ask: what did they leave behind? Which local juniors, apart from the favoured few did they impart any knowledge to for $50 million? What is more disturbing is these two English silks got collectively TT $108 million from us the taxpaying citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in a five-year period. Two individuals got $108 million from us the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and I will not tell you, because I have appeared in court against both of them and I have never lost a case against either. [*Desk thumping*]

One of the favoured juniors, Madam Speaker, charged e TecK over $750,000. What is interesting about this is for him, he charged $200,000 to draft a claim form and a statement of case. That is a fee higher than I would charge from start to finish of a trial; $250,000 for an interlocutory application; $250,000 to take instructions, peruse documents and draft an opinion.

This same junior charges regularly over $200,000 for advice to the Office of the Attorney General. This individual has charged in one matter over $1 million in fees. That matter is none other than section 34 to deal with Steve and Ish. Madam Speaker, $1 million, we the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago paid to this favoured junior who has less call to the bar than the Attorney General and myself, $1 million for the section 34 matter, the first part of it. He then charged $750,000 for the appeal.

He charged in the UTT matter for a pre-action protocol letter and a draft claim form and statement of claim $300,000 for a letter.

Hon. Member: And he lost the case. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Young: And he lost the case, correct. And as I just said, he charged and it is approved there by Anand Ramlogan, $750,000 for the section 34 appeal. He charged $1 million for the matter of Petrotrin versus Malcolm Jones prior to a statement of case being issued in the matter. So, we the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago paid this favoured son a million dollars before "he even step foot" into court or completed the drafting of documents to commence an action, and it is all approved with the handwriting and signature of a former Attorney General.

Hon. Member: Anand Ramlogan.

Hon. S. Young: This individual, Madam Speaker, on October 21, 2013 was paid $3.2 million under the instructions of moneys to be paid out on a number of invoices in one day. In one day instructions were given by an Attorney General to pay this individual $3,282,000. This is the same lawyer who charged us $660,000 for a matter and did not even have the courtesy of turning up into court when the matter was called. He charged and was paid $660,000 for a matter against a former client of his. So, he is now appearing for the State against a former client of his, which may be the reason he did not turn up in court, but he charged the State and was paid $660,000.

This individual, this junior attorney, is also the subject of criminal investigation in Trinidad and Tobago. He was still retained and paid even though there are ongoing criminal investigations, and to date we have uncovered that he has been paid the sum of $26.5 million to date over a five-year period. A junior attorney being paid $26.5 million to date by those on the other side, and this individual is the subject of more than one police investigation.

Madam Speaker, these are some of the startling and disturbing examples of what can only be considered a premeditated assault on the Treasury by a small handful of attorneys. [*Desk thumping*] And, to date, 10 of them have been paid over $245 million by us the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Where is the value for money with their cases collapsing after two days of cross-examination? Madam Speaker, these disturbing facts have attracted the attention of the Attorney General and I, and we tell the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that we are disturbed by it and we will be deciding what can be done in relation to it.

Another part of what I am called upon to do today, Madam Speaker, is to talk about this Government's legislative agenda. So I move from the disturbing assault and abuse of the Treasury that I am sure the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago, as we are in this House, are disturbed and numbed by, after giving them the assurance that it has not escaped our eyes and we are prepared to take unprecedented action in relation to same. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, during our tenure we intend to bring to Parliament legislation to achieve some of the following: local government reform. The Prime Minister has appointed an interministerial committee that is chaired by hon. Franklin Khan, co-chaired by myself, to bring legislation after a consultation process to the Parliament prior to the next constitutionally dated local government election, which will be at the end of next year.

We are already working on whistle-blowing legislation. The Revenue Authority: I am working feverishly and assiduously on. Campaign finance reform: we intend to kick off in Trinidad and Tobago in January of next year by having a conference where we will invite international speakers and those who already have this type of legislation in their jurisdictions to present and get us on the path to campaign finance reform.

We will have an independent statistics office to bolster the work that the CSO should have been doing. We will introduce a code of conduct for the Members of Parliament. We are looking at amendments that can be brought with respect to the Integrity in Public Life Act. The Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre is attracting our attention; the general accounting office is an independent office of Parliament. These are some of the legislative matters we will be bringing to the House.

There are two areas of concern I have been asked to highlight that we the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have inherited. Much to our chagrin we found ourselves about to be downgraded in two international areas that we would like to alert the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to. The first is FATF, and we are working assiduously with respect to what has happened. There has been a fall-through of legislation, the regulators are not being properly manned and the law enforcement do not have sufficient resources. So there is a possibility that we will be downgraded with respect to FATF, but we are working on amending and ensuring that no downgrade takes place. We are working with the authorities as we go into a fourth round assessment. [*Desk thumping*]

Another disturbing area and trend that we inherited is with respect to trafficking in persons. We are about to be downgraded or there is a possibility, Madam Speaker, of us being downgraded from Tier 2 to Tier 2 Watchlist. However, the Attorney General and myself are working with the authorities and trying to get sufficient resources in to ensure that there is prosecution and also other areas, including, we are looking at a border protection agency which is a multi task force of the various law enforcement agencies in Trinidad and Tobago. The point being, Madam Speaker, that we want the international world to know that we are aware of these issues and we are working assiduously and expeditiously to alleviate their concerns.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we are going to be working on the reform of the criminal justice system. We have met already with the Chief Justice and other areas within the criminal justice system that we need to. Two projects that we believe that would immediately have positive effects on the

system, Madam Speaker, that were alluded to in the budget presentation are videoconferencing facility at Remand Yard, which we expect once implemented would completely remove the need for the bringing of prisoners to and from the Magistrates' Court unnecessarily, and then also under the leadership of the Prime Minister, we are going to be working with the Judiciary to see if we can launch a pilot project for the use of lay magistrates for traffic matters and petty civil court matters.

12.15 p.m.

We are also committed, as you have heard, Madam Speaker, to granting the Judiciary financial autonomy, something they have been clamouring for, for years. Madam Speaker, if you would allow me to talk very briefly about the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Madam Speaker, what has taken place is the merging of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, as well as certain parts of the Ministry of Justice into one. The hon. Prime Minister had the foresight to appoint two Cabinet Members to do the work of these Ministries, the Attorney General and myself. What we are committed to doing is re-establishing the morale, the support of the staff of these Ministries and getting it back to the way it used to be, where he alluded—the Attorney General alluded to—the members of staff in these offices would be the first port of call in defending the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago against claims brought against the State of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We intend to work with great resources, the human resources that exist in these Ministries, those that have not been run out, and also to attract new resources to these Ministries. We are going to be offering training that they have been asking for and then we have also told them that in the few occasions where the matters may require expert opinion, advice and the expertise of silk, we expect our juniors in these Ministries to work underneath the silk to learn like sponges, [*Desk thumping*] and we have challenged them, Madam Speaker, that on the next occasion any such matter comes up they must lead the mantle and the charge. [*Desk thumping*]

Already, Madam Speaker, we are seeing positive results and the morale in these Ministries is being lifted and boosted. By something as simple as the Attorney General and myself going down to each floor of each department and meeting with the staff on their own floors and in their own space, we have been told by some of the staff that this is something that did not take place over the last five years. Madam Speaker, we have met with the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago and we have told them

that, with respect to what we have seen in terms of the assault and the abuse of the Treasury with respect to legal fees over the last five years, that is not going to continue under us. [*Desk thumping*]

We are going to consult with the fraternity and we have told them that what we intend to do is use a fee schedule, that is a fee schedule decided by the judges, and then we are going to be asking for discounts on that fee schedule. We believe that the taxpayers in a value-for-money system should be given discounts by lawyers as part of their contribution to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Should we find out of any lawyers being retained to do work and them not working, we are also looking at the use of the Disciplinary Committee provisions of the Legal Profession Act to deal with such lawyers.

Immediately, what we have begun to do and what we have achieved is we have cut some of the sizes of the legal teams we found that were retained on behalf of the State, for example in the Jack Warner extradition matter. We have immediately cut the sizes of these legal teams thereby immediately saving the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago millions of dollars. [*Desk thumping*] This has gone on across the board.

If you would now permit me, Madam Speaker, to turn to my constituency. Madam Speaker, in the period of 11 months prior to the election I walked the length and breadth of my constituency and met with as many of the constituents as I could have. I have seen on more than one occasion, on some occasions four times, I saw the problems and the issues in these constituencies; I made no promises apart from the promise to do my best, but I was determined and told them and they are committed to working hand in hand with me, Madam Speaker, to improve the quality of life for the constituents of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West over the next five years. Immediately, what will be happening, as just a couple highlighted examples in the constituency in the next year, there will be the construction of the Belmont Boys' RC, we will also be working to fix some of the eyesores in the constituency, for example, the repair of President's House. It is long overdue and we are hoping to get it done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, homework centres, I have already put in train and have formed committees to help me to get homework centres up and running for the younger constituents. It is my dream and my vision to ensure that they have the same opportunities my children do. They must come from school, [*Desk thumping*] they must get warm meals, Madam Speaker, they must then have persons who can supervise their homework and, after that, they must have

exposure to extracurricular activities, such as football, cricket, hopefully swimming, scouting and other areas. We are going to look after the younger children in the constituency.

With respect, Madam Speaker, to the young adults in the constituency who had long hearts and looks of disown and no hope, I am committed to developing workshops in the constituency to assist them with sustainable jobs and for us to move away, as much as possible, from the CEPEP and the URP programmes, to provide them with training that would assist them with sustainable development and, hopefully, sustainable jobs. We have already begun to source the equipment and the spaces necessary to make this a reality.

As my colleagues in Laventille East/Morvant, Laventille West, did over the weekend, the bringing of UTT, COSTAATT, and all of the opportunities and training agencies to the young people in the constituency, [*Desk thumping*] as they have led the charge with. We are also looking to the redevelopment and re-establishment of community centres in the constituency, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I am one who is usually very conservative with my use of words, and it is with these few words I thank you sincerely, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and the Members of this House for the opportunity to have made my maiden contribution in the Lower House, and I look forward to working on that very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is 12.22 p.m., I want to propose that we take the lunch break now. This House therefore is suspended and shall resume at 1.25 p.m.

12.22 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.25 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Augustine. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Prakash Ramadhar *(St. Augustine):* Madam Speaker, may I indicate, not just as a formality, my personal joy in your elevation to this august House as the Speaker. May I also congratulate each and every one of the speakers who have already spoken, and I look forward to hearing from those who have yet not. Let me also indicate to those first-timers as House Members that this truly is a blessing to have been put here and, therefore, if it is a blessing then we must conduct ourselves with the gratitude that is necessary for it, and the dignity which you have already shown, that is a primary concern of yours, we must all assist in maintaining.

I am sorry the Prime Minister is not here so that he could know full well that my congratulation is not mere lip service because I believe the Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, had to overcome tremendous difficulties against the odds to have brought himself and his party into winning the election of 2015. It is truly a heartfelt congratulations, and it proves to us that against odds if we are committed in ourselves to what we believe and what we want and we try hard enough nothing is impossible.

But to my friend, the member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and I say this with the best of meaning and possibly with a level of jest, that when you received your cheque for $1.9 million, was that pre—[*Interruption*] for one of the cases that you did—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Young: A cheque I have received—

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, maybe cash or otherwise, but——Milady, I will refer to you—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would suggest that you direct your comments to the Chair.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I am standing on Standing Order 48(6) in relation to what was just said by the Member for St. Augustine to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Madam Speaker: In terms of imputing improper motives?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to elucidate. Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine is implying that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West received a cheque for over $1 million from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government of which they were a part, and I am saying that I am standing on Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: I would allow the Member to continue with the contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very much, Milady. Well, maybe I could put it this way: did the Member receive any payment from any government source for any one case that they did?

1.30 p.m.

And the query I had really was more in joke than anything else, whether it was pre—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You cannot make a joke like that.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would want to suggest you do not go down that road, please.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Madam Speaker, whether it was, in fact, pre-discount or post-discount, but there are many on the other side—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I have already ruled on that.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I appreciate it. There are many on the other side, and with some level of, I will almost say, "envy", to have heard the numbers spoken about today, about the fees.

Hon. Member: Envy?

Mr. P. Ramadhar: A little bit of envy, yes, because for all the 28 years in practice I have never received a single government brief, and I have never asked for one. But to have heard now almost $1 billion expenditure in a void, because I really do not know the context in which all of these fees have been paid, what matters they were for, what was the gain to the State, if any at all. I know there are some matters that are better dealt with by others, but I will move on to why we are here today.

Of course, we lost the election, you won the election, and as some have so brazenly put it, you "are in charge". I want to assure you of one thing, yes you are in charge, but the pendulum which had swung, almost without reason to your end, the height of your popularity started to descend on election day September 07, 2015. [*Desk thumping*] The pendulum has already started its downward trajectory. And this is not a bane only on you, but I think for future governments that as we proceed the population expects different, it expects more and the incumbency of government in itself is something that we would have to look at in a new context, that you could never truly fulfil the ever increasing expectations of the electorate.

I want to warn all of us here that the arrogance I have seen displayed by some has no place in this House. This is a place, as I open, where it is a blessing to be here and, therefore, we must act with humility. To have heard some speak with such venom, with the arrogance and some level of—I am dreading to use the word almost "hate" that I sense, and almost frothing at the mouth when they speak of others, I believe that the society wants something very different, but the

society may get something that we may not wish to have. We have to set the example here, and I heard many speak about it. Every time I rise in this House, I have spoken about it and I will continue to speak about it, that we must set the example.

I am reminded in the Holy Bible, Mark chap. 3:25, that a house divided will not stand. This is the people's House, whether we are in Government or we are in Opposition, it is part of one system working together sometimes, criticizing each other from time to time, but at the end of it, it must be done with the interest of the people and not just for ego or for a sense of recrimination, or some level of attack. That is what I am sensing very early in this Parliament, that if we do not rein it in early enough, it could gallop away out of our control.

Having said that, this budget, Milady, has been described by some as deceptive; I will describe it as diabolical. The reason I say this is very simply that there are several factors in this budget that just do not make sense when held up to the light, because this budget represents how we move forward in terms of our expenditure and the things that we do. The power of the country rests first in the Parliament, but more significantly in the Cabinet, where the taxpaying dollar is used either for our benefit or to our peril.

When I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East in his maiden speech as the Minister of Finance, he being an engineer by training, it was not surprising that he may have been, what shall I say, out of his realm; but knowing the intelligence that he had, never always put for the benefit of others, I expected a little bit more.

This country expected the reduction in VAT. That sounds like a good thing, but do you know what happened there? VAT would be moved from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. It means then for those who go to buy their Porsches, their Audis or their BMWs, they will be paying less. But the poor man and the middle class, when they go to purchase their rice, their flour, their oil, their potato, their chicken, will be paying 12.5 on goods that they never paid VAT on before. [*Desk thumping*] I have not heard a single word from the Member for Diego Martin North/East, our Minister of Finance, or from any other Member on the other side who should know whether, indeed, what I have said is real or unreal.

There is a growing anxiety in the population that things, as I repeat, they never paid VAT on before, they will now be paying 12.5 per cent more on basic food necessities, while the savings really is for those luxury items. So that is why I put

this on the first lid as being diabolical, because the population was carried away by the propaganda of the last election. It was long, it was painful and it was insulting to the intelligence on many fronts.

When I heard the young gentleman, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant—what a courageous young man he was to have risen, to have given his maiden contribution after the Leader of the Opposition, whose contribution was I think excellent—but the response from my friend was courageous. I will put it at that. I do not wish to say more except than this: in his contribution he spoke about levels of discrimination, in particular in relation to one school, and you sensed that he truly believed that his constituency was being discriminated against. But when the truth be told, that the school of which he had spoken had been broken to be rebuilt, but could not have been rebuilt because of criminality in that area, where police had to be present. I think two contractors had to be removed. So it was not as a result of a lack of effort by the Partnership Government to have done things. But he truly believed that this was an act of discrimination, without the facts. So courage alone here is not enough, facts always remain important.

You know, I had to reflect, Madam Speaker, that so many young persons in particular in this country would have been carried away by this talk—from the day one the Partnership came in—of discrimination, discrimination, discrimination, racism to some extent, but discrimination repeatedly. That was the mantra of the other side. And it worked, it truly worked, because I remember sitting on the other side when the Member once again—not the same person of course, but for the very seat—spoke about discrimination in relation to expenditure on schools in his area. The Minister of Education at the time had already spoken, and passed to me information which he asked me to please convey. When I read it I was appalled, because I was of the view that what the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said at the time, that there was some merit in it. But the figures that were shown as a matter of record, uncontroverted till today, showed that the expenditure on school buildings and repairs in that constituency and surrounding constituencies far outshone those expenditures in St. Augustine and in any other area that we know of.

But many fell for that, and it proved then, and it has proven itself true on election day, against all of the conventional wisdom, all that we had learned in the politics, that "performance beat ol' talk", let me tell you what happened, this election of 2015 proved that "ol' talk beat performance". [*Desk thumping*] Because as we "ramajay", as we continue to attack—when the hon. Prime

Minister in his acceptance speech on election night spoke and then subsequent to that, I was lifted by his language that maybe this burning ambition and desire to be the Prime Minister having been achieved, I believe in transformation, I believe in change. He spoke wonderful language that inspired so many to hope against hope; that yes, maybe a new dawn had arisen, and that we could finally come together. You had my commitment and the commitment of many others to work with this Government. But that faith, and that hope, and that trust was betrayed by the opening salvo from the Minister of Finance, and from many other speakers who thought it fit and better to attack with full force.

Mr. Imbert: They speak the truth.

Mr. Ramadhar: They speak of truth as if they could manufacture it at their will. There is one truth, many interpretations. We as citizens—and I speak first as a citizen—when the Partnership was in government, figures would be given as to the state of the economy, now the PNM is in government, you hear different figures and you get different things about how good or how bad the economy is. Why should the average citizen be imperilled with the lack of knowledge as to how good the economy is, how dismal or how bright their future is? Is it not time that we really rest this thing down and say, "Look, let there by one institution whose figures are beyond reproach", so that when a number is given, we can all trust it? So there is no politicking with the future of the country from an economic point of view. I think that is a must-do in this term of this administration. So there must be certainty in the things we say and we do, based on facts and legitimate criteria as we proceed. That is not so difficult to do.

Madam Speaker, I said that this budget is diabolical, and I have given some ground for the basis of my statement, but I will give you more. This Government has indicated a return of property tax. They have not given us any flesh on the bone of what this truly means, that it would return in January to the old rates that we were accustomed paying. They have not answered that niggling question, that barbarism that we had fought against—I had led in 2009 onwards—of the "Axe the Tax". No question has been answered, and I will ask it here so that we could all feel some level of comfort or confidence that things have been put in place for these things.

One: Is it that the property tax raised in any area will be used for the benefit of those areas or will the property tax go into the Consolidated Fund so that it could fund other programmes, other projects that have nothing to do with your home or your community or your environment? We need to have that answered. Two: The valuations, what criteria will be put in place to ensure that there is consistency,

fairness and honesty in valuations? We know this is Trinidad and Tobago. They speak about corruption as if it was an invention from 2010. This country has been bombarded from the beginning of our political history till today with allegations of corruption, of mismanagement and wrongdoing.

I have always said, and I maintain: for those who have done wrong, let the institutions do their job, prosecute them and deal with them, but do not brush with a wide swathe all in the politics as being corrupt or having ill will, or not having the best interest of the people at heart. So the issue of valuations is crucial, because maybe they do not truly appreciate this, but there is a culture in this nation, especially of the middle class, that almost every dollar you earn you put it either in education, food or your house.

It is an ambition for all right-thinking persons who have families, to improve their homes so that they will first of all ensure that the structure is well-designed, strong, a good roof and, as time proceeds, you will enhance it. Put tiles, better washroom facilities and air conditioning, which is no longer a luxury, but it is a necessity now because of the changing weather patterns and the heat, and the humidity, and the Saharan dust, so that our babies could sleep comfortably and our students could study in some level of comfort.

I remember in 2009 that part of the criteria for valuing a home would be tiles—whether you tiled your home, whether you have air-conditioned units, how many rooms. Are we not aware in this country that we have extended families living in a home, so you will have many rooms, as small as they may be, to keep the family together? So until we are able to have clarity and transparency on these issues, I will have no faith or trust in this return of the property tax. You know, in England it has been said historically that a man's home is his castle, but under the PNM Government it appears that they wish to have that "a man's home is the Government's", and this is a frightening development. [*Desk thumping*]

As I make the point, our middle class, shrinking as it is and bombarded by this budget, it is set to destroy the poor and the middle class. How many of us, earning maybe a decent and moderate salary, would have committed ourselves to things, to ambitious programmes for the future of our children, purchasing insurance for one, depositing over time inter-moneys that would be used for the education of their children, or expanding their home and taking mortgages.

1.45 p.m.

So on the one side, the salary looks great, but the commitments are there, with almost no margin for anything else. So that come now on this latter day and you

put a valuation on a property that to some might seem reasonable, but in reality of the payer, the homeowner, their homes are jeopardized. So that we must ensure that there are things put in place so that no one who falls in that category should be in danger of losing their home, which happens in other jurisdictions. That is why it is diabolical because we do not know the criteria. We do not know whether it would be used in the communities. And what about the gated communities? Where you pay a premium to live in a secured area, gated yes, where the facilities, the road, probably the little ground and so is so well-manicured, so well put together that the valuator would go there and put a valuation on that home that you have already paid for. There are certain levels of unfairness and inequities that abide in these things and one must be very, very cautious and protect against them. So, Madam Speaker, that is one other basis upon which I will say that this thing is a diabolical budget.

The other thing is this one—rapid rail. Madam Speaker, I do not know if I could impose upon you—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, an incessant buzz is reaching me. I would like you all, please, to observe the Standing Orders and allow the Member for St. Augustine to continue his contribution with some level of silence.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I am truly grateful to you, Madam Speaker. On the issue of rapid rail, this has dominated the conversation for some time, and indeed it has been articulated policy before the election and since the election, and in this budget we have heard that this rapid rail is no longer just a thought, but an impending reality. My question to the Minister of Finance and to anyone on the other side who wish to answer is this: What is the alignment of this rapid rail?—because I remember I too led a campaign against the rapid rail in 2009. The reason I did is not that I do not believe in, you know, a transit system, a mass transit system. I do believe in one, but the alignment that we saw then ran through the most populated, densely populated areas of the East-West Corridor, unnecessarily I thought, when there was another alignment that could have saved hundreds, if not thousands, of homes and the displacement of thousands of families.

I do not know having spent $500 million plus for the feasibility study then—pre-feasibility—whether they would continue with that expended money and go with that route or whether they would have a new pre-feasiblility, feasible—whatever you call it—study to determine now the alignment, one, and the nature of this rapid rail. Because this is a small society. As we know, this rapid rail, the

concept—maybe I am wrong, but they will tell us if so—is something of a nature of a bullet train where it travels at excessive speeds, 200-plus kilometres an hour, so that you could traverse large areas in a short period of time.

How would that work when you leave Port of Spain and you have to stop in Morvant? How would that work when you have to leave Morvant and stop at San Juan? How would it work when you have to leave San Juan and stop at Mount Hope? How would it work?—two hundred kilometres an hour and then go along the East-West Corridor? How will it work? Because, you know, an alternative had been proposed of a light rail which I had suggested years and years ago. If they wish to have a rail system that could go above the East-West Corridor's Priority Bus Route that will not impact upon the home of anyone, and will truly help in terms of traffic congestion and the mobility of our citizens. I do not know, but we continue to hear of rapid rail.

And the hypocrisy that we continue to see in this honourable House is that every single one of the speakers, almost to a fault, has spoken of the bloated budgets of the Partnership Government, of which I belong, from 2010 to 2015. I say it was good, of course there was bad. But they have claimed that those budgets—the five years of them—forget the lie it was $400 million we spent. The Leader of the Opposition dealt with that admirably.

What is the budget that they have presented? When oil was $100-plus a barrel and gas was at its highest—today, when oil is at its lowest and gas equally, what is the budget the PNM has presented here? The biggest budget in the history of this nation. [*Desk thumping*] So, if it was bloated when oil and gas was high, what do you call it when oil and gas is low to have the biggest budget? It is insane, but it is not surprising because they talk one thing and do something else. They believe that the word is mightier than the action. That is who they are. That is what they are. Unfortunately, I have now to say "they" because many of the young, that I had great ambitions for, have fallen into that trap. That "meism". We red and we ready. Well, let me just say one thing. This thing about "we in charge", those are words that will haunt you, and I speak from experience.

My friend, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, in a different incarnation, a man I have great respect for, your ability to write. [*Crosstalk*] No. No. He is clearly of superior intellect. A man who wrote on October 14—you see they may have read, but we too have read and I have read October 14, 2012 in the *Guardian*, and I quote.

> "As much as I can see the Rowley-led administration presenting a superior alternative to the hapless bunch of PP incumbents, the Rapid Rail project is a

costly and flawed engineering solution to an economic problem that the Opposition Leader should reconsider."

Having said that, of course he is entitled to have changed his mind. But have we changed the route? Have we changed anything? Why are we in this time, when as they claimed the proverbial belt should be tightened, why are we speaking of a $10 billion expenditure—$10,000 million? And I am not sure, maybe the Attorney General could help us whether it is £10 billion, US or TT dollars. Either way, anyone of them, $10 billion is a huge expenditure on a fragile economy if you are to believe what the Minister of Finance has said. If you are to believe what he has said we are now in a position where there is a gap of $21,000 million between our income and our expenditure. But yet this is a priority project. Let us, for a moment, assume it is TT $10 billion. Where is that money going to come from? We hear of international agencies being quite interested in financing, but something we have forgotten. Yes, they claimed that the Partnership took—[*Interruption*] [*Member rearranges papers*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, your papers are disturbing the Chair.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. We are on the $10 billion—either TT, pounds or US. Where is it going to come from? Of course, they have removed some subsidy on gas and on diesel, but there is a huge missing gap. Why—and I want this to be marked in red—is this the priority at this point in time when agriculture—everyone knows the need to feed a nation is no longer a luxury but a national security issue—has been given one of the lowest figures in a long period of time? They dropped agriculture to such a low level of funding, but raised the rapid rail to the highest level of priority. The money comes from somewhere, and international agencies that are sniffing around know full well that if we take from them we have to repay and we have to repay with interest. But I have not heard my friend, the noble Member for San Fernando West, the Attorney General, and a man who I have had admiration for, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, either of them speak as to the time frame for the implementation of the procurement legislation.

You see, if you are going to spend this big set of money when on our law books and an advanced stage of implementation of the procurement legislation, why is that not the priority, if we are truly to believe that we are to restore confidence and rebuild trust? Why are we not putting that at the highest priority [*Desk thumping*] and at the next sitting of Parliament? I ask today brazenly, openly and on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what is your

timeline for the implementation of the procurement legislation? [*Desk thumping*] I ask with equal fervour: What is your timeline for the implementation of legislation for party and campaign reform? These are critical questions because in the last Parliament tremendous work had been done, not just on procurement, you know, but on party and campaign finance reform legislation.

I sat on a joint select committee with my friend; the now Attorney General sat on that also. Why are these not priorities? We have gone almost with a deafening silence on these matters. Because these are the things if you truly wish to restore confidence and rebuild trust that the nation wishes to hear. So that every dollar we spend henceforth will be opened to the scrutiny of procurement and to ensure that the rapid rail is truly not a racket rail for the repayment of financiers of the PNM. I am not one to deal with the rumours that one hears, but when there is such chatter, not from moving trains, but for potential railroading of our economy over the years as to who are the true players behind the rapid rail, and you see the closest of alignment between those names and the financing of the PNM, you are left to wonder and to shudder. [*Desk thumping*] It always struck me as obscene that before a—as they say—the proverbial blade of grass is cut or a nail hammered, $500 million of our taxpaying dollars, my taxpaying dollars, never getting a break from the State having to work and pay, was spent on a dream, a thought.

Why was there commitment then for so much and no commitment again? Who is the beneficiary behind this rapid rail? Not the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I will tell you why it is not the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If you spend this amount of money you know who truly benefits only, really, from a rapid rail along the East-West Corridor and even down into central and in the south? Those who are within walking distance of this thing.

They have not given us an idea, consistent with what we had suggested about the park and ride, so that people who now own their homes, beautiful homes, yes, throughout east, west, north and south, from Cedros, Icacos, Rio Claro, Princes Town, Moruga, Caparo, Freeport, Toco and I could go on. How would they benefit from the rapid rail, unless they could get to the rapid rail? That is why this Government—sorry the former Government—took a view that the infrastructural development for roads and drainage was critically important to really ensure that every Trinidadian and Tobagonian was connected, if not by electricity, by new water mains for those who never had before—250,000 more of our citizens under the People's Partnership Government had fresh running water for the first time in their lives.

So, we took a view to connect them, that they all belonged, that they all participated, made it easier for them to leave their homes in these far-out villages and to go to any part of Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, there is traffic and that is why we had proposed the park and ride so that you would have your car—which is the ambition of most, middle class again—so you could park it and then take the bus, with great comfort like a first-class ticket on an airline, either to Port of Spain, to San Fernando, to Arima, to wherever. Accessible to all.

2.00 p.m.

But this rapid rail of TT $10 billion, I am starting with—it could be US—which brings us to the totality of the budget for the fiscal year 2015/2016; and if it were pounds, I really cannot imagine what that is, will bring benefit to those who are within walking distance of the rapid rail. But hear the almost obscene irony of this thing, is that the villager who has spent his money in Toco to upgrade his home, to make his home truly a castle, comfortable enough for his prince and his princess, his daughter and his son, will have to pay property tax there, without any benefit to his community, but that money will go to pay for the rapid rail, connected, I am sure, to financiers of the ruling party. Why the rush? What is really going on here? If things are as dismal as they claim it is, why is this our first priority? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is so much more we could extrapolate upon, but I am not one to burden the House with unnecessary talk or even rhetoric. But, it is important for me to note, as I have mentioned in passing before but I shall return to it now, the attack on the last Government is that first of all we squandered $400 billion, that is $400,000 million in five years.

The Leader of the Opposition put that to rest showing full well that the vast majority of that money went into salaries and to payments that were committed by the State, so it is non-political. And out of that small proportion that remained, because it was only $290 billion, $110,000 million less than what they had preached repeatedly, brainwashed a generation to have voted for them out of that, this country—and I mean I will not defend a lot of what we heard this morning, I do not know enough to go there, from the Attorney General and my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I do not know enough to do that. Others may speak on those matters.

What I do know, because I do travel, I live here and I travel here, because I love my country and I want to see improvement along the east, west, north, south, central and in Tobago. What I do know the People's Partnership Government one

of the first things we did in legal affairs was to put 14 outlying offices so our citizens need not come into Port of Spain or San Fernando. What we also did was that we put a full-fledged Ministry in San Fernando so that all that you could have gained in Port of Spain you could get in south. We did the same thing in Arima, a full-fledged Ministry, and in Tobago we upgraded all the facilities so that our citizens need not burden themselves to have to come.

We put so much online, and I inherited a lot of good work from the past PNM administration, and we built upon that. But what I can tell you also is that out of that small portion that really was opened to the Government to spend in capital expenditure, this country benefited from 100-plus new schools. [*Desk thumping*] Upgraded every single other school that existed, including the school from Laventille East/Morvant. [*Desk thumping*] What I will also tell you, while they speak and the old talk beat the performance, when we were there, the performance beat the old talk, and we were able then to show with concrete evidence that we were able to build a hospital for the children of Trinidad and Tobago, and also to upgrade it as a burns facility for the Point Lisas Industrial Estate in Couva. Major, major development project. We took an administrative complex that was a white elephant, unborn. It was of no use. I understood that it had been inhabited by the street dwellers of San Fernando West, and turned it into a First World—and thank you chairman, the Member for Fyzabad—health institution for the people of south. [*Desk thumping*]

What I would also tell you, the concrete evidence and not just the talk, the concrete evidence is that we have turned sod and the construction is well on the way for a hospital, First World again, for Arima, and equally for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*] When the noble Prime Minister did not have to ask as Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, not discriminating, you see, put a world class health facility there that is akin really to a hospital. Not being asked. No prodding, and that is not all. When the Member for Chaguanas West was able to lay after 90 years, I think it was, a new water trunk along the East-West Corridor, so that you have a more reliable service of water, and I will come a "lil" bit to the St. Joseph experience. And then he put one along the backbone of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure first of all that the water that we capture is not lost to leakage, but is really delivered to the homes, so that persons who never thought they could see water coming from a pipe got it. Maybe there was some serious difficulty. I live in St. Joseph and I know for one reason or the other we did not have a reliable water supply. And I question, why, just before the election—

Mr. Deyalsingh: No, no, no.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Let me just, I am not finished, you are reading my mind, but do not try to go there, you might see thoughts you do not wish. [*Laughter*] There was almost an accelerated lack of delivery of water in St. Joseph.

Mr. Forde: Maracas too.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: In Maracas, eh. I mean, my friend the Member for Tunapuna. Along the East-West Corridor you wondered if it was not in Oropune. Suddenly, things went dry. You believe for a moment before the election in particular, any sitting Government would wish to deprive the electorate of water? I leave it up to God to know the truth. He has showered us with tremendous blessings lately, but sometimes the truth could go a "lil" bit dry in the mouths of some, but I shall not go there today. Not today.

When I look at the concrete evidence of a world class tennis centre along the East-West Corridor at the Eddie Hart Grounds, when I look to the concrete evidence of the aquatic centre, and the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, my friend from Diego Martin Central, we look forward to you fully institutionalizing these things for the benefit of us all and for the international visitors we expect, the aquatic centre. When I see also the concrete evidence of the velodrome, the cycling centre, nothing recycled, this is original, new thing. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: World class.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: World class facilities, when I see the upgrade, first of all at Mount Hope, the women's hospital the former Minister of Health, the oncology centre like a phoenix rising not out of ashes but of broken concrete, $140 million spent without anything and not a grass—as we say, grass growing on the concrete, and these are the concrete bits of evidence.

I will give you some more: when I drive around, or in fact, if you have the fortune of flying into Trinidad at night, look and see, they do not need the lights of Piarco to bring the plane home, they had to know where the grounds are, because over 200 grounds were lit. [*Desk thumping*] Not just lit, but grounds improved so that children and the elderly have a place to walk and a place to have their exercise, as the former Minister of Health led a programme of axe—not axe the fat, I tried that.

Hon. Member: Fight the fat.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Fight the fat. So, the communities had a space so they do not have to rush off early in the morning and come back late at night, had no place to go and to be a true community.

We believe in communities and we gave them those grounds back. And if you should go along, in particular the East-West Corridor, to see the number of families and the community walking and interacting with each other, it is a tremendous upsurge in the health, not just in the physical, but the emotional health of our people based on these things. When I look for further improvements, as criticized, and criticisms are the wont of the other side, to know that—how many children are using laptops?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Ninety-five thousand.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Almost 100,000 of our children have laptops. That again is not a luxury. Any child today who does not have access to the digital window, which is the laptop or a tablet, is one which is severely handicapped.

As they intend to if they remove, as they promised, the baby grant as we fondly call it, to impede the mental and physical growth of the babies into their first year, it is as if you take the laptop or the tablet away from any child, it is to impede their potential for competition, if not locally, certainly internationally. But, we are hearing that it will be on a needs basis. But who determines that? What are the criteria? Or is it, as the Member for Princes Town reminded us, that party card reign supreme, and if you are not part of the party it is not on the cards for you. These are the things that I am not speculating on. This is the history of those who are willing to remember and have not forgotten that we inherited pre-2010.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Augustine, your 45 minutes have been exceeded, do you intend to take the additional 10 minutes?—and I would ask you to wrap up within that time.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I would be most grateful. Little did I imagine that the time had so flown.

Mr. Deyalsingh: You are having fun.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Not fun at all. So, Madam Speaker, we are on the issue of laptops—you know what would happen to the middle class? They are neither rich nor poor, so that they will look possibly at one's income, as I had referred to earlier, and say, but, you are in an income bracket that your child does not or is not entitled to get a laptop. But, the middle class, these are the persons, and who are they? Civil servants, teachers, administrative staff, the backbone of that which carries us forward in the society, their children would be deprived. That is one.

I am hearing about the gates being closed. Let me say this, whether you are rich or poor, whatever your consequence of your birth, education is that one thing that liberates us all, because you have rich people who are uneducated, you have uneducated people who are rich, you have people who no matter what education you give them they will never be wise. So that we took a position that it should be opened to all, but I am hearing again, on a needs basis. So once again the middle class, neither rich nor poor may be left in no man's land and the gates closed upon them. And I do not wish to go into the secret scholarships of the past, I think that really belongs there. That every child in this nation must know full well, every one of us, that we are equally entitled and the criteria must be well set and must be truly and faithfully adhered to.

So, these are the things that worry me about this budget. That it is not designed with any scope for improving our lot. We speak about economic transformation. There is nothing in this budget that transforms anything other than the hope that we had to the anguish that we now feel. Madam Speaker, what is good for the goose ought always to be good for the gander. And I remember when, almost the good old days, not long ago, sitting in the Cabinet to have heard a decision taken, that the churches, the mosques, the temples in this nation; the houses of God, where good work is done to all manner of man, woman and child, that they are truly the social fabric, the social net that ensures that when a Government fails for one reason or the other that they are there to help those who need help the most. That we must empower them and to fund them and to strengthen them and encourage them. But, what did we get as a response when at Christmas, as we all know, that time of rejuvenation and happiness, and it is coming again, I do not know if our children will be lucky enough to get the toys that they had grown accustomed with? Criticized as always, yes.

But more important than this, is the PNM Government going to remove the grants that we had given to all churches at Christmas? So that they could continue their good work and spread the word of our Lord at that time and spend merriment and give and uplift so that at the end of the year no matter how hard it was, there is a break and a sense of, ok, next year is going to be better, a "lil" holiday, a "lil" niceness, a "lil" treat. You remember treats in schools? The churches, when we gave money to them, you know what it was identified as? A bribe. A bribe, how insulting is it to the good, the noble and those of integrity who man those institutions to have been told that if you should accept a help, a helping hand from your Government, which is the people's Government, which is the taxpayers' dollars, to go back to do the work of the people, that you are guilty of taking a bribe.

But how then do you identify and define the $15 million to unions? Was it required, requested or was that part of some deal that had been cut so that they would do the programme and the campaigning for the last five years, where they held hand?

Hon. Member: MOU.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: An unwritten MOU for repayment. But you know what happens, "sometimes when a lil deal cut, fella say, aye look at it boy. Aye, police watching boy". You see that, no, no I do not want that. I do not know, but what do you define that $15 million payment as, far less than the grants to our churches.

2.15 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, there is great reason for concern, and having regard to the history of many on the other side, I see, unfortunately, against hope, against expectation, nothing but old wine in new bottle. When I heard the criticism launched from the Member of Parliament for Tobago, who thought it fit not to have returned, that I had made comment about children and so. You know what I said, I said the real power of the PNM does not and will not reside in the elected members of the PNM. It does not even reside here. There is a power that is the PNM that is unrepresented and faceless to them. [*Desk thumping*] Their interest has never been about the people. Do not tell me you care, or it is only a matter of time. It is only a matter of time as the pendulum swings and your reality is shown.

Hon. Member: Westmoorings businessmen.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Wherever they are, I have no problem with big business, you know, but not at the expense of the small man or the middle class.

You see, Madam Speaker, it is easy to put forward young attractive faces. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Thank you. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: What about me? [C*rosstalk]*

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And some of the elderly handsome—but the power of decisions is what matters. You will see policies, my friends, that you had no idea would come. Decisions taken, the source of which is unknown to you and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will pay for those things. But rest assured that the country has changed and we are much more alert. Yes, we made a lot of errors, a lot of wrongdoing—from what I am hearing from—[*Desk thumping*]—by a few. I

am not going to shun the perceived reality of some, and the institutions of state must take care of them as they will take care of those who are willing to do likewise into the future. I believe in a future, I believe in tomorrow, and the only way we could achieve that is if we really get rid of our biases, we get rid of some of the supposed loyalties and deal with the reality and the truth of Trinidad and Tobago. We are in a perilous state. Things are not looking as good as they should be into the future, but we can make the future we want by doing the things that are necessary today.

Madam Speaker, as I am about to take my seat I wish you well. I wish all of us well. I have said and I shall repeat, if you as a Government for the country succeeds in the interest of the people then we are all well served. But if you should use your old ways, as a facade, appearing to look at the interest of the people when you look after the interest of a few—and the reason I say these things, and it pains me, because I know some truly believe the demonizing of the People's Partnership. They truly believe that a lot of things that have been said are true. Some may be, a lot of it is not. But just ask, how is it that for the seats held traditionally by the PNM you have the highest level of crime. I do not say that with any level of pride. I say that with pain.

Why is it that the seats traditionally held by the PNM have the lowest level of employment? Why is it that the seats traditionally held by the PNM, possibly contributing to those two factors, have the lowest level of education and development? Why? Do you care? The young of the PNM, you have a hope, you have a chance, take the control that was given to you, the power that was given by the people and tell the elders in your party that "really, is we time now", and to hear the language of some, not all.

I know my friend from Tunapuna, a good man. You cannot help but like him. I am telling you.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Easy, easy.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Yeah, look where your mind gone. No, you have some good people on the other side. Young Stuart—Stuart Young—sorry.

Mr. Deyalsingh: You accusing the man.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: No, I did not accuse him of anything. I beg your pardon, Milady. You see, because I want my friends to know on our side and on their side, we must be safe in each other's company; that we must look after each other, because we are the leaders of this nation.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your 10 minutes have expired. You have three seconds.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I want to thank you and to my noble colleagues on this side and to my friends on the other, and to truly wish us well, because if we do well we do well for this nation. God bless you. [*Desk thumping*]

Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): [*Desk thumping*] Many thanks, Madam Speaker, as I make my maiden contribution in this, the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Before I start, I would like to thank God for this opportunity, I would like to thank my family who have supported me in the journey, I would like to thank the political Leader and Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley for the opportunity to be the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph and also to be the Minister of Health. Fourthly, I would like to thank the over 19,000 persons in the constituency of St. Joseph—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Ninety?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—who voted—over 19,000 persons who voted, who took the decision to exercise their franchise? Whether they voted for or against me is irrelevant. The fact is, they voted.

I have often heard my political leader say that the late ANR Robinson is quoted as saying that the professional class has failed this country. And I never knew what that meant, Madam Speaker, until I heard an illustrious Member of the political class, of the professional class, tell people of colour, tell women who were traditionally disenfranchised, not to vote. If ever the professional class failed Trinidad and Tobago, that statement "not to vote" failed Trinidad and Tobago. And I congratulate every citizen who rejected that call and came out and voted for either the UNC or the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I also want to congratulate you on your election to the post of Speaker and your ruling this morning, Madam Speaker, on what is sub judice actually brought a breath of fresh air to this Chamber. [*Desk thumping*] We can now have the restoration of dignity to the office that you hold as represented in the Chair that you occupy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the election that just passed represented the rejection of the values of Resmi; rejection of LifeSport; rejection of squandermania, cronyism, nepotism and corruption. [*Desk thumping*] It rejected false papers, it rejected gracelessness in the face of defeat. You wanted majority MPs, 50 per cent plus one. You got it. What is the problem? [*Desk thumping*] Everyone here was elected with 50 per cent plus one. We did not have to have that disastrous run-off Bill, which was going to be totally unconstitutional, to get what you wanted. You wanted no splitting of the vote. You wanted a two-party race. You got it. What is

the problem? You got a two-party race. You wanted to decimate a third party, you decimated the Congress of the People from seven seats to one seat. You got it, but yet you want to go to court. Your will was done. The Member for Siparia's will was done, Madam Speaker. You got it.

Madam Speaker, I have to spend about 10 minutes rebutting some arguments from the other side. And I want to start off with the Member for Caroni Central. The Member for Caroni Central in his contribution asked about 20 questions. His constituents want to know, his constituents want—he asked about 20 questions of the PNM. His constituency wants to know this, that and the other. But he did not ask the final 21st question and the most important question of all, because his constituents want to know whether he is UNC or COP.

Mr. Hinds: Ohhhh! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Tell them that. You wake up one morning, COP, and by dusk, by sunset, you are UNC. That is what your constituents want to know my friend. And this is the same Member of Parliament who stood up and talked about transparency and hid behind a legal opinion, that he could not tell us how he was going to dispose of the lands in Invader's Bay. The biggest disposal of real property in Trinidad and Tobago and the procurement guru of the past Government could not even provide a deed for the land to satisfy any potential buyer.

Madam Speaker, in responding to the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, I am reminded of Patty Hearst and Stockholm syndrome. And I just want to read into the *Hansard* what Stockholm syndrome is.

> It—"…is a psychological phenomenon in which hostages express empathy and sympathy and have positive feelings toward their captors"—and even help them in the commission of their crimes.

That is what that contribution from the Member for St. Augustine reminds me of, Stockholm syndrome because the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine did not tell this Parliament, in response to the hon. Attorney General, what was his role as head of the Legislative Review Committee, what was his role as the Minister of Legal Affairs and Justice, about the issues surrounding the proclamations of the Children Act, 2012. He did not regale us with anything, any explanation about the mess coming out of the Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Bill, 2000, where the State, as I am told by the hon. Attorney General, will now be liable to the tune of $300 million. That is what we are being regaled with today. And the Member for St. Augustine, held hostage by the UNC, sat in

Cabinet as head of the Legislative Review Committee and said nothing, did nothing. It reminds me of Schultz in *Hogan's Heroes*—I see nothing, I do nothing.

Mr. Hinds: I am nothing.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And he sat in a Cabinet, and now this Government is going to have to pay out those fees. It will be nice to hear if anyone can be held personally liable for those things.

Hon. Member: We will look into it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: For the umpteenth time we will tell the Member for St. Augustine that the issue of taxes will go to each corporation. That was clearly said in our Local Government Manifesto of 2013. [*Desk thumping*] All taxes and revenue collected under any corporation will go to the corporation, so that you do not have the discrimination which took place under your administration where the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation got their development budget cut from $25 million to $21 million while central government budgets kept going up and up and up.

Similarly, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, their development project budget was cut.

Hon. Member: Tobago too.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: All corporations now, whether you are a UNC corporation or a PNM corporation, will have a steady known and reliable stream of revenue to plan. And we said any shortfall will be made up by central government. We have been saying so for two years. But Stockholm syndrome is a vicious thing.

2.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, during the campaign we said, ad nauseum, that the alignment of the mass transit system, nobody ever said about a bullet train, eh. It is this Member of Parliament who introduced into the debate a bullet train. We spoke about a mass transit system elevated over the priority bus route. That is the alignment that the Member for St. Augustine did not hear because he is suffering from Stockholm syndrome, being held captive so he cannot hear, and falling in love with their captors.

He wants to talk about the financing of the mass transit system. We said ad nauseam during the campaign, we will invite the IDB to do a feasibility study and

if it can be done, it can be financed through long-term debt financing, as opposed to my friend from St. Augustine, who sat in Cabinet and agreed to the financing of the Point Fortin Highway taking $7 billion for the largest infrastructural project this country has ever seen, from the current account. That is how they finance. You take $7 billion from the current account, so the country is now short of cash. We have clearly said we will go into long-term debt financing and the rates of interest these days are quite low.

Madam Speaker, I want to respond at some length to the issue of Caroni Limited. It was brought up by three speakers, inclusive of the Member for Naparima, and it is time that somebody on this side finally unmasks the UNC for their role in the demise of Caroni Limited, and I will do that today.

Madam Speaker, prior to 2000, sugar was given preferential entry into the European Union under the Lomé Convention. It was a way of the Europeans telling the ACP States, African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, their former colonies, that, you know, "maybe for past transgressions we will allow you duty-free access into our markets for your sugar and your bananas." By 2000, the world was changing, and the whole issue of duty-free concessions was no longer as viable as it was.

New Members of Parliament will learn that very often we will debate Bills here which Trinidad and Tobago, as a small State, has absolutely no choice but to sign up to, whilst the big metropolitan countries like the United States do not have to do it. It is one rule for the big countries, one rule for the small countries, and the new Parliamentarians will learn about this.

By 2000, Europe was telling its former colonies, the ACP States, African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States "Look, this preferential treatment has to end". And they came up with something called the Cotonou Agreement which the Basdeo Panday administration signed in June of 2000.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The Basdeo Panday administration, of which the Members for Oropouche East, Chaguanas West, Caroni East, were all Members of. The Member for Couva South would have been in the unions in those days. The Member for Siparia was there, and I want to ask any of these hon. Members: did you raise a voice of objection in Cabinet in 2000 when the Basdeo Panday administration signed the Cotonou Agreement? Or did the Basdeo Panday administration, like us now—did they have a choice but to sign it? The fact is, the

Basdeo Panday administration signed that agreement and the Member for Oropouche East knows that, Chaguanas West knows that, Caroni East knows that, Couva South knows that, Caroni Central knows that.

In that agreement you had the banana protocol, you had the sugar protocol, which reduced this preferential access. But what is more galling is this: Part of the Cotonou Agreement, when you read the objectives, was the alleviation of poverty in ACP States: African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States.

Madam Speaker, I spent my early years in Caroni opposite a cane field. My father had a shop—rum shop at the side, grocery on one side—and I would see sugar workers come to our shop broken in spirit, broken in body, because they are out in the field since two, three in the morning, with all the attendant social problems that went with sugar cane cutting—all the attendant problems. And Prof. Paul Teelucksingh has written a very good paper on that. It is in the public domain. I saw it.

But what is more important for us to understand is this: Do you know what the cost of production of sugar cane being sold into the EU was then? The cost of production was 50 cents a pound. Do you know what the price that we were getting was? Fifteen to 25 cents a pound. It was being subsidized by 100 per cent.

Trinidad and Tobago was one of the highest-cost producers of sugar in the Caribbean, together with Barbados. It was an untenable industry. Whether the Basdeo Panday administration had a choice or not, the fact is he signed on to it. And did any of you raise your voice in protest? Signing of the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 was the beginning of the end of the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago—fact.

It was further ratified by the then Minister of Trade, then MP for San Fernando West, Miss Diane Seukeran. That was the way the world was going, to free trade, elimination of subsidies, eradication of poverty. And if you want further proof that it was the UNC that started the decline of sugar as an industry in Trinidad, I read into the *Hansard* an article called: "Anand Ramlogan's Speech - COP Rally, 6th October, 2007", in which he talks about why he chose the COP. He says: "Why COP?" He says:

> "The political vehicles with ethnic number plates have exhausted their utility and have become obsolete."

That is our friend—he was calling our friends opposite obsolete. He goes on to say:

> "The UNC had a chance and blew it. The destruction of Caroni is painful but the truth is, Panday assisted in the destruction of Caroni by failing to strengthen and re-structure it when he was in power."

These are the words of Anand Ramlogan, and I will repeat it for the national community—Laventille West.

> "The UNC had a chance and blew it. The destruction of Caroni is painful but the truth is, Panday assisted in the destruction of Caroni by failing to strengthen it and re-structure it when he was in power."

But he goes on to say:

> "He killed Caroni"—he, being Panday killed Caroni—"and Manning lowered its coffin with the UNC performing the last rights, arti and all!"

This was Anand Ramlogan saying that the UNC performed arti. [*Interruption*] This was Anand Ramlogan, not me, my brother. That is what Anand Ramlogan said.

But, Madam Speaker, do you know what I came across recently? An article—and this is going to shock our friends, especially our new friends—by Rhondor Dowlat in the *Newsday*. Laventille West, listen to this one, eh. Sorry, Madam Speaker. Wednesday, August 31, 2005:

> "Junior Finance Minister Christine Sahadeo yesterday offered high praises to president general of the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union…Rudranath Indarsingh, for his representation of former workers in their hour of need."

Hear what they go on to say, Madam Speaker. She said Indarsingh "did what he had to do", that is help shut down Caroni. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Aaaayyyy! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: She said—[*Interruption*]—Wait, hold on, the best is yet to come, like Frank Sinatra. Frank Sinatra has a song on his tombstone: "The best is yet to come." [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, please.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Member for Laventille West—

> "Indarsingh will receive the Chaconia Silver medal today at President's House - a national award for his contribution to the trade union movement, specifically overseeing the smooth transformation of Caroni (1975) Ltd which resulted in more than 7,000 former sugar cane workers receiving VSEP payments and land for residents..."

Who shut down Caroni Limited?

Hon. Members: Indarsingh. [*Laughter*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Who shut down Caroni Limited? Madam Speaker, I put it to you, it was Mr. Basdeo Panday and Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh who helped shut down Caroni Limited. [*Desk thumping*] Not the PNM, Member for Fyzabad, not the PNM, Member for Naparima. And that, my friends, is the inconvenient truth about Caroni Limited.

And he sits down there for five years and pounds the PNM while he collected a Chaconia Silver medal for the role he played in the shutting down of Caroni Limited. He was awarded. He received the Chaconia Silver medal for the part he played—and received a medal at President's house, being lauded by Christine Sahadeo, former junior Minister of Finance.

Mr. Indarsingh: Christine Sahadeo did not give me.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I never said she gave you. She lauded you.

Mr. Indarsingh: It was the President.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And the Member for Couva South sits down there and pretends that he had no role to play in the shutdown of Caroni Limited, an inconvenient truth.

Madam Speaker, much has been said about the economy. Much has been said about full employment under the past administration, but let me tell you something. Nobody believes those figures about full employment, not even Moody's. Do you know why Moody's downgraded us? One, no data from CSO, and the Member for Caroni Central was in charge of CSO; no medium-term policy framework. Who was in charge of that? The Member for Caroni Central. No diversification of the economy. So when they talk about an economy blossoming and blooming, Moody's gave three criteria why we were downgraded: one, no diversification; two, no reliable data from the CSO and; three, no medium-term development plan. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Just ignore them.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, we ignore that and we return to the budget, because I have spent enough time rebutting. This budget is entitled: "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let's Do This Together." I have been heartened by the responses of responsible, independent thinkers, business associations in this budget. What this budget has done, as the hon. Minister of Finance has said, it starts a conversation on some difficult issues, for instance, the fuel subsidy. That is a difficult conversation to have, but this Minister of Finance has the fortitude to start that conversation and we congratulate him for that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Oh yes, oh yes.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And this is a time if we heed the Prime Minister's call when he made it in Queen's Hall when we were all given our instruments of appointment, for volunteerism. And I will come to volunteerism soon in the health sector. This is the time for all groups and all parties to join together under God to take Trinidad and Tobago forward.

Madam Speaker, I am not one, when I was in Opposition, to make light of serious health issues. We always deferred to the Minister of Health because we never felt health was an issue to be politicized, but I have to call into question the former Minister of Health asking the current Minister of Health what is he doing to stop the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease from Jamaica to Trinidad.

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, as we sit here right now there are no confirmed cases in Trinidad. It is in Jamaica, it is in Cayman. And this Minister of Health in 2012, when there was an actual outbreak in Trinidad, the bulletin he put out was this:

> Hand, foot and mouth "…disease is usually a mild, short illness caused by a virus. It mainly affects children under ten."

I have spoken to CARPHA. There is absolutely no need for panic, and I urge Members opposite not to panic the population over the issue of hand, foot and mouth disease in Jamaica. CARPHA has advised that there is no need to screen passengers coming in at our ports of entry from Jamaica. The same way the former Minister of Health would have dealt with an actual outbreak in Trinidad, we will similarly deal with it. But as of now, there is no confirmed case in Trinidad. It is a mild virus. What we will tell any parent, if you suspect your child has it do not give aspirin. Rehydrate the child, give paracetamol, acetaminophen. It is a self-limiting mild viral infection, and the protocols are there from 2012 when there was an actual outbreak in Trinidad. Do not politicize these issues.

Madam Speaker, as I come to the substantive part of my contribution dealing with health, I refer to the Government policy document, "Let's Do This Together", which speaks about integrity and morality in public life, which is of the highest priority for this administration. [*Desk thumping*] The standard of the health is a significant marker in the development of any country and we will use health as a marker. Our mission in the Ministry is to create a modern health care system which is evidence-based, and as I go through my contribution I will allude to what evidence we are using, which is focused on the redevelopment of primary health care as a priority. We have enough secondary hospitals, we have enough tertiary care. We are going to be refocusing on primary health care whilst not deemphasizing any other aspect.

We are going to look at the continued restoration of all our health facilities. Madam Speaker, at this point in time I want to refer to my *Hansard* contribution in the Senate of November 23, 2010, if you would allow me, and I do not know if my words then were prophetic. I would have been sitting opposite the Member for Chaguanas East as he is now; Senator then. This is what I said on November 23, 2010. The then Minister of Health was Sen. Baptiste-Cornelis and I said:

> "The point is that a person presented too late, having not taken care of a condition. You cannot blame any government or Minister of Health. I sympathize with Sen. Baptiste-Cornelis, because what she is going to be faced with in Trinidad, especially with health, is a population that is going to clobber her and absolutely massacre her for every little thing that goes wrong which are the exceptions..."

Those are my words in 2010.

> "…but she would get no praise for all the good, joyful outcomes of health. With respect to all those outcomes, you are only going to see a letter to the editor praising the staff, but if there is an unfortunate outcome in health, the Minister of Health of the day gets absolutely clobbered in the media."

Those were my words.

On my first day I had a very unfortunate incident to deal with and the media clobbered me. The media called me 40 times a day. You know, true to my words, an article lettered to the editor appeared in the *Express* of Friday, October 02, "Expertise, love, care at Mt Hope Hospital". Do you know how many calls I got about this letter? None! Absolutely none! None! Absolutely none! This is a person lauding the Mount Hope system and I got not one call from the media. Not one, but that is the nature of the thing. But I go on.

Madam Speaker, in our manifesto we outlined eight priority areas: chronic and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, care for the elderly, outreach visits to vulnerable populations, dental health, mental health, environmental health and HIV Aids. What we are going to do is link the Government manifesto, which is now Government policy, to the Ministry of Health based on evidence. Non-communicable diseases which is a significant part of primary health care, let me give you the evidence. Sixty per cent of deaths due to NCDs, with 50 per cent of these dying before the age of 70 can be preventable to some degree.

One of the first policy positions we are going to take is to establish a functioning NCD unit within the Ministry of Health, and the targets we are looking at are these:

> NCDs mobility rate: to reduce our mobility rates of NCDs per 100,000 population by about 50 per cent within the next five years.

Currently, it is 1,940.8 per 100,000 population. We would like to get that down and some of these figures actually come from CARPHA. CARPHA estimates that 8 per cent of our GDP is wasted through diabetes and hypertension alone. Could you imagine that? Eight per cent of our GDP is actually wasted through diabetes and hypertension.

Madam Speaker, when I had the second or third heads of department meeting and we were talking about our manifesto focusing on primary health care, I asked the persons around the table, I said, "Look, one of the things I think we should focus on in primary health care is dental health". Madam Speaker, the only thing that did not happen was everybody bursting out into a round of applause, because dental health has been put on the back burner of this country's health agenda for far too long and we are going to put dental health back where it belongs.

Mr. Singh: Put teeth in there.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We are going to put teeth into it. Very good! We currently have 47 dental units in 105 health centres with 36 of them providing some sort of restorative care, but seven are limited to providing only for extractions and four are non-functional. So this administration is going to pay particular attention to dental health, and one of the first things I will be doing after this budget debate is finished is actually meeting with the dental council to see how we could move the dental agenda forward and bring it in to a point of focus in primary health care.

Madam Speaker, let me just give the national population an update on some of the facilities:

The National Oncology Centre is carded to be completed sometime between August 2013—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: No.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Well, not August 2013; November 2016. Sorry. But one of the things we have to do is to bring the enabling legislation for that, which is the National Ionizing Radiation Protection and Security Bill, and Ionizing Radiation Protection of Employees and Medical Exposure Regulations. That is high up on the list of our legislative agenda.

The Arima Hospital: 150 beds. We had some problems because the contractor could not receive the 5 per cent payment over the last budgetary cycle. The money had basically run out. We are trying to do that now.

Point Fortin hospital: 100 new beds. That is ongoing. There are some administrative issues being worked on, but that project is going on.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia has been baiting me in the public to make a statement about the Children's Couva Hospital. First of all, let me give that hospital its correct name. It is the Couva Children's and Adult Hospital. It is not a Children's Hospital as the Member for Siparia keeps on saying. [*Desk thumping*] It is a Children's and Adult Hospital. But in an effort to portray herself as the mother of the country, she forgets the adult part.

Now, Madam Speaker, there is a difference between opening a facility and commissioning a facility. Yes, the last administration; yes, the Member of Parliament for Siparia opened the facility, but it was never in the contemplation of the Ministry or the South-West Regional Health Authority about the commissioning. Commissioning means having all the equipment and having your staff. That hospital at its peak is going to require 2,700 able-bodied people to run it, but you do not commission the whole thing from day one. It is done in phases.

Year one was supposed to be 470 people, for year one. But I want the people of central and south to know you are not being deprived of the use of that facility because that facility was never meant to be commissioned after its ceremonial opening, and the evidence to support that, Madam Speaker, is the Minutes of the first meeting of the Couva Children's and Adult Hospital commissioning oversight committee. Do you know when that first meeting was held?

Mr. Hinds: When?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The first meeting to commission the hospital was held on July 08, 2015. In other words, it never occurred to anyone that while this construction was taking place, to coterminously have the committee seeing about commissioning. Where are the people going to come from? It was just space. And, there were even questions as to the vesting of this property. Would it be vested in the Government or vested with the South-West Regional Health Authority? The Member for Fyzabad knows that.

He knows there were concerns about how this property was to be vested because the SWRHA CEO advised the Ministry of Health there was no provision in the 2014/2015 Recurrent Expenditure budget to support the staffing of 470 people for year one commissioning. Those are the facts and the Member for Fyzabad knows that. So the members of the public in Couva are not being deprived of anything because it was never the intention to commission this thing this year. They opened a building.

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said about procurement under the past administration. I now turn to CDAP. Our manifesto says clearly we are going to review and expand CDAP. CDAP cost this country about $40 million per year and I want to read a report conducted by Barnoya and Yang in 2013 which I got from CARPHA, but was never made public. Do you know why it was never made public? Because it spoke glowingly of CDAP. And this is what the report said. Remember, CDAP was started in 2004.

> A study conducted by Barnoya and Yang in 2013 on the mortality rates for cardiovascular diseases in Trinidad and Tobago, the result showed a significant 2.9 per cent decline per year in CVD mortality rates in Trinidad and Tobago.
>
> When the various policies were examined that may have contributed to this decline, it was concluded that the CDAP programme and the massive scale-up in secondary prevention treatment was the main contributor.

CDAP, started by the current Minister of Finance, accounted for the saving of over 5,000 deaths—5,000 lives were saved with CDAP, but when they were in Opposition they had everything bad to say about CDAP. This report was never made public. Never made public.

3.00 p.m.

But, Madam Speaker, the scandal now is about the procurement and distribution of CDAP medication. The Member for Fyzabad spoke about a Bill, the Regional Health Authorities Bill that the former Minister of Health piloted and I

am going to quote from the *Hansard* because you were right. Part of the agenda was to give the RHAs the authority to purchase drugs on their own. This Bill—Wednesday, March 28, 2012:

"This means, Mr. Speaker…"

This is former Minister of Health.

"…that the Regional Health Authorities together would be able as a collective unit to bulk buy goods and services where it allows them to be economically expedient to do the same."

He goes on in that same contribution to say:

"Now, in this process, we could also put pharmaceuticals. Most of the pharmaceuticals are centrally bought however by Nipdec and C40."

Madam Speaker, so stick a pin. CDAP cost $40 million a year. The former Minister of Health comes to Parliament on Wednesday, March 28, 2012, pilots a Bill to give the RHAs the power to buy CDAP drugs. You with me? I refer to a 78-slide presentation by Indrani Rampersad, Director of Contracts on April 14, 2014, which talks about the pitfalls of sole select tendering. I refer to a Cabinet Note which the former Minister of Health takes to Cabinet to recommend an open tender process for the setting up of an information system to monitor the use and utilization of CDAP drugs called the National Health Card, I believe it is.

The former Minister of Health goes to Cabinet on April 03, 2014 for an open tender proposal; open tender. He was sent packing by the Cabinet headed by the Member of Parliament for Siparia and says, "No, we do not want open tender. We want sole select tendering." Sole select. They gave it to a firm. I am not going to call the name of the firm because that is irrelevant. The name of the firm is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the Member of Parliament for Siparia, as the Chairman of Cabinet, rejects a Note from the former Minister of Health for an open tender which he agrees with, which the technocrats at the Ministry agree with, and the Cabinet chooses sole select, and that contract is worth $30 million and does not include a maintenance contract which is then priced at $17 million per year.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Seventeen?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Seventeen. So the contract is 30 plus 17, 47. This is to manage CDAP. How much did I say CDAP cost per year? Forty. So they are coming up with a $47 million programme to manage a $40 million—but it gets

worse. They then formed something called a National Health Services Company Limited by Cabinet Minute No. 1829 of July 15 with three deliverables. One of the deliverables is the engagement of the services of the provider to provide, manage and operate the procurement, storage, distribution and usage of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals.

So, Member for Fyzabad, you are correct. The RHAs were supposed to be given the authority; it was never done. We engaged a contractor at $30 million, did not include the $17 million maintenance fee and then we set up a company. And you know what the cost to set up this company is?—$8 million: personnel expenditure, salaries to the CEO/Corporate Secretary, $1 million; goods and services, $5 million; minor equipment purchases, $2 million.

So let me recap for the public. CDAP cost $40 million a year. We invite a company, against the wishes of the Minister of Health, by using sole select, giving a contract for $30 million without the maintenance of $17 million, so you have to spend the $17 million eventually. So $30 million plus $17 million, and then they set up a company costing $8 million to manage CDAP. Total cost to manage CDAP at $40 million: $55 million. You ever hear the saying the candle cost more than the funeral? Well this, Madam Speaker, is that. Fifty-five million dollars to manage a $40 million project. Where is the sense in all of this? Where is the sense? And this company—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Joseph, your 45 minutes have expired.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I will require my time.

Madam Speaker: And I would advise you to wrap up within that time.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, arising out of that, we have advised central audit under the Minister of Finance to do a full audit into the National Health Card. [*Desk thumping*] Somebody wanted to know what was going to happen? That is what is going to happen. You are going to have an audit into the National Health Card. You are also going to have an audit into the Children's Life Fund by Ernst & Young. [*Desk thumping*]

Legal fees for the Ministry of Health. We heard tales of legal fees this morning, Ministry of Health—little Ministry of Health—over five years, $21 million in legal fees. With 20 per cent of those legal fees, $5 million going to one man. One man finds his name on the register of lawyers for all the RHAs. This

lucky one man gets $5 million in fees from RHAs. That is the entire budget for the Integrity Commission in this budget. That is what is going on with legal fees in this country.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak briefly about a couple of policy positions that we are taking. HIV/AIDS: we have taken a policy position to return the coordinating committee for HIV/AIDS back to the Office of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] This is a multisectoral initiative that needs the intervention of the Office of the Prime Minister. That is a policy position we are taking. Madam Speaker, the issue of maternal and child health, the Cabinet Note simply spoke about the position but the position is not fully created, it just agreed to the criteria of the position, and PMCD is currently seeing about that and the Permanent Secretary is working assiduously to see about that.

Madam Speaker, we have issues of waiting lists for things like cataract surgeries, reading of MRI films, CT scans. I have already met with some local people to clear up the backlog on these things. I will report to the population more on that, because I need to speak now about my constituency for the remaining eight minutes or so. But I just want the population to remember two figures: $55 million to manage a $40 million project and $21 million in legal fees of which $5 million went to one man; one man in all four RHAs; all four; has his tentacles in every single RHA.

I represent the constituency of St. Joseph and the constituency of St. Joseph does not have water and has not had water since I assumed the role as Member of Parliament on November 05, 2013, regardless of what anyone outside there says. It reminds me of a very unfortunate statement that my opponent in the general election made when he said, the reason why we do not have foreign exchange is because of the election. Have you heard a more inane statement? This foreign exchange issue facing my constituency—because we have big business, small business—has been going on since April 2014. But Vasant Bharath—Sen. Vasant Bharath now—says the forex situation is because of general elections. Whom are you trying to fool? So what happened in 2014? They had no election. But my constituents are now happy that we go back to the old system of allocating forex. [*Desk thumping*]

My constituents need to have some community centres done. I am calling and I have to write the current MP for Community Development, Culture and the Arts—Minister, sorry—that the Mount Hope Community Centre which languished for five years under your tenure now has to be opened. Five years, it languished there. We need to have the Curepe Community Centre either rebuilt or

remodelled or refurbished. We need to have a community centre built in Caiman. We need to have the Maitagual Community Centre restarted. Madam Speaker, the increase in taxable allowance from $60,000 to $72,000 per annum is of great benefit to my constituents, most of whom make that kind of money, which will give them an extra, I think, $240-something in their pockets per month, and when you couple that with the decrease in VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent, I am sure they can benefit greatly from that.

Another initiative in this budget which I had to prosecute in the public domain is the way this Government treated rent-to-own people. I had to go on the radio and TV and tell the HDC and tell the Member for Oropouche East that the letter that was sent out to rent-to-own people, age 58, to "either take up dey mortgage or get out" was wrong. Our focus on rent-to-own will service the same middle class that somebody spoke about there earlier—Member for St. Augustine. That same middle class that the Member for St. Augustine is so concerned about—Stockholm syndrome, so concerned about—my middle class constituents will benefit from that.

We are going to expand and re-look at CDAP. The solution to CDAP is not a $55 million solution. The solution to CDAP is to come up with a better method of procurement and distribution and we are already working on that in the Ministry to find a better method of procurement and distribution of CDAP, [*Desk thumping*] and when we do that and the process becomes more efficient, then we can expand CDAP. So that a report which tells you that CDAP is a main driver into the saving of 5,000 lives does not stay hidden from the public because it is a PNM policy. Because it is a PNM policy that came to light under the UNC, it stayed silent. Could you imagine that?

And CDAP—for those of you who do not know—has been mentioned at World Health fora with admiration. It is one of the developing countries in the entire globe. A landmark decision, a landmark project to ease—[*Desk thumping*] That is $40 million less that poor people and the middle-class people that the Member for St. Augustine speaks about—he is so concerned about the middle class—that is $40 million less that the middle class and poor people have to find per year. From 2004 to 2015, 11 years; 11 by 44 is what? Four billion dollars? Whatever it is. Four hundred million dollars that poor people have to find less.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close, the Ministry of Health, under this administration, is in good hands. I want to reiterate that the hand, foot and mouth outbreak in Jamaica is not a major concern to Trinidad now and I have confirmed

that with CARPHA. There is no need to make that into a political football. The same measures that were taken in 2012, we will take in 2015, even though we have no confirmed cases here.

I thank everyone for the opportunity to be in this House. I thank my political leader and, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the way you are conducting the business of this House. With those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

3.15 p.m.

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I do anything, I would just like to congratulate you on your ascension to one of the toughest seats that you would ever find in a Parliament of any nation, especially in this country. But your handling of the Parliament so far is quite good. As a former Deputy Speaker, may I just say that.

First, let me also thank my constituents for having me here today and voting me back into office for the sixth time in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank them wholeheartedly.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Six?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: For the sixth time.

Miss Mc Donald: And last.

Dr. F. Khan: Well, the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South says last. That is my choice, not yours.

Miss Mc Donald: I asked the question.

Dr. F. Khan: I also want to thank the political leader of the United National Congress, the Member for Siparia, for giving me the authority to run for that seat for the sixth, equalling that last Member and to win it for six times, and also to be part of a Government that made a difference in this country. [*Desk thumping*] When we say make a difference, one looks at the matter of the figures and you see 340,000 people voted for the People's Partnership and 370,000-odd voted for the PNM, a difference of 30,000 and also—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: You won by 400 votes.

Dr. F. Khan: The majority of Laventille did not support you so you should keep quiet. You have twenty-something thousand people in Laventille and what, 5,000 supported you? You should be ashamed.

Mr. Hinds: I got 13,000 votes my friend.

Dr. F. Khan: You padded that.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, while some banter is allowed, let us get on with the business of the people.

Hon. Member: I believe that.

Dr. F. Khan: Madam Speaker, may I start by saying that I sat in this honourable House for the last couple days and wondering every time that the Government speakers stood up, I tried to figure out why it is that every single Member had such an aggressive tone. And as a doctor in my own right I tried to figure out what caused that human behaviour; the human behaviour of aggression, the way it was done. The only thing I could think about is that whenever you start a debate, whoever pilots a Motion, sets the tone of the debate, and then I realized, and I went back to the budget statement and I saw exactly why the Members on that side have become so aggressive.

You see, Madam Speaker, this is a Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and we are here discussing the issues of the country, granted there has been an election. An election has been won by the PNM on the other side. But when you start off with a budget statement which determines the actual running of a country, saying:

> "..Trinidad and Tobago rejected the politics of deception, betrayal, greed, arrogance, waste and mismanagement. They rejected officially-sanctioned corruption."

Now, that should have been struck off from the budget [*Desk thumping*] as imputing improper motives.

> They rejected discrimination and squandermania and immorality, nepotism and cronyism.

I thought, Madam Speaker, that the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East was referring to the past PNM Government. It is only when I realized that he was referring to our Government, I decided that set the tone for the aggression in this House. I would take it down a little bit.

Madam Speaker, I do not know anything about Caroni and the Lomé Convention and the "Conoteau" Agreement.

Hon. Members: Cotonou Agreement.

Dr. F. Khan: Cotonou Agreement, sorry. I was a Deputy Speaker and I was a member of the ACP but that in itself was not discussed. I am not versed in that so I

will not speak about that. What I, however, would like to speak about, Madam Speaker, is some erroneous figures that have been presented to this House. I was, for four years, the Minister Health of Trinidad and Tobago and one thing I am certain about is that certain figures that have been presented here by my good friend from St. Joseph are not that correct. He went at lengths to speak about CDAP and I must clear this up now, before I start to indicate the legacy projects that we left.

The Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, the Minister of Health, said when he went into the office and he saw the CDAP, which is the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme, it was only $50 million, I think. But CDAP, when you look at it in all its sides, it is approximately $300 million. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, Madam Speaker, it has ballooned on the estimates to $300 million. By the time you finish the year it goes to about $600 million because of the inefficiencies of the procurement, the methods of approach, the lack of distribution, the lack of RHA controls, the lack of everything on the supply chain, Madam Speaker. We went to town and looked at it and tried to find a way, how would we: (1) bring accountability to CDAP as well as making sure that the correct drugs reach the correct people at the correct time without shortages? You would have read that CDAP shortages of drugs always made the papers in letters, in articles, in everything. So we had to find a way to do it.

Now, prior to 2011, I am going back to 2001, when I was the Minister in the Ministry of Health, we had the same problem and what was happening at that time, the health offices, the pharmacists were working according to normal hours but the patients were not getting the pharmaceuticals as they should. There were shortages, quite a lot of shortages at that time. I cannot remember who was responsible. I think it was still Nipdec.

Now, the then Minister, Minister Hamza Rafeeq, came up with the idea that if we were able to put government pharmaceuticals in pharmacies close to a health office then the patients would be able to access these pharmaceuticals any time as well as during the day, and that is how CDAP was born. We went about it and we looked at it and we decided this is what we will do and we will send these pharmaceuticals into the system and then we had a very early election. The then Attorney General and the Prime Minister could not see eye to eye and we ended up on an election, I think it was December.

On December 21, I remember the Member for Diego Martin North/East became the Minister of Health and he took the CDAP programme, I cannot

remember what it was called then, created the CDAP from that substrate and it came as a CDAP with Nipdec.

Now, over the years CDAP started off well and drugs and pharmaceuticals were added on to it each time. A time before 2011, I think it was 2009, the diabetic programme was launched, where people would get free glucometers, free strips to look after their diabetes and hypertension. I specifically want to talk about the CDAP diabetic glucometers. You see, Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph could have asked me and I would have told him, I have no problem telling him that the firm that was chosen after proper tender rules by the Central Tenders Board systems, with a lot of discussion between the Ministry of Health technocrats, Nipdec technocrats, Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, the Health Services Committee. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please.

Dr. F. Khan: The health council of our Cabinet committee, they were the firm that was doing CDAP already. They had done the CDAP of the 300,000 patients. They were the ones who put a card together for people to access the glucometers and the strips. That is what they did. It was just an extension of that. The initial part of that health card was borne out of an extension of what was occurring already, because once somebody was doing something, it would be easy to continue, because we were losing—and I would say after discussion with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Mr. Larry Howai—approximately $300 million in leakage.

Nipdec, as well as the Ministry of Health technocrats, we put a team together, sat down and they thrashed out the values and the firm started off with a small amount of money to see how it ran, and they were able to put in every single—275 pharmacies in Trinidad and Tobago, the hardware and printers and everything else to deal with the health card. And also they were able to purchase the soft licence; the licence for the software, and that does cost a lot of money.

So, Madam Speaker, when the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph comes in and says that CDAP is $50 million, automatically he is incorrect. It is $300 million and goes to $600 million when you purchase quite a lot of items.

The health card is just an extension of a card that was there already for the diabetics, but now we have put on this health card the matter of registration as well as pharmacy registration, patient registration and also the only people who can get this health card would be those citizens, legal residents, permanent

residents, et cetera, because we saw there was a serious leakage in this country from normal pharmaceuticals/CDAP and HIV drugs as well as oncology drugs and this is the function of the health card. By doing that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: What about the "No Rowley Campaign"?

Dr. F. Khan: Would you be quiet? Learn something "nah". You have been here as long as I have.

Madam Speaker: Members, please be guided. Interruptions are very specifically allowed for under our Standing Orders and, hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, maybe if you direct your comments here you would be less distracted.

Dr. F. Khan: Madam Speaker, I would love to do that because you are much better looking than he is. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, that is how the health card came about and the reason I am going through this is because it has been in the public domain about this $30 million, this $23 million and it is all this rubbish that has been going on and I cannot believe the Member for St. Joseph fell for that also. This is how it went and it continued, and we had a team set up every single week meeting with Deputy Permanent Secretary Jacobs, as well as everybody from Nipdec, as well as myself ironing it out and we ended up with the health card. The health card, if it is continued, is the foundation of the National Health Insurance System in the country. [*Desk thumping*]

So when we speak today, when the Member for Diego Martin North/East speaks about universal health care, universal health insurance, he cannot do it unless there is some system in place to regulate that system. And every single person, we started off with CDAP because we had a database. Using that database, we are producing cards together with ttconnect and ttconnect centres, as well as the Ministry of Health and pharmacies. When those 300,000 people of CDAP are registered, the HIV and oncology centres will be done—people, patience.

The sum of $30 million was the cost so far. That has not been paid in full, because there are systems in place to check at each level when and how this system, and the payment is done based on the deliverables. So, it may be $30 million allocated. In Cabinet, you have allocation but the payouts are not the allocation. Allocations are given, however the payouts depend on deliverables. I do not think they have gotten that amount yet because the health card has not been fully commissioned.

The $17 million for maintenance, Madam Speaker, that was not given, because we found it to be too exorbitant and we had to go back to the drawing board. So when you come—Madam Speaker, if you talk a lie very loud you think everybody should believe it but that is not the way things were done. That $17 million was never, never given. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

In fact, the Cabinet and the health council looked at it and said that is too much, let them run it for a year, which is the cost of what is happening before we talk about maintenance. Madam Speaker, not only will the health cards see about pharmaceuticals, there is a strip which will be converted to a chip, that you will have your medical records, your medical investigations and everything, so you will walk around with this health card, like an identification card with all your hospital records on it. I have not heard anything from the Member for St. Joseph about the loss of medical records in this country. People in this country go to the health offices and the health centres and the hospitals and the records are lost. The health card was a system to deal with that.

So what would have occurred, Madam Speaker, you would have been able to detect when—let us say, one pharmaceutical leaves C40 which is where they are housed, when they go towards an RHA, when they are distributed from that RHA to somebody and given to a patient. So you could track the whole supply chain. So nobody could come and say that they need another set of eye drops which cost about $500. As it stands now, without the health card you can get 30 eye drops in a month, and use one and sell the other 29. With the health card you will not be able to do that, and that is what the whole reason behind the health card is, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So to come here—I did not—I mean, order the health cards, feel free to do it. I have no problem with it.

I have noticed in this budget debate, the Member for San Fernando West started off with indicating the amount of legal fees. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West repeated everything he said, and there has been an attack on the legal fees. I will tell you about legal fees in the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health is an area that seems to be very lucrative for people who have medical negligence; they go after it. I inherited from the Eastern Regional Health Authority—and I will tell you some, Madam Speaker, one of the legal representatives who is very close to the PNM, signed off on a medical negligence case when they were told that it should not be done; something called consent, you might understand it; consent was given verbally for $6 million for a case, and that had to be paid off from our—I tried my best to see if it could have been

decreased. It was not worth that amount of money, but it set a precedent in the system where we had to now look at that. That was a precedent set, thanks to one of the legal people from that side.

So, Madam Speaker, when we—the Ministry of Health—and you will learn it, Member for St. Joseph—daily there are medical negligence pre-action protocols or cases. There is a case in south that we are doing at present for the last four years, where the claimants are asking for quite a lot of money. We are paying the lawyers to defend the Ministry of Health.

There is another one where I have asked for an appeal because if that case went through as it was, we would not be able to pick up a mental health person in this country again. So this is where a lot of the legal fees go to. I have no decision on who gets the legal work. The RHA does that, they choose whoever it is, and I put in place, Madam Speaker, that it must be cleared by the legal department of the Ministry; anything.

So to contracts; all contracts must be cleared by a contract review committee at the Ministry. That was a direction of a Minister with respect to section 5 of the RHA Act—because RHAs can choose what they want and procure how they do, but the Minister can put things in place.

So, Madam Speaker, putting these things in place was done, because the People's Partnership inherited a complete mess in the health sector, and it was bad. I mean, when we looked at it, people were having long waiting times for visits, long waiting times for MRIs; pathology slides were taking a year to be given; accident and emergency was a horror story, and it was going on and on; cardiac services, cardiac, it was not done in hospitals.

It got so bad, Madam Speaker, that when the People's Partnership went into office we found out that millions, not just—I mean millions of dollars were being paid to private institutions for things that could be done in the hospitals. I put a cap and said nothing will be outsourced until we get that centre; and we did.

Out of that, after things started off in the hospitals, came about the increase in the medical aid, and increase in the EPP, which is the External Patient Programme for cataracts, which the Minister is going to do. It is happening already; MRIs, it is happening already; CT scans, happening already; joint surgeries. In fact, there is a team from Denver, Colorado that is going to be coming here in November, end of November, to do 100 joint replacements, thanks to us. [*Desk thumping*] That was what we did.

I hope they "doh stop it". Hip-joint replacements, they are very necessary now as we have an ageing population. Our ageing population dictates that we have dire need for treatment as well as joints, and they are coming from Denver. I do not think that the Member for St. Joseph, Ministry of Health did that in one month; that was ongoing for that to happen.

Now, the Children's Life Fund, I need to touch on the Children's Life Fund. It made news, front page news, because at the time it was necessary to make news because it was an election period, and everybody wanted to get their two cents' worth. The Children's Life Fund has saved more than 230 children in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The legislation was written in a way that only those with life and death circumstances as per—said by a specialist surgeon, a specialist doctor—can access the life fund up to a million dollars to leave. People applied, some people did not get, some people got. Cardiac surgery could be considered life and death, but it could be done here, but some people have gotten the approval to go away.

When we changed the board of the Children's Life Fund, there was a new CEO, and what she found, but it has not been proven, and it is in the hands of the fraud squad, that there was some discrepancy of about US $7,000; that is it.

Hon. Member: US $7,000?

Dr. F. Khan: US, seven sixes are 42, about $42,000, and most of it has not been fully elucidated yes or no by the patients' relatives. It is $1,000 that is usually given to patients' relatives when they go abroad for initial expenses. But you are speaking about $1 million being given and US $1,000 for expenses. About seven people said they did not get it, they cannot remember if they got it or not, and a big hue and cry was done, because the CEO was asked to leave because of other things—[*Interruption*] not that, there were a lot of other things, and I want you to audit it. I want the Member for St. Joseph to audit that and you come back here and tell us what the audit has said, and you will see.

As a result of that, Madam Speaker, things hit the airwaves and the Children's Life Fund—because the only reason the Children's Life Fund became such an issue was because it was the—Cabinet Note No. 1 of the Member of Parliament for Siparia, the then Prime Minister, and if you take down the head, the body will die, and that was the only reason. If the Member of Parliament for Siparia was not the one who did that Children's Life Fund, you would have heard very little about it; and that is how it runs.

You see, Madam Speaker, politics—and this is first time in a long time I will agree with my Prime Minister of ’95, when he said: “Politics has a morality of its own”, believe me it does. I have learned that over the time, and sometimes the morality of politics is not the morality of the real world. It is a totally different thing, and things happen—I mean, like a simple example is this CDAP.

CDAP is something that we are supposed to do, and granted yes, we spoke about the—I came to the Parliament and we spoke about what? We spoke about the procurement by the RHAs. So one RHA could procure on all the RHAs. This was to get away from the inefficiency of what NIPDEC and the C40 was doing, and I hope they would have taken it up on board, but it never happened. The RHAs were the ones who are supposed to do it. So we had to, at the Ministry of Health, form the Hospital Services Company. That is what we had to do. Because the RHAs—each RHA, north, south, east and central, Tobago is out of the jurisdiction; they are under the THA. Because the procurement system was such that you had a different discrepancy in each one the Hospital Services Company came into being, because that would have been able to get faster procurement from the Ministry of Health.

I will tell you an example, Madam Speaker. It came to my attention that an echocardiogram was broken down. An echocardiogram, graphic machine checks the heart, ultrasound of the heart and how it runs. I told them to get one urgently. A year after it had not been found, and what we were doing, sending all the echocardiograms out to the private sector to do it. A year afterwards an emergency echocardiography machine was not given, and that is not all.

I could go again; vitreoretinal surgery. People in this country have a very high incidence of diabetes, their eyes are most important to function. The back of the eye is the retina, and what happens? Diabetes damages the back of the eye; uncontrolled diabetes, and they have to do vitreoretinal surgery. We bought the instruments for San Fernando; always a problem. We tried to get it in Port of Spain, pushing it, pushing it, urgently, it is now happening; approximately a month ago, just before elections, because I put my foot down, I said this must happen before I leave. We have to pay $23,000 per patient in the external market. So putting the VR surgery equipment was one part of it, as well as south, and it is happening, Madam Speaker.

Now, he spoke about CDAP and the high incidence of diabetes and primary health care and where we are going to go with primary health care. Madam Speaker, I was doing that for four years already, it is nothing new. [*Desk thumping*] When I went to the Ministry I found out that the STEPS Programme

showed that 60 per cent of adults; 55 per cent of children are becoming obese in this country. It was a bad—it still is. It is a bad case of obesity, and that came about—the Fight the Fat Programme and all the other primary health care programmes came about as a result of those figures.

So going to primary health care, Member for St. Joseph, you are just continuing what we have started. It is nothing new, because—what also we did, Madam Speaker, you know, we also looked at it and realized that many people should be treated at home, do what they call the wellness numbers, rather than just go into a health office when you are sick. So I discussed it in Cabinet and the hon. Prime Minister said: "But why do you not open the health offices later so people after work can go there". We opened 105 health offices [*Desk thumping*] late, nine o'clock, 24 hours, weekends, everything, Madam Speaker. So it is there.

We refurbished it, utilizing the CEPEP Programme. An innovative way to use CEPEP, CEPEP by the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Tabaquite—CEPEP and URP were able to assist in refurbishing all the health centres in the country, [*Desk thumping*] as well as some hospitals, and that is called innovative use of CEPEP, not just cutting grass, and they did a very good job. May I say that to the Member of Diego Martin North/East, some of them still need to be paid.

Now, we looked at the children hospital, Couva Children's Hospital. Couva Children's Hospital reminds me a lot of the 1995—2000 Government, UNC that I was part of. In 1995, the Panday administration, they saw a rotten airport in the—inherited a bad airport and a new airport was done. Forget the other part of it, that is being done in the law, but there was a new airport, people loved it. And as soon as 2002 came in, it was totally—the whole idea and concept of the airport was looked upon as something bad, because why? It was done by the United National Congress.

The Couva Children's Hospital—we know it is an adult hospital. It has 120 adult beds, but the part that you are looking at has the sign on it; it is the children part of it. So you have the Couva Children's Hospital block there, and you have the adult hospital on the other side. In between there are the investigations and the corridors, et cetera. No equipment, Member for St. Joseph. I put a commissioning team there from South West Regional Health Authority and also the Ministry of Health. Dr. Doon was the one who did it.

Hon. Deyalsingh: In July?

Dr. F. Khan: Well, we had to wait to see exactly what we needed. [*Laughte*r *and crosstalk*] No, "yuh could laugh". Madam Speaker, he could laugh as much as he wants, but the commissioning—[*Interruption*]

3.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Continue, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you. The Couva Children's Hospital, Madam Speaker, was attacked by the Member for St. Joseph as: "It is not a Children's Hospital, it is a Couva children/adult, Couva children/adult hospital." Of course it is. That is what it is, 120 beds versus 80 beds. That is what it is. There are also plans in there to have a burn centre, a helipad and an accident and emergency centre.

Now, while it was being built, we were looking at it and deciding how we were going to staff it. I could teach you how to staff it. We were going to staff it utilizing the overflow from Couva Accident and Emergency as well as San Fernando emergency into the Couva Hospital. We were also looking at—and if you look, there is a Cabinet Note for it where the privatization, utilizing a private management firm of international repute to run the Couva Children's Hospital. It is there. As well, the Chinese have expressed interest in doing it, you could speak to them.

Now, when you say that there is no equipment, I mean, did you visit it? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: I never went.

Dr. F. Khan: Please visit it, Member for St. Joseph, because what you would do, you would look as though—when you look at that hospital, you would come back here and apologize to the Member for Siparia, you would. [*Desk thumping*] I also ask you to visit the Carenage health facility and you will see the similarities in what both of them look like. The Carenage health facility and the Couva Children's Hospital are state-of-the-art centres that we gave to people [*Desk thumping*] via the Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*]

In that Couva Hospital, I could read out all the equipment: endoscopes, anaesthetic carts, you have operating theatre tables, you have everything. Wilmer ophthalmology sets, but what is most—you have all that, every single thing there—significant, do you know what you have there? You have a 3-Tesla MRI centre. And do you know what that 3-Tesla MRI could do? It is fast, rapid, rapid MRI, and that is why we indicated—the CT scan is there, there is a mammogram machine that is state of the art and—we were hoping that the commissioning team

would have started with the radiology department and start commissioning the radiology department, then the children's outpatient clinic, accident and emergency and then the surgical part and operating theatre. It is a lot of equipment. I mean, if you go through it—I could show it to you, it is there. The adult part of the hospital has been completed, from what I remember. There are also designs on the system for a rehabilitation centre. It is all there.

So, what I am saying to you, Madam Speaker, when you come to this honourable House and speak about nothing was done and how bad it is and how bad the health sector is, that is an indictment on me. I am really going to take offence at that.

You see, Madam Speaker, when you look at for years—I think it is 40 years—Arima was supposed to get a hospital, 40 years. I tried, while doing the plans and the negotiations for that hospital, to repair as much as I could the old hospital which was left to ruins. We were able to get Block E done and we were refurbishing the accident and emergency part of the—in fact—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). I never said that the health sector is in a bad state. I ask for that statement to be withdrawn. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, 48(6) refers to imputing improper motives. So that if it is that you are saying that you have been misquoted, if that is the case, if you have been misquoted, I would ask the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan to be more accurate in your references.

Dr. F. Khan: Madam Speaker, on your indication, I would just withdraw that for now and I would try and look at the *Hansard* next time to get a proper approach. Now, Arima Hospital, Madam Speaker, was in the cards for about 40 years, so too Point Fortin Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] Both of these hospitals, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]—I would have to come to Scarborough; there is so much we have done, Member for Siparia, I do not know what else to speak about. There is so much to speak about.

The Arima Hospital, we went through the negotiations, we went through with finance, we went through with the Chinese Embassy and we were able to start work for the mobilization and the plans and there have been sod-turning ceremonies. So too with Point Fortin, similar type of hospital, but one of the flagships, Madam Speaker, is that of the oncology centre. [*Desk thumping*]

When we took office in 2010, the Oncology Centre was concrete and grass—grass, concrete and more grass and thick concrete. We went about it utilizing the

same architects, Farrow Partnership Architects, and UDeCOTT was given the task of starting the process and organizing the contractor together with the structure link with Farrow Partnership. Works started, Madam Speaker, and what we also found was that the oncology centre that was going to be built was a bit deficient, and as a result of that I took a Note to Cabinet and got approval to put what we call the PET-CT scan unit and a cyclotron to make radiopharmaceuticals. We also put into that oncology centre a linear accelerator called a CyberKnife. That is ongoing. Unfortunately, it could not have been finished because Farrow Partnership Architects went into bankruptcy and we did not have the plans. UDeCOTT did not have the plans. All the plans had to be redone.

It took almost about a year to be redone because there was nothing to do based on the drawings. That is ongoing. It has been ongoing for the last five or six months, and as the Member of Parliament said, we should get that oncology centre by the middle or the end of next year. Also, another thing—so we took care of the oncology part of it together with the satellite oncology centre in San Fernando which we opened—[*Desk thumping*] the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad being the chairman at that time—as well as Sangre Grande. There are also a lot of satellite units of cancer care in St. James.

I want to speak a little bit about maternal and child health, Madam Speaker. Maternal and child health was something that the hon. Member for Siparia, then Prime Minister, commissioned a committee to look into maternal deaths and foetal action. The Member of Parliament for Fyzabad was the chairman of that committee, and out of that came discussions with the major heads of obstetrics, gynaecology and paediatrics, and a document with recommendations of what to do to decrease maternal deaths and to decrease foetal deaths was given.

We have put a lot of it into place. The last thing, we have the Director of Women's Health which was done prior to exiting office, as well as we started looking at the foetal medical unit in Eric Williams where young preterm babies would be taken care of. That has been done and it is there, and I recommend for it to be continued, to my hon. colleague, the Member for St. Joseph. We looked at that.

Now, I just want to go into a little bit about—just one thing about that. The women's hospital, when we first went there in 2010, we found that none of the elevators were working, none. So pregnant women—the theatres are at the lower floors and the wards are on the second and third floors. So when we had to do any caesarean section or any delivery—caesarean section or operative-type of work—you had to bring these patients down somehow into the operating theatre, and

taking them up was another task because the stairs are steep. We were able to commission two elevators, two new elevators in that hospital, as well as air-condition most of the hospitals and put better seats, better, as you say, environmental-friendly accident and emergency systems in that hospital, but it still was deficient.

We set about the task of developing what we called the Women's Outpatient Clinic, and you see it is going up there. It is almost 90 per cent completed and I notice that it is mentioned here, in Mount Hope. It is going to be a state-of-the-art centre with birthing rooms, teaching facilities. It is going to have an atrium and it is going to be ultrasound and a full outpatient pharmaceutical centre which would be linked to the main hospital, freeing up space in the main hospital for beds and more operating theatres. In other words, doing it like that we were able to set that system moving forward from the committee report.

Madam Speaker, another thing, if one did an X-ray in the women's hospital, you had to go across with your film to Mount Hope to get it read and come back again this way. Madam Speaker, this day and age with telemedicine, we have put what is called the PAC System, the picture archiving and communication system where there is a feed of a digitalization from the Mount Hope Women's Hospital. You take the X-ray on a digital system, it is read in Mount Hope by the specialist and you get back your results without moving. It is happening in Sangre Grande, it is happening from Toco to Sangre Grande, and it is all over. They have also put one into Carenage where you have the X-rays being done and you would get the report back. You can even get it on your cellphone through that system, digitalization. These are things we were looking at—and also in San Fernando. So, that was the form and movement of how the health sector was moving forward.

Now, I was speaking about infrastructure, let me speak a little about human resources. We found that there was a paucity of medical specialists in this country. When that came into being we realized that people either left to go abroad on their own and never came back or they just did not do anything. The speciality training centres of England, Canada, United States and Europe have all been closed. Even Jamaica has been closed. So, we had to set our system where we could have trained our young doctors and, as they say, nurses abroad.

So we started off something called the medical scholarship system. The medical scholarship system where somebody applies by advertisement. There are numerous amounts of specialized areas and they could now be sent abroad with the behest of the Government and return to fulfil that requirement. So, Madam

Speaker, taking to that part, the human resource part of it—I see that the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East made a big fanfare in his budget presentation saying that they have started to deal with the shortage of medical professionals, and I would read it. He started to make a song and dance with that. Anyway, what he said is that they are looking at the shortage of medical professionals, because they gave GATE to some people in Grenada and in Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you something, giving GATE to people in Grenada—I want you to understand that, Minister of Education—and Jamaica, would make sure that they hardly come back to Trinidad. Do you know that? They do not come back. Grenada—I would tell you one—is being run by an offshore medical school system. They do their clinical studies and clinical work in the United States and England, and they form bonds there and they do not come back at all and they do not pay back the GATE. We were trying to make sure that all students stay in Trinidad and Tobago who get GATE, and as a result of that we opened San Fernando Hospital—[*Desk thumping*]— the teaching hospital, two floors to train medical students, so we would not have to pay out GATE and lose our medical students. So, you are paying GATE, but you are going to pay GATE to students who are not going to come back.

If you notice something when you look at the Cabinet Note, they are always asking for deferrals, and once you say no to deferrals you get a ton of complaints. So, Madam Speaker, that is how it has been going. So putting GATE into Grenada, and Grenada is an offshore medical school, and from what I understand, the medical fraternity has been bought out by the Chinese, so it is going to be a different kettle of fish coming forward. Minister of Education, Member of Parliament for Arima, you have to look at that.

4.00 p.m.

Specialty training, Madam Speaker—we looked at specialty training and we started a system of specialty training with the University of the West Indies, where we were looking at bringing in the private and public sector to train doctors at all levels, not just one or two areas, and also making sure that every single doctor is able to teach and become university part-time lecturers. That is still ongoing.

Another part of the human resources—we have a serious problem with ancillary medical services: ultrasound, biomedical technicians, biomedical equipment technicians, et cetera. In fact, the Ministry of Health now has a degree with the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago,

to produce biomedical medical equipment technicians. There is a diploma specialty and there is also a BSc. So, Madam Speaker, we looked at the human resources and—COSTAATT does the ultrasound, et cetera.

I want to say a little bit about nurses. [*Interruption*] When we went into office—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: May I remind Members about the use of their electronic devices. Somebody's device just reached my attention. Could you please check your devices.

Dr. F. Khan: Let me talk about nurses. When the People's Partnership went into office, we found, in fact, at the Ministry of Health that nurses who did the nursing curriculum and passed the exam from the institution—let us say COSTAATT, University of the West Indies and also the University of the Southern Caribbean—when they wrote the nursing exam, 50 per cent failed. After three tries, that 50 per cent was thrown out; they had to leave and be given jobs as ENAs, which is Enrolled Nurses Assistant, but they had the capacity to enter the programme in the first place.

When we looked at it we found that the practical training of the nurses left a lot to be desired. As a result of that, Madam Speaker, we went to Cabinet and were able to get a Note to start to do over the full nursing and midwives—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, your 45 minutes have been spent. Are you extending for the further 10 minutes?

Dr. F. Khan: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Then I will advise that you wrap up within that 10 minutes.

Dr. F. Khan: I will wrap up. Madam Speaker, thank you very much, and thanks to the House for allowing that 10 minutes.

This is one of the legacy projects I would say. Looking at that, we changed the legislation in this country where nurses—it is the first time in the history of parts of the Commonwealth, where nurses could become nurse interns. So you are finished with your degree, you have gotten your diploma from your institution, prior to writing the exam of the Nursing Council. Practical training was a problem, that was where they fell down, because there were not enough educators for the number of nurses, so some did not get the full training.

As a nurse intern you could spend 15 months learning practical aspects of nursing and then write the exam. If you do fail the exam, you have three tries.

After three tries, if you do not pass it, you have remedial courses and then you go again. If you do not pass it after that, well then—that could never happen, but they were given a chance. They were given a chance rather than being thrown out in the cold. The Nursing Personnel Act done by the People's Partnership changed that ball game and made sure that nurses were taken care of. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we also put into that legislation the Advance Practice Nurse. The Advance Practice Nurse is like a nurse practitioner who can act as a doctor; that is what we did. As a result of that, there is a part of legislation—and I want the Member for St. Joseph to hear this—the Advance Practice Nurse would have been somebody to be in rural communities to work as a doctor: examining patients, giving injections and also prescribing medicine under the supervision of a senior doctor. However, when we came to Parliament, I came with negative resolution for the regulations for the Advance Practice Nurse. The job specs et cetera, et cetera, would have been negative resolution; just lay it on the table and it would be law after 21 days. However, it was asked that it comes as an affirmative resolution, and we need to bring that as soon as possible. The reason behind that, the nurses are clamouring for that, and I think it is a good way to go in this country.

The Pharmacy Board Act—we have almost finished legislation for it, and I would like to see it here because you understand why, Member for St. Joseph, the reason behind it. The Nuclear Law Act is almost finished, because we have sent people to Vienna for the last year or so and they have finished that Act.

When we speak in this country about moving innovation forward in health care, this is what our People's Partnership Government did in the last five years. So it hurts when somebody does not recognize what you did and why you did it—and it is just for political points. I have always maintained that health should be apolitical, and the Members across there would attest to that. You must never use health as a political football. The only reason I sent the release for the hand, foot, and mouth disease is because it has gotten bad in Jamaica and we need to put steps here. When Ebola came into being, it was one of the worst times of my life, but we were able to put that thing in place to prevent Ebola from coming here. Once it gets in here like Chickungunya, it spreads like wildfire. So once one country in the Caribbean has something, things have to be put in place.

Madam Speaker, CARPHA was on the drawing board for 11 years in PAHO; none of the islands wanted to do it. It was the People's Partnership under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar that gave me the authority to bring CARPHA to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] CARPHA is the Caribbean Public Health Agency.

All public health comes through CARPHA in the Caribbean, similar to that of the CDC in Atlanta, Georgia and PHAC in Canada, as well as the English part. As a result of that, CARPHA could boast that we have in Trinidad and Tobago something that is going to be the state-of-the-art systems for the whole of the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister, who had given me the leeway to do these things. What we need to do, and I have promised the CARPHA people—and Prof. George Alleyne has been behind me for it—we had agreed to build the CARPHA headquarters here. There are plans there already by UNOPS. If you speak to the Ministry of Health, you have the UNOPS there, and there are plans already in place to build that in Valsayn, together with a new area for the Blood Bank, because blood banking in this country needs to be done in a proper manner. The legislation was being drafted where every single hospital could be a blood bank in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I just want to spend some time on two items: the extended patient programme that we did and the Medical Aid Programme. When we went into the Ministry the Medical Aid Programme existed, but you could only get $60,000 and no more. So if something cost you $62,000, $100,000 or $1 million, you could not get it. Cabinet allowed me, allowed the Ministry of Health the right to assess, look at all the illnesses and determine if it is necessary and good value for money. As a result of that, people who are out there, the ones who were responsible for the $60,000 cap, were able to benefit with things for $200,000 and $300,000. We have also done the first lung transplant through that, together with Cabinet.

The EPP programme is something that came out of the Medical Aid Programme where we were able to do cataracts and joint replacements, the MRIs. Anytime you have more than three months awaiting in the major hospitals, you can apply to the EPP programme to get it done privately, at the cost that we tendered.

Last but not least, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West always clamoured that the people of that peninsula did not have a health facility in Carenage. The amount of things that happen in the Chaguaramas area and the amount of things that go on there, I approached the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister, for us to put a centre there together with areas of accident and emergency access, X-rays, et cetera. They have that in Carenage now, and they have a mini hospital.

What I would like to say, Madam Speaker, through you, to the Member for St. Joseph, is that we decided at the Ministry of Health to put our own plans in place for prototypes of health offices around the country. The Chaguanas Health Facility was done like that. The designs were done separately as well as the contracts to be awarded through proper tender. It is sitting there waiting to be done. I ask the Member for St. Joseph to see if you could do that, because it is a state-of-the-art centre and it would be very nice for Trinidad and Tobago. It has its own MRI system, its own CT-scan system; it also has birthing beds and beds to stay, as well as a whole area for wellness and gyms, as you say, wellness centres.

Madam Speaker, with these few words, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak, and for all the Members who had their maiden contributions, congratulations.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Madam Speaker, it is with pride and humility that I rise today to make my first contribution to this honourable House. My pride is magnified because we are not here today to debate a specific Bill, but one that sets our nation on the road to economic recovery, responsibility and prosperity.

As I am on my feet, on behalf of San Fernando East, I join in the chorus to congratulate you on your elevation to the Chair of this honourable House, and based on what I have seen thus far, I have no doubt that you will perform your duties with decorum and dignity befitting this House.

The pride I feel today is largely in part because I am a member of the political movement that has contributed to the greatest overall growth and development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In the last few months leading up to the election, and even in this debate, I have listened with amazement as speaker after speaker, representing the other side, singled out the amount of box drains they built in some constituencies as the signature accomplishment of their administration. If that is what makes them happy, I will not deny them that pleasure. But while they continue to look down at drains, we on this side will look upward and onward to bigger and better things. [*Desk thumping*]

For example, consider the impact of the establishment of the UTT; the construction and commissioning of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and the introduction of GATE. These three PNM initiatives are responsible for taking this entire nation leaps and bounds ahead in this region and even far beyond.

Through you, Madam Speaker, allow me to extend my congratulations to my senior colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East who, though a veteran of this Chamber, delivered his maiden contribution as Minister of Finance in a manner that only he could have. It is clear that he intends to follow in the vein of his PNM predecessors and deal holistically with the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I respectfully submit that he has exceeded expectations in this regard. He demonstrated in his presentation that the People's National Movement is, indeed, made of sterner stuff. In only four weeks, he was able to deliver a succinct, penetrating analysis of the performance of the previous administration, and point this nation forward in a manner that was a mixture of sobriety and sagacity, erudition and empathy. This is the pedigree of the gentleman and, by extension, the political movement to which he belongs. I offer to him and my colleagues who spoke before me, my sincerest congratulations on their respective contributions.

Madam Speaker, the humility with which I stand before you today is inspired principally by the seat I now occupy, and the people I now have the honour to represent, the people of San Fernando East. For well over four decades, the people of San Fernando East were represented by the hon. Patrick Manning, a bedrock in the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

4.15 p.m.

Today, I accept graciously the baton that has been passed to me and pledge to keep the flag of San Fernando East flying high. But, Madam Speaker, there is a point I wish to make about my predecessor and his conduct in this House. It is a point which came to me quite forcefully during the contribution of the Member for Naparima who, quoting scripture and all, chastised the PNM for gloating in the wake of our election victory. Madam Speaker, no one here can forget the disrespect, the contempt, the picong, the mauvais langue visited upon the head of Mr. Manning and all the Members of the Opposition Bench when they returned to this House after May 24, 2010. Those on that side reminded him, at every turn, of how he had reduced the PNM to a 12-seater maxi and he took it all without as much as a murmur. Today, Madam Speaker, when the shoe is on the other foot the Member for Naparima seeks solace of scripture, the same scripture that conveniently eluded him when he was busy scripting the "No Rowley" campaign, but I remind this honourable House that even the devil is capable of quoting scripture. [*Desk thumping*]

Time marches on and today the PNM is led by the country's eighth Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, and I take great pride in being a part

of his team as the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East. I admire his vision, I respect his leadership and I have unreserved faith in his ability to lead this nation. Madam Speaker, in my conversations with the people of San Fernando East, prior to September 07, they all spoke with one voice about the neglect of the constituency during the last five years of the UNC administration and the obvious vindictiveness they suffered as a result of being represented by the PNM.

Today, when I speak to them, having heard our budget statement, the hard-working, honest and patriotic constituents are looking forward to the planned reform of local government. As decent and conscientious taxpayers and property owners they recognize their obligation to pay taxes on their properties, appreciating the fact that the property taxes they pay will now be used to improve their own local municipality under the proposed reform.

The people of San Fernando East are looking forward to the increase in personal allowances from $60,000 to $72,000, the increased allowances to retirees and the reduction in VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. The young scholars of San Fernando East are looking forward to the increase in the OJT stipends and the introduction of the graduate programme in Ministries. The people of San Fernando East now express the view that they are worth a lot more than box drains.

I stand today, as the Minister of Public Administration, charged with the responsibility of guiding the public service through the rough waters of challenging economic circumstances, when we are called upon to do so much more with so much less. It is a responsibility that I have accepted wholeheartedly, and today I pledge my unswerving commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to deliver a public service that is modernized, customer-focused and results-oriented. I have boundless faith that this is attainable, particularly if one is to judge by this Government's ability to produce a budget within four weeks of having been elected to office. That Herculean task put onto the shoulders of the Minister of Finance was undoubtedly made easier by the sheer diligence of the army of public officers in the Ministry supported, I am sure, by countless others scattered throughout other Ministries; the Ministry of Planning and Development, and the Minister of Planning and Development ought also to be commended.

Today, Madam Speaker, I salute these heroes of our public service who, yet again, delivered when it mattered most. Their efforts not only confirmed my belief in our nation's motto, "Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve", but also underscored the theme of this year's budget presentation, "Restoring

Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together", and that is why it pains me, Madam Speaker, when I hear the Members opposite lament about the job losses and job cuts taking place in Ministries. Permit me then to put some things into context. Members opposite have argued that despite a promise to the contrary, scores of persons are being sent home and their contracts terminated; Madam Speaker, the truth is a different story.

The facts as we know them to be are as follows: persons who are in permanent positions in the Ministries are not being sent home, they have absolutely nothing to fear; persons with legitimate contracts and possessing legitimate qualifications working in contract positions approved by the Chief Personnel Officer are not being sent home, they have nothing to fear; however, persons who were brought into the Ministries and state enterprises on three-month contracts in positions not approved by the CPO, without job descriptions and whose contracts have expired may have a cause for concern. Persons who were brought into the Ministries and state enterprises whose only qualifications, as the Minister of Communications noted, were their birth papers and their family's relationship with a Minister, may have a cause for concern. Persons who hold no qualifications for the positions they occupy, or worse, those who misrepresented their qualifications may have a cause for concern.

Madam Speaker, there is ample evidence to suggest that the majority of duly concerned workers were brought into the Ministries and state enterprises for the singular purpose of campaigning for the UNC candidates in the last election. Madam Speaker, the real tragedy here is not that these workers may have to seek legitimate employment elsewhere, the real tragedy is that the former administration knew very well that those contracts could not have stood up to any real scrutiny, and the UNC was using these vulnerable persons for their own short-term, personal and political gain. The real tragedy, Madam Speaker, is that all this was being done at the expense of the public service. There was a time, Madam Speaker, when persons aspired to join the public service, when persons wore the title of civil servant as a badge of honour, accepting that service to the public was not servitude but rather a contribution to a higher calling, the development of country.

Sadly, Madam Speaker, this is no longer entirely so. The public service is viewed by many as archaic, lethargic and less than customer-centric in its daily interactions with those who pay their salaries. Additionally, working in the public service has come to be equated with dilapidated buildings, environmental

nightmares, outdated technology and snail-paced bureaucracy. The public service, whilst being the single largest employer entity in the country, is no longer viewed as the preferred place to work.

Madam Speaker, based on the latest figures available to us, the incontrovertible fact is that at the end of December 2013 approximately 44 per cent of the available positions in the public service were vacant. I have heard my colleagues lament over and over in this debate on the paucity of staff in their Ministries; I will now, for the benefit of all, give the global figure: of the 30,552 establishment positions 46 per cent or 13,709 were vacant, and of the 14,194 contract positions 41 per cent or 5,863 were vacant.

Madam Speaker, these figures are not figments of my imagination, but were contained in a response to a question filed by the former Member of Parliament for La Brea, the hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey. I refer to Question No. 98 of the 2013—2014 session of Parliament posed to my predecessor. Madam Speaker, out of 44,746 positions in the civil service 56 per cent of these are filled, have bodies. Let me repeat, Madam Speaker, out of 44,746 positions in the civil service only 56 per cent of these are filled. This means, Madam Speaker, that as at December 31, 2013, an amazing 44 per cent of positions were vacant. There were no bodies, no one in 19,572 positions to do the work. If we factor in vacation and other negotiated leave entitlements and we factor in that quite a few of the jobs are old and, thus, public officers are underutilized we can roughly estimate that the true filled rate, the true staffing rate in the civil service is closer to 50 per cent.

Madam Speaker, what these figures demonstrate is that the public service has been operating on approximately half of its human resource capacity and, therefore, explains the sorry predicament currently facing us. I hasten to add though, Madam Speaker, that this does not justify shoddy customer service, nor does it excuse inordinate and unnecessary bureaucratic delays. Instead of hiring persons for campaign purposes, instead of hiring friends, family, activists and other closely associated persons, those on the other side could have concentrated on properly staffing the public service.

One of the critical objectives of the Ministry of Public Administration over the next few years, therefore, Madam Speaker, will be the improvement of the staffing situation in the public service. Is it any wonder then that the service experienced by members of the public is often less than desired? Can you imagine the strain on those officers who are currently in the service? And to compound the situation further, Madam Speaker, I note that the previous administration engaged in six realignments of Government Ministries during the period 2010—2014.

The public service was therefore in a repeated state of upheaval, unable to settle down and achieve stability and focus. The cost of these repeated realignments, Madam Speaker, is significant. Examples of these costs include the labour cost of implementing the realignment exercises by divisions; this involves significant work by agencies such as the Budget Division, the Public Management Consulting Division, which has to transfer positions from one agency to another; the Service Commissions Department, who then has to transfer persons from one agency to another; the Integrated Human Resource Information System team that has to record these transfers and the Government Printery which has to print all the realignment information; the time factor involved in completing the exercises which results in the loss of momentum on other projects; the negative impact of the exercise on the day to day operations of the Ministries; the cost involved in replacing signage, stationery and supplies; the maintenance and utility costs involved in housing new Ministries and their departments.

Madam Speaker, also, the negative impacts, brought about by frequent and significant changes in strategic direction, such as stress, job insecurity and demotivation; worse, every realignment affects the pension and leave records of public officers and has contributed greatly to the delays in the payment of pensions to our retirees. I also hope that our citizens can now understand more fully why, before we came into office and now in Government today, we have said that there will be no overall loss of jobs. There are jobs in many areas of the public service for competent, honest and committed people.

I hope that the other side and our citizens can now understand why there is a need to have fewer Ministries. The Government took this decision in recognition of the fact that the public service had these resource constraints and needed to pool what resources we actually have in order to get the job of the public service done. As one of our core strategies to address this manpower issue, the Ministry has already started collaborating with the Service Commissions Department in a major initiative to strengthen and modernize that institution so that it too is better equipped and resourced to fulfil its obligations to the various other service commissions which are such an important part of our democracy and our governance.

That support, Madam Speaker, will include any backing that is needed for legislative changes, organizational structure changes, process enhancements, training and development, the development of improved information systems, and other areas. These initiatives will no doubt continue over a period of several years, but perhaps it was evidence of this human resource insufficiency that led

my colleagues on the other side to hasten to place persons in those positions, persons who possessed neither the qualifications—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.30 p.m., and in accordance with Standing Order 12(2), I now say that we take our break. We resume here in 30 minutes.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, perhaps it was evidence of this human resource insufficiency that led my colleagues on the other side to hasten to place persons in those positions, persons who possessed neither the qualifications nor the experience, persons whose résumés were littered with inaccuracies and falsehoods, persons whose only claim to fame was their blind loyalty to the handful of persons who irresponsibly wielded the reins of power for the last five years.

Madam Speaker, the mistake those on that side continue to make is they confuse loyalty with competence, or is it that they just do not care? My simple bit of advice to them is this: it is easier to earn the loyalty of a competent person than to make a loyal person competent. I would hasten to call the name of Resmi Ramnarine, but I am advised that she no longer carries that name. Imagine having to lose one's identity over ill-gotten and undeserved political patronage. Now, losing a three-month contract position does not seem so bad by comparison.

In addition to strengthening the offices of the service commission, the Director of Personnel Administration and that of the Chief Personnel Officer, the Ministry Public Administration will further ensure that the Government Human Resource Services Company, one of the state enterprises in its portfolio, is reorganized for greater efficiency.

Madam Speaker, this institution was established in 2006 to support the transformation of the public sector through valued-added recruiting and human resource solutions. Like so many of the country's other institutions, GHRS declined in its reputation and service delivery following 2010 when many of its most competent and experienced personnel, some with global reputation, were forced to leave, forced out by many of those who are now crying foul.

It is incumbent on the Ministry of Public Administration therefore, as a matter of priority, to rebuild that organization so that it can fully deliver on its mandate of embedding modern tools for recruitment and selection, including multistage

assessments, competency-based structured interviews, psychometric evaluations, sound reference checks on candidates and other methods. This will improve the quality of the recruit into the contract stream of the public service.

As a necessary precursor, however, GHRS must undertake its own recruitment and selection exercise to rebuild the capacity of that institution to undertake modern methods of recruitment and selection for contract employment using globally accepted best practice. One immediate area of concern for the transformed GHRS, Madam Speaker, will be the staffing of new authorities to be created, namely, the Revenue and Motor Vehicle Authorities.

In commenting on the 2016 budget, auditing and accounting firm Ernst & Young Services Limited noted that the challenges in the implementation of the Revenue Authority include, for example, the inability of the Board of Inland Revenue to retain competent staff within the tax system, a heavy reliance on external bodies to provide funding and perform a vital recruitment function.

The commentary noted that whatever the model adopted by the Government, the key to success will be to ensure that the authority has a human resource management function which should facilitate effective recruitment and selection of appropriate personnel, career planning, promotion and advancement, learning, growth and development, performance management, rewards and compensation. It is my considered view that such a task ought properly to reside with the GHRS as this was the raison d'être for its creation in the first place.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to accommodation for public officers because ensuring that the right people with the right skills are placed in the right jobs cannot be the be-all and end-all of the reform of the public service. One salient element of this transformation is the accommodation of these officers in safe, comfortable working environments that are conducive to productivity.

Madam Speaker, the last PNM administration pursued the policy of creating more government-owned office accommodation. Apart from seeking to reduce the Government's annual rent bill of over half a billion dollars, that administration pursued the policy to build its own offices mainly for two reasons: one, it had recognized that the portfolio of government properties had neither increased in quality nor quantity for decades; and, two, an increasing number of public officers were working in unsuitable work spaces that frequently invited the scrutiny of the OSH Department and the representative unions. This often resulted in both partial and complete shutdowns of operations causing significant disruption in the quality of service offered to the public and a consequent loss of revenue.

One can easily recall the frequent stoppages of work at the various revenue offices of the Board of Inland Revenue in Sangre Grande and Arima as testimony to this problem. I have heard horror stories, Madam Speaker, of ceilings falling on public officers, of rats in the workplace eating public records, and of termites falling into employees' food and drink. I cannot understate the accommodation crisis that Ministries currently face. Most public officers know this and the general public can sense their growing discontent when they too become collateral damage in the process.

And sadly, although being aware of these issues, the previous UNC administration—and despite their public posturing about caring for public officers—the UNC left the valuable assets like the government campus buildings unfinished, unfurnished and standing idle for five years.

Madam Speaker, I reemphasize that this policy was pursued to reduce Government's rental bill while simultaneously providing public officers and an increasingly demanding public with modern, clean, safe and OSH-compliant office accommodation. Public servants deserve nothing less. I emphasize, as well, that many Ministries currently have extremely challenging space constraints. They simply do not have the room to grow and this impedes efficient service delivery and the accomplishment of national objectives as a result.

Madam Speaker, this Government is working assiduously to complete the government campus and, when completed, it will accommodate 3,867 persons as follows: the Customs and Excise building is designed to accommodate 474 persons; the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs tower is expected to be completed in November 2015 and can house 1,087 persons; the Immigration Division tower will be completed in January 2016 and can accommodate 362 persons; the education tower is expected to be completed by March 2016, and will accommodate 972 persons; the Board of Inland Revenue tower is expected to be completed in July 2016 and is designed to accommodate 972 persons.

Madam Speaker, the Property and Real Estate Services Division falls under my portfolio and, therefore, the responsibility for the accommodation of public officers is mine to shoulder. Madam Speaker, I wish to advise the national community that since assuming office I have taken a Note to Cabinet to establish an interministerial committee to assess and rationalize office accommodation for Ministries. Every effort will be made to expedite the relocation of several offices. My commitment to public officers and to members of the public is that by the end of fiscal 2016, possibly before, there will be more office space suitable for the service delivery that they expect. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is one more thing I wish to say about the public service portfolio. For too long we have not been tapping into the strengths within our own silos. In this era of discipline and leaner pockets we have to look at collaboration, knowledge-sharing and replication of best practices. In fiscal 2016, I intend to promote the implementation of interdisciplinary teams at various levels from Permanent Secretaries to clerical officers designed to create more consistent administrative and institutional processes and practices in the public service. We will learn from each other and grow with each other. The end result of all of this, Madam Speaker, will be a transformed, rejuvenated and rebranded public service where those agencies and personnel who excel will be celebrated.

In the last few years the Ministry has established an initiative called the Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard Programme, and the Member for Fyzabad will be happy to know that it is a very good initiative, in my opinion. Allow me to clarify further, this standard is a national certification quality assurance mark that is awarded to public service providers who have demonstrated that they offer a high quality of service to the public and are committed to continuous improvement and innovation. This approach, Madam Speaker, was based on a model operating in the civil service in the United Kingdom, and in 2016 I intend to continue this programme and seek new services that can obtain the certification. Madam Speaker, 11 services received the diamond certification in 2015. Among these were the Sangre Grande Accident and Emergency, TTBizLink, and the Tobago Emergency Management Agency.

I now publicly acknowledge those unsung heroes in the public service who are responsible for service excellence, and I want to encourage them to keep shining and maintaining their certification because the citizens who use these services want and deserve more. While this administration needs to provide some stability and, in this instance, continue sound programmes, we must mark our era with smart governance by adjusting some strategies.

With respect to the Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Standard certification I am committed to finding a way to focus on those 20 per cent of public services that have 80 per cent impact on the citizens. In the next few years some of those high-impact services will be targeted.

Madam Speaker, I say this with caution. These public service agencies and the public officers in these agencies have much to do. So, while many may not achieve the diamond standard in fiscal 2016, we will be working to ensure that

citizens will see some improvement in the space where they are served, in the manner in which they are served and, where possible, in the time in which they are served. Please trust that this will all be realized.

Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to the ICT and telecommunications aspects of my portfolio. As we all know, information and communications technology continues to transform the way we live and conduct business. It was under successive PNM administrations during the period 2002 to 2007 that the Ministry of Public Administration managed the liberalization of the telecommunications sector and developed our country's first ICT strategy. Sadly, we have had little progress over the last five years with our rankings and, more importantly, our country's scores on the internationally-recognized international indices remaining essentially unchanged.

ICT is both a fast-growing economic sector in itself and an enabler for sustainable development in all aspects of our national economy and society. Trinidad and Tobago is at the forefront of this global technology revolution. Our citizens, especially young persons, are among the most avid users of social media in this hemisphere, if not the world. All of us have mobile phones and many, perhaps most of us, already have smartphones.

5.15 p.m.

ICTs are increasingly embedded in our daily lives. We get our information from the Internet, and thousands of us are now shopping online. And as the last election campaign so clearly demonstrated, we increasingly communicate online or through other ICT-enabled mediums. What does this mean in practice for our citizens? Permit me to consider one example, that of our farmers. Given this administration's renewed thrust in the agricultural sector, farmers also have to improve their efficiencies in how they grow, harvest and sell their crops, and technology is one of the most important tools that they can use.

The ability to access and send information will allow them to become not just part of the national agricultural community, but the regional and global one as well. With online access, farmers can use predictive applications that can help forecast potential crop yield, find ways of dealing with diseases and pests, get notifications and weather events that would affect them, find buying and selling prices, participate in crop auctions, all making informed decisions that would affect their livelihood.

A farmer does not have to know how to create an application, but he needs to be familiar with and have access to basic technology tools. Computer literacy and

access to a computer, tablet or smartphone connected by high-speed access are a useful start. This, however, could advance to more sophisticated applications, taught in farming communities at times convenient to them, briefings delivered by videoconference at community-based facilities, information on current prices delivered by text alerts, a picture to describe a particular problem answered within 24 hours by a global expert. The possibilities and the returns are endless.

Madam Speaker, as you can see, ICT affects the lives of our citizens on many levels and in many ways. But while there have been several major investments by both the public and private sectors to enable increased competition, choice and lower prices, these investments have perhaps inadvertently served to exacerbate or widen what has often been described as the digital divide. And these marginalized groups and communities on the other side of the divide can be identified as including rural remote communities, persons with disabilities, the elderly persons living in poverty, women and girls, and at-risk youth.

In fiscal 2015/2016 the Ministry of Public Administration in partnership with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago as well as its sister Ministries and agencies, including iGovTT, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, collectively propose to build upon and enhance existing initiatives and infrastructure, and aggressively implement measures to once and for all eliminate the digital divide in Trinidad and Tobago.

As we have indicated in our manifesto, we will endeavour to develop Trinidad and Tobago into a technology and innovation centre with one of the most basic steps to ensure that all of our citizens have access to ICT equipment and connectivity. It is that same resolve that propels our vision to ensure that there is broadband Internet connectivity for every citizen who so desires. In the first instance, we will work with the private sector to drastically increase the footprint of free public Wi-Fi hotspots in popular areas as well as in those areas and communities which have been traditionally underserved. This will then be coupled with the creation and deployment of a free island-wide public broadband wireless network, affording citizens the ability to seamlessly access Wi-Fi Internet services safely and securely at hundreds of locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not take the opportunity to offer a brief comment on the laptop in schools initiative pursued by the previous administration and which formed part of their list of accomplishments. So excited were they about it that they gleefully announced its expansion to first-year

university students, and even to primary school students. All of this sounded good in theory, but there is growing evidence that the distribution of laptops without the necessary infrastructural support in the schools and the absence of a focused integration into the curriculum, and without broadband connectivity in the homes, rendered these laptops as mere game-playing machines to thousands of students.

Many of my constituents who do not possess the intellectual acumen of the esteemed former Minister of Education and former Prime Minister, but who are not short on common sense, simply asked whether the country might not have benefited more if the Ministry of Education had ensured that every school had a proper computer lab, sufficient broadband connectivity and properly trained teachers before embarking on the wide-scale distribution of laptops. Providing laptop computers to students served little good when teachers did not have laptops and schools did not have broadband access. [*Desk thumping*] In this regard, the Ministry of Public Administration is committed to continue working closely with the Ministry of Education and all stakeholders to ensure that our students get laptops and an electronically delivered curricula and Internet access.

Madam Speaker, the need to build capacity and improve access to ICTs is not limited to the education sector. We must do this for the wider society, especially for senior citizens, persons in rural communities, persons in poverty, and persons with special needs, to bridge the digital divide. This administration will continue to play a key role in creating a suitable, enabling environment to facilitate the effective adoption and utilization of ICT. This responsibility includes ensuring that the legal framework for conducting electronic transactions is put in place, which would facilitate the continual growth of electronic commerce, electronic communications and electronic transactions, including the delivery of government services electronically, commonly referred to as eGovernment.

Further, Madam Speaker, a draft national broadcast code has been prepared and submitted for approval. The objectives that are outlined in the code are geared towards ensuring, among other things, that children are neither harmed nor misled by the transmission of inappropriate and/or inaccurate material; that standards are applied to provide adequate protection for listeners and viewers against harmful, abusive or discriminatory material; that material likely to encourage or incite the commission of a crime or lead to disorder is not included in broadcast services; that news in whatever form is reported with accuracy and presented with impartiality; that to the extent that broadcasting service providers cover political matters, especially during the period of elections, that they present a sufficient

range of information, views and opinions in a balanced manner; that viewers and listeners are given adequate information or warning about programming that contains any material that may be harmful to viewers or listeners.

Madam Speaker, I give this honourable House the assurance that the Ministry of Public Administration will undertake the necessary consultations with all stakeholders before a final position is taken with respect to the broadcasting code. These are challenging times, but I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can rise to and surmount any challenge that comes our way.

Madam Speaker, we have been through the traumas of 1970 and 1990, and we have survived. We have been through the collapse of oil and gas prices and a world recession in 2008 and thereafter, and we have survived. We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are destined to succeed. If we could have overcome five years under the last administration, we are resilient enough to face any obstacle in our path. We, as a nation, are living proof that pressure creates diamonds. This PNM Government will restore our brilliant shine for generations to come, and with those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith (*Toco/Sangre Grande*): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, thank you. It is with a great deal of pride and humility, at the same time, that I stand here this afternoon in this honourable House, firstly, to give thanks to the almighty God for being with me on this journey. I must at this same time thank my hon. Prime Minister for being with me and supporting me throughout this journey. I take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to congratulate you. I feel proud as a woman to congratulate you on this auspicious occasion in this honourable House.

As I make my maiden speech this evening, I want to say thanks to my family who has supported me throughout this journey. [*Desk thumping*] Last but not least, I want to say thank you to my many friends throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say a special thanks to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande for their overwhelming support, their gracious support, their support which had me as an overwhelming victory in Sangre Grande. And I want to thank them for reposing that confidence in me to be their representative. I want to assure them that I would stand here and properly articulate their views and I would be that voice for them in this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, what has been revealed in this debate so far is the stark reality of our economic position, a position which could have been avoided, had

those charged with the national economic stewardship for the last five years exercised fortitude and integrity to manage our national economy. Today, I say thank God that a PNM-led Government is in office. It is because of this and the gravity of the situation which confronts us is revealed. I want to say that my life before entering this House, I have heard many stories, but sitting here on this seat for the past three days and hearing stories of overspending, corruption, over and over, Minister after Minister, I think the country can now breathe a sigh of relief. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, now the appropriate corrective measures can be taken and implemented to put Trinidad and Tobago on a path of recovery and growth. In these periods of economic contraction, it is usually the most marginalized in the society, those living at the middle or lower end of the economic strata, those rural communities such as mine that are plagued by poor infrastructure and services, that are hardest hit. As we all know, it is the role of Government to find a balance between the economic adjustments necessary for the survival of the economy, and at the same time provide the appropriate cushion for the more economically vulnerable in this country.

Madam Speaker, this 2016 budget has found that balance. As such, I want to put on record my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance for his diligent work in preparing an excellent fiscal package, worthy of commendation and support from all Members of this august House. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to recognize and congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development for her supportive role in that regard. [*Desk thumping*] According to the UNDP's Trinidad and Tobago Human Development Atlas, Toco/Sangre Grande has the highest unemployment rate in this country. Therefore, it follows as no surprise that we also carry the highest poverty rate in the nation. It is logical that to reduce poverty we must create jobs. We must put our citizens to work on a sustainable basis. URP and CEPEP were conceptualized to be a means to this end, not the end in and of itself.

Madam Speaker, the cycle of dependency has to be torn down and replaced by a situation of merit. To achieve this we must strive to put all our citizens on the same level to access the opportunities which are available. In this regard, this Government has recognized that the people of Toco/Sangre Grande have been forgotten for too long, and we have taken a multi-sectoral approach to remedy this problem, put people to work, improve infrastructure, tap into the economic base of the constituency and improve connectivity.

5.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, if you want change when you want progress you cannot continue doing things the same way, and this nation wants progress. That is why we are on this side of the House. This Government has recognized that in order to raise Toco/Sangre Grande when you want to change, ladies and gentlemen, the years of neglect and poverty Toco/Sangre Grande has suffered, we must provide a new sustainable economic base to jump-start the economy of the constituency—a sustainable economic base because we believe the role of Government is to create an enabling climate of opportunity and growth while at the same time giving our citizens the tool and support necessary to tap into this new pool of opportunities.

Madam Speaker, that is the role of effective government. It is in this vein that this PNM Government has provided for the commencement of steps towards the construction of a ferry port in Toco, with a ferry service from Toco to Tobago. And critical to the success of this project is the question of connectivity, an appropriate network of roads to allow easy access to the port and its services.

In this regard, when I look at the budget presented by our hon. Minister of Finance I am satisfied, as a Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, that he has not forgotten us in the line of transportation, and my experience for the past 34 years, traffic gridlock is one of the most serious problems in Trinidad and Tobago today, and this budget has recognized that.

Under transportation, it was also recognized the need to open economic space, to generate economic opportunities, including the construction of the Wallerfield to Manzanilla highway. It was also recognized that a new first-class road between Valencia and Toco will link the new fast-ferry port in Toco with the rest of Trinidad. It is said in our document here that subsequently, the entire north-east region of Trinidad will become available for new industrial, residential and commercial development.

Madam Speaker, that was not all. A new ferry port in Tobago providing a faster alternative sea route from east Trinidad to Tobago. Our road network, it is said, will open economic space in Trinidad and Tobago providing in the process much needed connectivity among communities, in particular, rural communities.

So, in this regard, we will construct an A-Class road from Valencia to Toco, a ring road around Sangre Grande as well as improving the existing roadway. These initiatives will have the welcoming effect of opening up north-east Trinidad to the rest of the country as well as Tobago.

I wish to focus my attention on this issue of connectivity as traffic congestion caused by an inadequate road network is alive and it is a worrying issue in Toco/Sangre Grande. From my experience I know it will take a comprehensive plan to solve this problem, not quick fixes. We have seen quick fixes are just the plaster and not the cure for the wound and, Madam Speaker, none has been as glaring as the Valencia Bypass Road which has simply pitched the traffic a few miles forward; as one enters Tururе you end up in the same traffic gridlock. Yes, you get out of Valencia more quickly, but the moment you hit Tururе on the Valencia stretch the traffic congestion starts again. And why is this? Maybe it is because those on the other side are accustomed over the past five years of giving us many quick fixes. We are talking about comprehensive planning, Madam Speaker, and we are saying that because of the inadequate road network quick fixes could never have worked.

The Eastern Main Road cannot be widened. The creation of new alternative routes to drivers who are heading to various destination beyond Valencia must be looked into. This Government proposes to develop the ring road around Sangre Grande which starts from Wallerfield into Manzanilla and the new road from Valencia to Toco will provide these alternative routes and remedy the traffic congestion that has been a strain on commuters from the east for years. Yes, the PNM Government recognizes the plight of the people.

Madam Speaker, this ferry port and improved road networks will create critical new job opportunities not only during its construction but also through the positive influence it will have on the other sectors and the new industries it will attract to the region. One sector is the agricultural industry. Farmers also have to face extreme challenges to transfer their produce from the field to the market. It is imperative that we provide our farming community with the necessary access roads. When agricultural access roads are married to this new and improved road network it removes the constant headache and cost of having to traverse deplorable terrain to get their produce from field to plate. I was speaking to a group of farmers in my constituency some time ago and I was startled to learn that they often suffer more losses in transporting the produce without proper access road than the losses from diseases to crops. Having proper connectivity will not only keep farmers in the industry but also attract new investors and facilitate growth in food production.

We as a country must move forward. We must move forward towards greater processing of products, towards manufacturing if we are to remain sustainable. We have seen a contraction in the manufacturing sector over the past five years, and this Government does not intend to sit idly by and let this trend continue.

Madam Speaker, with improved access to the east and this ferry port, it makes good sense to facilitate the establishment of processing facilities closer to the fields. We create a value-added product, get a greater return on our harvest as well as create new jobs and maintain a vibrant economy that is self-sustained. This is an important element in the diversification of the national economy.

However, access roads and processing plants in themselves only cannot form the basis of a strong agricultural policy. Farmers generally can now welcome the initiatives that we have decided to remove, all imports and duties from agricultural inputs. I will say it again, farmers are happy today that this Government has removed all imports and duties from agricultural inputs. Farmers will now have greater cash to hire more workers and expand production.

Madam Speaker, I have held discussions with constituents who reside on the coastal boundaries of Toco/Sangre Grande. As you might—most of them, you may imagine, were fisherfolk, and the fishing industry in Toco/Sangre Grande is no bed of roses. Proper cold storage facilities are lacking as well as necessary breakwater systems to protect the fishing boats when they come to dock, and they were complaining about this at a time when money was afloat.

In addition to agriculture, the improved access to Toco/Sangre Grande will redound to increase the attractiveness of our tourism product. We are known as the turtle-watching region. We have serene and scenic beaches along the coast, untapped forest, hiking and natural nature trails. All these tourism products will now be able to function at maximum capacity as visitors from both local and foreign will be able to access them with ease. And I say foreign because if we have that ferry a person could leave Tobago and be in Trinidad in half an hour, and they too will access these services. This boost in tourism is also a plus in the diversification agenda. [*Desk thumping*] When that ferry port becomes functional my constituency will be faced with an improved volume of commuters, visitors and residents alike, and this will have the effect of giving birth to new businesses as well as more access to government services leading to greater employment.

Madam Speaker, employment is what Toco/Sangre Grande always needs. The establishment of that port in my constituency may transform Sangre Grande into the capital of the east and the guardian of the bridge between Trinidad and Tobago. No longer will Toco/Sangre Grande be a forgotten constituency. Apart from the infrastructural development of the constituency, in this information age, the availability of ICTs is critical to development. There must be widespread access to broadband by all citizens at affordable rates provided by the state. Some

rural communities are unable to enjoy these technologies because of a lack of proper systems to transmit signals in these areas on the one hand and the prohibitive cost on the other.

Our citizens, long denied this access, will be able to benefit from hotspots in popular areas and eventually from free national broadband services. I say thanks again to the Minister of Finance. This is groundbreaking for a developing nation. [*Desk thumpin*g] I also wish to suggest, Madam Speaker, that the initial free hotspots be set up not only in popular areas but also in rural areas where the most marginalized can be exposed to modern technology.

Madam Speaker, we have seen how the initiatives of this budget will help cure one of the two major ills in Toco/Sangre Grande, that of unemployment, while at the same time bringing unprecedented development to the east. However, if we are to deal effectively with poverty the newly employed must be given some level of protection, especially in time of economic depression. In essence, we need to put more money, as disposable income, in the hands of these citizens. My Government has provided for this by increasing the personal allowance to $72,000 which means that income tax will not have to be paid by persons earning less than $6,000 per month.

So, Madam Speaker, poor people have not been left out in the cold in this budget as some Members opposite will like us to believe. What we have done is chipped away at the maximum welfare state which has been constructed and which perpetuated the dependency syndrome. We have put forward proposals which will empower the individuals to strike out and take advantage of opportunities provided.

This budget is the first step in the fulfilment of a contract we made with the people on September 07. The people of Toco/Sangre Grande are anxious to see action on our plans for development of the area, not only with infrastructure but also through improved opportunity. And I dare say, we have not disappointed them.

Madam Speaker, we must also remain cognizant of the unfavourable economic position we are in and recognize that all cannot be done at once. The establishment of a ferry port in my constituency complemented by a comprehensive road network promises much hope. No longer will Toco/Sangre Grande be a forgotten constituency. In fact, Sangre Grande must be prepared to be the capital of the east and the gateway to Toco and Tobago. The opening of a ferry port in Toco is the basic platform upon which the region will achieve growth and sustainable development.

As I conclude, Madam Speaker, I request of the nation, Trinidad and Tobago, to trust and support your Government because we have your interest at heart and we are listening. Let us take this journey together to build back faith in our institutions, to bring good governance to you and to enforce the rule of law which has been so lacking during the last five years. Hold fast to prayer and believe for we will and can do this together. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, we were to have another speaker from the Opposition side, but I understand that the person who was to speak is reportedly unwell. So, Madam Speaker, at this time I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, October 13, 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly

Adjourned at 5.45 p.m.