

Senators' Appointment

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

SENATE

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Senators Sophia Karen Chote SC and David Small, who are both out of the country.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona SC, ORTT:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS
CARMONA, O.R.T.T., S.C., President and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T., S.C.
President.

TO: DR. AYSHA B. EDWARDS

WHEREAS Senator Sophia Chote, S.C. is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, AYSHA B. EDWARDS, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 20th October, 2015 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Sophia Chote, S.C.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 19th day of October, 2015.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS
 CARMONA, O.R.T.T., S.C., President and
 Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of
 the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, O.R.T.T., S.C.
 President.

TO: MR. JUSTIN JUNKÈRE

WHEREAS Senator David Small is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, JUSTIN JUNKÈRE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 20th October, 2015 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator David Small.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
 President of the Republic of Trinidad and
 Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
 Ann's, this 19th day of October, 2015.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senators Dr. Aysha B. Edwards and Justin Junkère took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

SESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEES (APPOINTMENT OF)

Madam President: Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order 79(2), I wish to make the following appointments to the sessional select committees for the First Session 2015—2016 of the Eleventh Parliament.

Standing Orders Committee

Ms. Christine Kangaloo	Chairman
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Daniel Solomon	Member
Mr. H.R. Ian Roach	Member

House Committee

Mr. Franklin Khan	Chairman
Mr. Foster Cummings	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Mr. Vasant Bharath	Member
Mr. David Small	Member

Committee of Privileges

Ms. Christine Kangaloo	Chairman
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Mr. Paul Richards	Member

Statutory Instruments Committee

Ms. Christine Kangaloo	Chairman
Mr. W. Michael Coppin	Member
Mr. Hafeez Ali	Member
Mr. Wayne Sturge	Member
Ms. Sophia Chote SC	Member

Business Committee

Ms. Christine Kangaloo	Chairman
Mr. Franklin Khan	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Member

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2016, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2016. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Draft Estimates - Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly for the financial year 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the financial year 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Public Sector Investment Programme 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Public Sector Investment Programme 2016 – Tobago. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Social Sector Investment Programme 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. State Enterprises Investment Programme 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Review of the Economy 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Madam President: The Hon. Minister of Finance.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam. President. Madam. President, I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2016, be now read a second time.

Madam President, this is a money Bill and it was approved in the other place yesterday. The Bill provides for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sum of \$54,762 million or \$54.762 billion under various Heads as indicated in the Schedule to the Bill.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, first, let me convey my appreciation to you, to the Government and to hon. Members opposite for the opportunity to commence debate on the 2016 Appropriation Bill in the Senate. This Bill is the outcome of detailed comprehensive planning by this Government and represents the initial step towards confronting the economic challenges currently facing our nation. The 2016 fiscal package entitled “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let’s Do This Together”, charts a new transformational course for our nation, a course which diverts from the overall mismanagement and macroeconomic underperformance of the last five years.

The key objectives of our economic policies include macroeconomic stability, strong institutions and investor confidence, sustainable growth and diversification, job creation and the promotion of social justice. I have laid 11 documents in the Parliament which review the revenue and expenditure items over the last fiscal year and give details of the Government’s policy priorities and budgetary allocations going forward.

But first let us put all of this in an economic context. There is reason to be concerned about the state of the global economy. Almost 10 years after the onset of the financial crisis, the global financial crisis, the global economy continues to grow modestly at best. The IMF has reported that the global economy grew by 3.3 per cent and 3.4 per cent in 2013 and 2014 respectively, and projects moderate growth of 3.1 per cent this year.

Further, in advanced economies, growth in 2015 is projected to be just 2 per cent, while emerging economies are projected to grow by 4 per cent in developing economies. Robust economic growth across the world therefore remains elusive. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, the United Nations Economic Commission has also indicated that the region’s annual growth rate is expected to be 1 per cent lower than 2014. Madam President, in addition to these global realities, our policy decisions in Trinidad and Tobago must take cognizance of the following risks: the impact of the upcoming monetary policy normalization in the United States and other developed countries, economic uncertainties in the Euro area, increased financial market volatility, unpredictable and volatile commodity prices, particularly the oil prices, and potential spillovers from geopolitical conflict, coupled with persistent vulnerability in emerging economies.

10.15 a.m.

We face a delicate balance between tightened stabilization policies without at the same time, stymieing future growth and job creation, as well as expenditure on much needed public expenditure. It is against this uncertain backdrop and the subpar global economic performance that this Government must manage our economy.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Our performance since 2010 has not been encouraging. Members will recall that Moody's Investor Services downgraded our Government bond rating and issuer rating from Baa1 to Baa2 earlier this year in 2015, and changed the outlook for Trinidad and Tobago from stable to negative. Moody's cited the following as the main reasons for the downgrade: persistent fiscal deficits whereby this country's fiscal accounts have reported recurring deficits of between 2 to 3 per cent of GDP since 2009, after consecutive surpluses were observed over the previous eight years prior to 2009; limited economic diversification and a weak macroeconomic policy framework. There is also the problem with the accurate collection of data for Trinidad and Tobago.

Apart from Moody's assessment, there were other indicators of mismanagement. Over the last five years our economy has been stagnant, growing by less than 1 per cent on average. Net public sector debt grew from 32 per cent of GDP in 2010 to 46.3 per cent of GDP in 2015. Our cash balances moved from a positive approximately \$7 billion in May 2010 to approximately \$8.7 billion in overdraft in September 2015, a reversal of approximately \$15 billion. Madam President, these are the facts; these are the hard, cold facts. As Minister of Finance I give the assurance that this Government remains undaunted by the task ahead of us. As promised, our economic plans will deliver a stronger, more robust, more diversified economy that will provide opportunities for all citizens.

With respect to the budget itself, this is based on price assumptions of US \$45 per barrel for oil, and I can explain that that \$45 is for the basket of crudes that is produced in Trinidad and Tobago, which would include oil from the east coast, from the south coast and from the west coast and the north coast. It works out at a price for West Texas Intermediate at somewhere between \$41 and \$42 per barrel, which is well below the current trading price for WTI. We have also predicated our budget on a price of \$2.75 for MMBtu for Henry Hub, and \$8 for Indonesian gas. We believe these assumptions to be conservative when compared to projections made by the IMF and the Energy Information Administration which are all projecting an oil price for 2016 in excess of \$50 per barrel.

Total revenue is forecast at \$60.29 billion; total expenditure, net of capital repayments and sinking fund contributions, is forecast at \$63.05 billion, which includes \$5 billion arising from arrears and salary increases in 2015. So that the real budget, Madam President, is really about \$58 billion when you take away that \$5 billion extraordinary expenditure caused by arrears of salaries and so on. For fiscal 2016, the budget deficit is projected to be 1.7 per cent of GDP, and Government's fiscal consolidation exercise is projected to achieve a broadly balanced budget by 2018.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I now turn to the growth agenda. The growth outcomes of the economy over the past years have been very lacklustre, and if we are to succeed in expanding the economy's capacity to produce goods and services, and increase income to the public and private sectors, we must undertake decisive action and partner with our local private sector.

The energy sector as the lifeblood of our economy must be restored to resilience. We must reverse the decline in the sector over the last five years, where oil production fell from 100,000 barrels a day to 80,000, and we must ensure it is governed by an ethical, efficient and ever-evolving regulatory framework.

Our energy policy rests on the following key pillars: timely negotiation of our imminently expiring gas supply contracts—we have gas supply contracts expiring in 2017 and 2018, long-term contracts; monetization discovery of reserves, especially expensive deep-water hydrocarbons; competitiveness of our energy industries; an equitable share of revenue for major players in the sale of our energy products; establishment and continuation of relevant downstream projects; attraction of appropriate human resources to our nation's most important sector; maximization of local content, local value added; development of an attractive fiscal framework to maximize activity in hydrocarbon recovery and re-establishment of our nation's reputation as a preferred destination for investment; creation of an enabling environment for producer companies to be encouraged to seek new discoveries of hydrocarbons reserves, and in particular incentives that would motivate oil and gas companies to produce what is called "stranded gas", and also incentives for small operators whose capital adequacy may not be as strong as large players.

We have already begun the conversation with key upstream, midstream and downstream players and corporate citizens, and we expect to intensify these discussions over the next few months. We have also set a target in terms of renewable energy, that 10 per cent of energy produced in Trinidad and Tobago will come from renewable energy sources, primarily wind and solar, by the year 2021. This is similar to what the European Union has done, where it established 20 per cent of energy from renewable energy by the year 2020. They are way ahead of us so we set a lower target.

Diversification: Madam President, our persistent reliance on the energy sector is untenable. The sharp decline in oil prices that began last year is another potent rationale for diversifying our economy and sources of revenue. We need to do far more than just pay lip service to the urgent need to diversify beyond the

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

petroleum sector. We intend to encourage and invite the private sector to become involved in our diversification effort. We must find a way to get our private sector, which is risk averse, to get the motivation to invest in the productive sector.

We have identified the following industries as focus areas: agriculture and agro processing; maritime services; fishing and fish processing; aviation services; creative industries; financial services and software design and application, among many others.

One of the first things we will seek to do is to operationalize the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre, which has been in abeyance for the last five years. We will look for partners, particularly with the large Asian banks, to operate from our shores as they look for strategic opportunities to penetrate markets in the Western Hemisphere. We believe that once we attract some signature partners to our IFC, we will be able to create the nucleus for a financial centre serving Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Trinidad and Tobago.

We also intend to focus on creating a viable well-developed maritime economy, including a ship maintenance facility to focus on ship repair and shipbuilding, which should also spawn a hub for these activities within Caricom. Another area is information and communications technology. As part of our strategy we will complete and operationalize the Tamana InTech Park which has been languishing for the last five years, as well as the Piarco Aero Park, which I recall as Minister of Works way back in 2010, I had received Cabinet approval for the design, construction and funding of the Piarco Aero Park, yet five years later what is there in the Piarco Aero Park, other than a few roads and drains.

We also intend to upgrade industrial estates and establish new ones in designated spaces throughout the country. We also intend to integrate ICT into our education initiatives. ICT in education is critical if we are to compete in the global economy. It has the potential to enhance learning and provide students with new skills and capabilities, and also facilitate and improve teacher training and minimize cost in the delivery of instruction, resulting in more effective learning outcomes.

With respect to agriculture, agriculture presently contributes just 0.5 per cent of GDP. This has been the case for several years and we intend to create a strong, modern competitive agriculture sector. Food production must be made affordable and competitive. We must reverse the decline in agriculture production. For all the talk over the last five years, the agriculture sector has remained at 0.5 per cent

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

of GDP. We must incentivize our farming community to rise to the challenge of making our country as self-sufficient as is possible in food production. We must increase public sector investment and motivate private sector investment in agriculture, in particular, agricultural technology.

We have already started the process by unifying all of the agencies involved in agriculture under one unified head, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We brought lands back into the agriculture Ministry. Security of land tenure will now be accorded high priority as well as provision of necessary infrastructure for farmers.

With respect to facilitating business, one of the biggest problems in this country is the current foreign exchange crisis, for want of a better word. We have already discussed this matter with the Central Bank, and during this week the Central Bank will be requested to revert to the pre-2014 foreign exchange distribution system, eliminate the backlog of arrears of foreign exchange demand and ensure that legitimate demands for foreign exchange are met. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, let me just indicate this is being done in the context of the Exchange Control Act of Trinidad and Tobago. This is one of the biggest problems.

In all our pre-budget discussions, all of our manufacturers have indicated to us that one of the greatest challenges they face is adequate supplies of foreign exchange to get the necessary raw materials and inputs for adding value and for manufacturing products. Going forward, we intend to have an open-door policy with all stakeholder groups in the business community to ensure we are sufficiently aware of their operation realities and the challenges they face. [*Desk thumping*]

We also intend to intensify the use of public/private partnerships. We are already utilizing public/private partnerships in a limited way to deliver infrastructure in health, education and broadband technology. Capabilities are currently being built in the Ministry of Finance and other Ministries, but we intend to use the PPP model to deliver infrastructure and services to our citizens. We feel if we can mobilize private capital, it will assist us in diversifying our economy and also providing much needed infrastructure. We have allocated \$20 million to develop the necessary technical expertise in the use of public/private partnerships and to acquire the services of international experts to assist us to expand and broaden the use of PPPs.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The reform agenda—as a matter of urgency, we will undertake the following initiatives: procurement reform with primary focus on transparency, integrity and value for money. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, for the last five years there has been a lot of talk about procurement. The last administration ended its tenure with only a partial proclamation of the Procurement Act which is still ineffective. We intend to fix this problem in the shortest possible time, but certainly in fiscal 2016.

10.30 a.m.

We intend to create the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. [*Cell phone rings*] We believe that as much as—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Hon. Minister, could I just remind Senators about turning off your cell phones or putting them on silent.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam President. There was a lot of music there for a while.

We believe, Madam President, that at least \$5 billion in revenue per year remains uncollected because of the inefficiencies in our revenue collection system. The revenue authority will combine the Customs and Excise, the Board of Inland Revenue, the VAT Office and all of the agencies involved in collecting revenue, so that there will be shared communication and collaboration among all of the agencies, and we also intend to bring modern techniques for revenue collection. There are many agencies, the Pricewaterhouse in its pre-budget memorandum made the point that if we reform our revenue collection, we could collect as much as \$8 billion per year in revenue that is now not collected.

We also intend to establish a general accounting office within the Parliament to provide real time analysis of actual performance against budget and projections going forward. We also intend to create a statistical institute which will replace the Central Statistical Office and facilitate modern, timely, data-driven decision making. This institute will be independent body and its board will comprise representatives from the Central Bank, from the CSO, from the private sector, from the universities, from the Government and so on. We believe it is about time that we have proper and accurate data in this country, for this was one of the reasons why Moody's downgraded Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The CSO has been—the only way I can describe it, as being in a mess for the last five years.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Financial regulatory reform within key institutions in the financial sector such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Financial Intelligence Unit and so on, to make sure that these agencies are operating in accordance with best practice.

I move to other important sectors—crime. Madam President, let me make it crystal clear, this Government is at war with the criminals elements of our society. For too long criminality and lawlessness have been a scourge to our citizens and to the economy and I wish to echo the sentiments of the new Minister of National Security that this is a war that we on this side shall win. [*Desk thumping*]

As part of our efforts we will undertake improvements in policing techniques and intelligence gathering, as well as strengthening our scientific investigation capabilities. This includes increased cooperation and operational investigative integration between police officers, crime scene investigators, detectives, the Forensic Science Centre and intelligence agencies as part of an integrated security approach. As a critical piece in our anti-crime architecture, we will establish a joint border protection agency comprised of the police, the Coast Guard, the customs and all agencies involved in border protection to manage the security and integrity of our nation's borders, given our country's location between the supplier countries of illegal narcotics in South and Central America and consumer nations in North America and in Europe. We are also a target for arms transshipment coming out of Central and South America.

We believe that no single arm of law enforcement or even one Ministry can address crime and therefore, we are adopting what is called a whole of government approach so that all Ministries and agencies will come together in the fight against crime.

With respect to the gambling industry, an unregulated gaming industry has yielded a proliferation of private members' clubs throughout the country without appropriate regulation. We believe there is tremendous leakage of revenue and taxation within this unregulated industry, and we also believe that without regulation this industry could be indirectly facilitating money laundering, crime and other social ills. We will therefore amend and pass the Gambling and Gaming Act after consultation with key stakeholders such as faith-based organizations and NGOs involved in dealing with gambling addiction and other social ills that come out of gambling. But we must do something about it. For far too many years administrations have turned a blind eye to the proliferation of casinos in Trinidad and Tobago. We must bring some order, we must bring some regulation to this industry, [*Desk thumping*] especially since it employs so many people.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Education: Madam President, we live in a very dynamic and increasingly complex and interdependent world. Education and learning is therefore critical for the well-being of our citizens. We are committed to continue promoting education as a high priority, if not the highest priority. Our track record speaks for itself. [*Desk thumping*] We created the Government Assistance Tuition Expenses, GATE. [*Desk thumping*] We established the University of the West Indies. [*Desk thumping*] We established the University of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We made education free from nursery to tertiary. [*Desk thumping*] And during the period 2002 to 2010, as a result of our progressive policies such as GATE, the establishment of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and the inclusion of private educational institutions within the framework of GATE, we increased the participation rate in tertiary education by over 400 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Going forward our plans for education include: preserving, maintaining and expanding where necessary our system of free education; ensuring that the Government Assistance for Tuition expenses, GATE, remains relevant, easily accessible and available to all citizens who are in need of it. And I stress, in need of it. [*Desk thumping*] I made the point in the other place that we need to talk, that if somebody is earning \$150,000 a month, if such a person should be able to avail themselves of free university education. We need to talk about these things. We need to talk about whether GATE should be targeted to those who need it or whether it should be free for everybody whether you earn \$1 million a year or not. We as a country need to talk about these things. And I might say that in some discussions with TTUTA, they are of the firm view that we should look at introducing some form of means testing for persons who are very wealthy.

Improving opportunities for teacher training and development, ensuring our curricula and teaching methods remain relevant, maintaining First World standards in term of enrolment, ensuring universally early childhood education and maintaining our system of universal secondary and tertiary education, while ensuring that access to the highest level of education in all areas of Trinidad and in Tobago is available to all citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of sport, we are determined to make Trinidad and Tobago a world-class sporting nation. [*Desk thumping*] We intend to develop a participatory approach to the development of sport where all stakeholders including athletes, sporting bodies, communities and persons with disabilities will have a voice in the development of sporting programmes and initiatives. Among our key initiatives will be the development of a sport institute of Trinidad and Tobago, an entity that would have as its responsibility the development and formulation of plans for sport and the upgrade of existing facilities for sport and recreational activities, so that we can harness all of our talents of our citizens in sport.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

With respect to health, Madam President, our approach to health care will move away from the approach of the past, where the approach was to construct multibillion-dollar facilities—white elephants as hon. Senator says to the right of me—which remain empty, unfinished and unusable at the point in time. One of the biggest problems in the health care systems at this time is not these huge buildings, but the availability of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. So, our focus will be on dealing with the chronic shortages of medical professionals within the health care sector. Of course, we will have a hospital construction programme, but it must be a holistic approach. We cannot just put up these huge buildings that will then remain empty for a long time because we simply do not have the doctors and nurses to staff them. We must deal with our existing institutions and modernize and upgrade the delivery of health care in these institutions.

I now come, Madam President, to the fiscal measures. The measures presented in the budget for fiscal year 2015/2016 provide for the following: an increase in the personal income tax exemption limit from \$60,000 to \$72,000 per year. [*Desk thumping*] This was a manifesto promise of the People's National Movement and we have met it within the first month although we said we would do it within 12 months; an increase in the business levy, and this is part of revenue raising because we must balance. We have a \$21 billion gap between recurrent revenue and expenditure. And while we are able to plug that whole this year with extraordinary inflows such as money available to us from Clico bonds, from sale of shares in the methanol company, from dividends from the National Gas Corporation, from prepayment from past lending, from the Trinidad Generation Unlimited plant and so on, Madam President, we must balance.

So while we increase the personal income tax exemption from \$60,000 to \$72,000, we also felt we needed to raise some revenue, and there are many businesses that do not pay any tax at all. All they pay is business levy and Green Fund because they do not declare profits. So one of the ways of getting some more revenue from these types of businesses who manage through all sorts mechanisms to avoid paying tax, is the use of the business levy. So, we are increasing business levy from .2 per cent to .6 per cent, increasing the Green Fund from .1 per cent to .3 per cent. And might I say, some of these taxes are offset against corporation tax. So when you actually begin to pay tax like the big companies, then you can offset your contributions to these taxes with your corporation tax. It only affects people who do not pay any tax at all somehow. Widening the VAT tax base, increasing collection and compliance; reducing the VAT rate from 15 to 12 per cent while looking at luxury items and non-essential items that are currently exempt from VAT, and determining which of these should now be subject to VAT.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

We are also increasing the threshold for value added tax registration from \$360,000 to \$500,000. And the reason for this is in addition to those businesses that do not pay any tax, there are VAT registered businesses that get refunds. They do not pay tax. They do not declare profits, but they can claim refunds on things like vehicles and so on. So they actually end up being a net drain on the Treasury because the amount of refunds they get is not equivalent to the amount of VAT that they earn and contribute to the Treasury. So we thought we would raise the threshold to \$500,000, it makes administration easier and plug that loophole where you have companies down at that level, the \$360,000 level, who are in fact claiming more refunds than the VAT they actually generate.

Establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. I spoke about that already. Implementation of the Property Tax Act of 2009. It is already in force. The implementation had just been waived or avoided for the last five years and the last waiver that was an amendment to the legislation will expire on December 31, 2015, and we decided to allow Act to operate. But we are going to go, in the first instance, to use the old levels and the old rates, so that people will not be disadvantaged, and we are going to create a special regime for persons who, through no fault of their own, elderly citizens perhaps living a place like Woodbrook, just use that as example. When they bought their house it might have cost them \$10,000 50 years ago, it is now worth \$3 million. It is no fault of their own. They are on fixed incomes and people like that we are going to create a special regime so they are not penalized by the increase in value of their properties through to no fault of their own. We will in all likelihood make people like that exempt from the property tax. So it is going to be equitable. [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 a.m.

Finally, the application of transfer pricing rules, there has been a lot of talk about this; nothing really achieved with respect to transfer pricing. And for those who are not familiar with this mechanism, transfer pricing is a means by which multi-national corporations can claim expenses not incurred in Trinidad and Tobago. There have been many studies on this and many of these expenses are inflated, some of them are imaginary, so they claim head office expenses for head offices that do not even exist. So, we are going to apply transfer pricing rules finally in Trinidad and Tobago so that we can deal with this whole question of transfer pricing, which is the way that many multi-national corporations avoid profits. Over 100 countries in the world have already adopted transfer pricing mechanisms to deal with this problem.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

As I indicated, the implementation of the Gambling, Gaming and Betting Control Bill. After appropriate consultation we shall provide incentives for CCTV and alarm systems. We believe that persons should be encouraged to look after their own personal security. This was something touted by the previous administration, but, as happened with many of their initiatives, they did not take it to the final stage, so they got bogged down in the specifications required for CCTV and alarm systems. As a result the thing just dragged on and on and on, to the point where we are now where nothing has been done. We know the specifications for CCTV, is not difficult, it is not rocket science, and we will be finalizing these specifications within the next couple months so that we can allow tax and duty exemptions for CCTV systems, thereby encouraging people to install these in their homes.

We also want to start the dialogue on the fuel subsidy, because the fuel subsidy has reached as high as \$4 billion in some years when the price of oil was over \$80, and we think it is time for the country to talk, should we be spending \$3 billion or \$4 billion, or, as the case may be, in this year with oil at 451.7 billion on a fuel subsidy, rather than directing that money towards targeted programmes to help the poor and the indigent. So, we decided to increase the price of super gasoline and diesel by just 15 per cent to start the ball rolling. And we will have a national conversation on this to determine whether those billions of dollars that are spent in the fuel subsidy—my memory tells me we have spent almost \$20 billion over the last five years on the fuel subsidy, whether that could be better spent elsewhere, on health care, on education, as the case may be.

We also have to make adjustments to the National Insurance System based on the Ninth Actuarial Report, which should have been laid in this Parliament by the last administration, but was not, and it will be laid shortly. We must do this otherwise the National Insurance System will run out of money within a few years. We are also increasing another manifesto promise, increasing the cap on joint incomes earned by retirees in respect of national insurance and old age pension by \$500. [*Desk thumping*] Again, this was a promise we made to be implemented within the first 12 months. We have done it within the first month. Creation of a retirees benefit programme for those of you who have gone to Panama, you would see how they treat their retirees. [*Desk thumping*] They give them discounts on so many things, and we have decided initially to provide free drivers' permits and passports to retirees over the age of 60 [*Desk thumping*] and then we will continue with this programme to see what discounts we can give to retirees in addition to free drivers' permits and passports.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

We also thought that for young people we would assist them by increasing the stipend paid to participants in the On-the-Job Training programme. [*Desk thumping*] In a lot of complaints that those stipends are inadequate, we have decided to increase them by 20 per cent. We are also creating a graduate recruitment programme. [*Desk thumping*] So many unemployed graduates, people with First Class Honours. I know quite a few myself. People have qualified in petroleum geo-science and so on, with First Class Honours, who are walking the streets of Trinidad and Tobago today because they are simply unemployed because of the downturn in the oil economy and the collapse in oil prices. We felt that in every Ministry we would create this graduate programme, which is a specialized programme. So, in the Ministry of Finance we would be looking for accountants and economists, in energy we would be looking for petroleum engineers and petroleum geo-scientists, in education we are looking for people with specialized training in education and so on. And this is part of a professional development programme. It is very different from OJT. These people would be selected for their excellence in their academic achievements for their all-round skills and so on, and be part of a professional development programme. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to recruit in the first instance 500 university graduates, approximately 20 per Ministry, and some for Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We intend to exempt all taxes and duties on all imports into the agricultural sector. And I will leave my colleagues in agriculture to deal with that. I have heard so much old talk about, oh, that is there already. It is just not true. You speak to a farmer, you do not get custom duty off of agricultural vehicles, you do not get motor vehicle tax off agricultural vehicles. All you get is VAT, and it is a refund system. We have to pay the VAT, then claim it back over a three-year period.

Hon. Senator: So, they were misleading.

Hon. C. Imbert: Of course, when they said that they had done this already, it is just not true. This was done after direct discussions with farmers. I spoke to them myself, I spoke to fishermen, I spoke to farmers. I ask, what do you want? And they said, one of the first things they want is all taxes and duties off of all imports to agriculture. [*Desk thumping*]

We also would be providing financial autonomy for the Judiciary. Over the next year we will be speaking with them to work out a mechanism where we can hand over all of the procurement, the responsibility for the construction of judicial buildings, the acquisition of goods and services, handed over completely to the Judiciary within a framework of checks and balances. So, finally the Judiciary will get what they have been asking for, for so many years. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam President, that is a brief summary. I would leave my colleagues in this honourable Senate to give details and to flesh out many of the plans and programmes of the People's National Movement Government. All I would say is that I am honoured to be given the portfolio of Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to thank all of my colleagues. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to thank the hon. Prime Minister, the Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, for having the confidence in me to give me this responsibility, and I give an undertaking to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that I will do my best to serve everyone equally without fear or favour, as we put our economy back on a path to recovery and growth. I thank you, Madam President.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam President: Before allowing other Senators to join the debate, I just want to remind everyone, that in accordance with Standing Order 43(1), a Senator can speak for a maximum of 40 minutes, there are no extensions, and what I would do is indicate to Senators when they are within the five minutes of the impending expiration of their allotted time. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you. Madam President, allow me to once again to congratulate you on your ascension to the office of President of the Senate. And may I take the opportunity in his absence to welcome our new Minister of Finance, and to congratulate him on his assumption to this very critical office.

Madam President, if I may quote Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, when he said:

It is not which side of the fence that you are on that matters. What is important is the quality of the contribution that one makes towards the nation.

Madam President, given the far-reaching and complex nature of the budget, and given the obvious time constraint, as you have identified, I would like to focus my contribution on the following themes:

- The fiscal measure proposed by this intellectually bankrupt and overwhelmingly incompetent administration;
- The negative impact of these austerity measures;
- The impact of the fiscal measures on labour and the working class;
- The likely effect of these measures on escalating crime, public safety and security;
- Procurement, the pernicious property tax and the dreaded revenue authority;
- Highlights of the energy sector and the way forward.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, the 2016 budget is littered and punctuated with endless distortions, many fabrications, wild allegations, historical rambling, half-truths and massive deception. Many of the fiscal measures are designed to begin a process of redistribution of income, wealth, resources and power in favour of the rich and powerful, and away from the weak, voiceless and powerless in our society.

We in the People's Partnership have nothing against the rich. We stand for equity, justice and social progress for all. The budget is filled with deceptive rhetoric and double standards. It is dangerously misleading; it is an illusion wrapped in the gift of superficiality; and it is nothing more than a massive mamaguy by this minority administration.

The 2016 budget is predicated on recommendations which the Minister failed to mention, emanating from a private meeting between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the International Monetary Fund held at the request of the Government of our country after the last general election. Madam President, they just did not know what to do. They were totally devoid of ideas as to how to manage and grow this economy. Stringent and draconian IMF austerity measures constituted the foundation of the 2016 fiscal package. By the Minister's own admission he stated, and I quote:

They provided me—that is IMF—with their own assessment as well as their own solutions.

Is the hon. Minister of Finance prepared to share this assessment and those solutions proposed by the IMF with this honourable House? Remember, Madam President, this is the same IMF, who in 1986 prescribed the 10 per cent cut across the board in public expenditure, thereby impoverishing large sections of the working class in our country. The Minister further confessed, that after these consultations with the IMF, he was now better informed of the true state of the economy. He went on to state, and I quote:

That our economy is in a more perilous state than we envisaged.

In fact, the expert with whom he consulted firmly recommended the implementation of several draconian measures, supposedly designed to generate a revival in growth, and more resources and will also redound to the benefit of our children and future generation, according to the Minister.

11.00 a.m.

Nothing could be more deceptive and devious. What were these measures? You know what they were, Madam President? A property tax, broadening of the VAT base, increasing the excise tax, increasing personal income tax, increasing corporation tax, eliminating the fuel subsidies, reducing other subsidies and transfers and introducing wage and hiring restraint mechanisms.

Madam President, these are classical IMF inspired austerity measures and solutions, that according to the Minister is supposed to generate and revive growth. Is this not intellectual dishonesty on the part of the Minister I ask, Madam President? Indeed, these stringent and anti-people measures will ultimately lead not only to a severe contraction in the economy but loss of jobs, price increases, wage freezes, and possible salary cuts, increased capital flight, increased poverty, decrease in foreign direct investment inflows, human capital flight, increased poverty, a surge in crime and an increase in social instability, particularly among the poor and the vulnerable.

Has the Minister conveniently forgotten, Madam President, the fraud perpetrated on this country by this very IMF during 1985, 1986 and 1987 when it was proved by reputable institutions such as the World Bank and the University of the West Indies that the statistical manipulation and misrepresentation of critical indicators of our economy by the IMF aimed at imposing austerity measures which were more stringent than necessary, had a debilitating effect on the country as a whole. It is said, Madam President, that those who forget the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them.

Madam President, I now turn to fiscal package. Following on the heels of the raft of austerity and draconian measures which was clearly misdiagnosed based on the statistical misrepresentation and manipulation of the data, the poor, the dispossessed, the voiceless and the powerless citizens have been negatively impacted. It is clear that the Finance Minister's incorrect fiscal measures will lead to inflation manifested in higher prices, slowing down of existing business activity, create greater hardship for the poor and will cause the existing exchange rate to even depreciate in the short-term.

Madam President, the rise in fuel cost will trigger increases across the board in the final products, especially the prices of basic food items. It will negatively affect private car owners, taxi-drivers, small scale transport businesses and single mothers facing high grocery bills. As a matter of fact, it will have a dreadful impact on every single person in this country.

The inflationary impact of the fiscal measures will also result in a real fall in the minimum wage. One economist at the University of the West Indies has already predicted that the real minimum wage would be reduced from \$15 per hour to \$10 per hour as a result of the Government's inflationary fiscal package. Single mothers, unskilled workers and those persons living close to the poverty line will be impacted negatively by this erosion of the minimum wage.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The taxing of zero-rated and exempt VAT items will cause business to increase their prices, forcing the consumer to pay higher prices for such items. This represents an absolute reversal and repudiation of the policies of a former administration. All goods and services in the Second Schedule of the VAT Act are likely to be affected by this backward and anti-people measure.

The Minister of Finance has indicated that it is the intention of the Government to sell the family jewels in order to make up the revenue to balance the nation's budget. The country would like to know from him, which state assets are to be disposed of by this new Government? What will be the impact of these fire sales of state assets, unemployment, loss of income, family life and the future of our children?

I now turn to public safety and national security. In spite of the strategic misinformation on the allocation of \$10.8 billion to national security as being the highest since independence, an in depth analysis of various policy documents on public order and safety is manifestly misleading, if not fraudulent.

Madam President, there is an absence of strategic and tactical initiatives to stem the rising tide of homicides, kidnappings, border integrated capability and efficient resource allocation. Given the need for increased border protection in light of the growing drug trade and the poor rate of crime detection, particularly in the area of homicides, why have the resources allocated for the training of the K-9 Units been reduced or eliminated? For example, under the PNM 2016 Development Programme for the Ministry of National Security, there is no allocation for the construction of dormitory and messing facilities for the Coast Guard in Cedros for 2016, as well as the absence of any allocation for the establishment of a Coast Guard base at Charlotteville in Tobago. Nothing about these has been mentioned in their 2016 budget.

The Commissioner of Police has been literally crying out for border protection improvement to assist in stemming the inflows of illegal guns and drugs into the country, and human trafficking. Yet, the Government in its 2016 budget has failed to provide the necessary resources for crime fighting and public safety and security in strategic locations throughout the country.

In the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* for Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, 2016, under the heading Minor Equipment Purchases, there is a sizeable reduction in the allocation for the purchase of vehicles, rent/lease of vehicles and equipment and maintenance of vehicles, for the police service as well as a reduction in the allocation for the training of Members of the Police

Service. For example, reductions for the purchase of vehicles and maintenance of vehicles are in the vicinity of \$15 million and \$21.8 million, respectively. There is also, Madam President, no allocation of revenue for the Regiment, for the purchase of vehicles and equipment for critical border duties and functions. The Minister of National Security tells the nation that crime is the number one priority of his Government yet the resources necessary to provide vital security and safety are absent.

In addition, reference is made to the police service on page 33 of the budget statement in which the Minister of Finance has stated his intention to modernize the service by establishing a police management agency with a mandate to develop the necessary leadership expertise, skills and professionalism, as well as a police service inspectorate to treat with potential abuse of state power and any overreach by the police service in the discharge of their duties. These agencies seemed to be a duplication of existing ones, such as the Police Complaints Authority and the Police Training Academy. What is the real purpose and aim of these agencies?

Madam President, it appears that the Government is seeking to introduce mechanisms designed to influence and ultimately control the executive of the police service and to bring it under its total control. This is highly dangerous and unacceptable as an independent organization, especially in the area of operations. It is highly dangerous for the politicians to be using mechanisms and devices to influence the behaviour, the conduct and direction of the executive of the police service and at the same time, introducing its own sanctions to punish errant police officers who may abuse or overreach their authority and power. These are matters for the Police Complaints Authority, the Police Service Commission, and the Police Commissioner. These two agencies are designed, as far as we are concerned, to undermine and compromise the Commissioner of Police and his executive and allow agents of the PNM Government through these agencies to seek to control this particular coercive arm of the State.

Madam President, this is outrageous, it is scandalous and dangerous and must never be supported. We call on the Government to leave the Commissioner of Police alone and to leave the Police Service Commission alone.

I now turn to labour and the working class. Labour and the working class are expected to suffer serious dislocation and serious distress as IMF inspired austerity measures take firm roots in the next 12 months and beyond. Unemployment and under-employment are expected to rise as the national economy contracts and slows in the wake of the application of these painful measures.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, as I mentioned earlier in my contribution, valuable strategic and sensitive state assets will be subject to a fire sale as the Government scrambles to close the revenue and expenditure gap. Prized state assets, possibly Petrotrin, Trinmar, National Flour Mills, TSTT, First Citizens Bank, National Gas Company, National Petroleum, National Energy Corporation, even the Port Authority among others, could be placed on the chopping block for privatization. Let the Minister explain to us which enterprises are to be sold.

Further, a policy of wage freeze, wage reduction and even retrenchment may be vigorously pursued by this administration in an effort to balance the books. A programme of rationalization and structural adjustment will visit the public service in its broadest context as the regime seeks to pursue what it perceives to be efficiency gains. Many social programmes within the current safety net will simply be cut and/or removed putting severe pressures on the most vulnerable in our society. Several of the fiscal measures, inclusive of increasing the prices of super gasoline and diesel, would also negatively impact the working class and erode their real wages thereby reducing their living and working conditions.

Madam President, workers and their families will also suffer from higher food prices as the Government seeks to increase its VAT take from \$6.7 billion in 2015 to \$12.4 billion in 2016, an increase of some \$5.7 billion through a reduction, they claim, from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent.

11.15 a.m.

This, according to the Director of Tax at the KPMG, would be an astounding accomplishment on the part of this administration. It is expected that several thousands of zero-rated and exempt items will now attract, effective from January 01, a 12.5 per cent VAT where none existed before. We want the Minister to tell the country the truth on these matters.

In the coming period, the Government would have no option possible but to depreciate the value of the TT dollar vis à vis the US dollar. Any such move will witness an escalation in the cost of living, further eroding the income of the working people of our country.

I now turn to procurement, the pernicious property tax and the dreaded revenue authority. At the heart of the Government's proposal for infrastructural development is the urgent need for proper procurement legislation. Simply put, Madam President, before the Government could engage in any major infrastructural programme they must ensure that procurement legislation is firmly and fully operationalized. [*Desk thumping*] In the absence of proper procurement legislation we, in the People's Partnership, will strongly resist any attempt at engaging in major infrastructural projects, including the so-called US \$10 billion rapid rail project. [*Desk thumping*]

The People's Partnership calls on the Government to immediately proclaim the procurement legislation in its entirety, [*Desk thumping*] as passed by the Parliament. We are not interested in any review or watering down of any provision of the procurement legislation. Implement the law as it was enacted by the Parliament. The people of Trinidad and Tobago did not expect the reintroduction of this pernicious property tax. This is a regressive tax and will negatively affect business entities, pensioners who own property, young persons planning to purchase properties, and existing home owners. The consequences of the reintroduction of the property tax will witness buildings being abandoned, rent increasing, increasing mortgage rates, rising utility bills and a fall in renovations and repair to properties and general maintenance.

Madam President, what additional services can citizens expect to receive from this new venture? And will the Government share with this Senate what remedies it intends to employ if citizens are unable or unwilling to pay?

The dreaded revenue authority: studies have shown that the cost of operating revenue authorities in advanced and emerging economies are very high, and there is no guarantee that revenue authorities will be more efficient and effective in revenue collection. The reintroduction of the revenue authority will negatively impact upon workers who will be displaced and therefore become unemployed. We reject outright the introduction of a revenue authority and stand fully and firmly behind the workers of the Board of Inland Revenue, the VAT office, [*Desk thumping*] the Customs and Excise Department and any other revenue collecting agencies.

Madam President, in 2010, the concept of a property tax was resoundingly rejected by the population, to the extent that the then government lost the general election. So here we are, five years later, back to the future.

Sen. Khan: Sen. Mark, could you give way a minute?

Sen. W. Mark: No. You will speak at the appropriate time.

Sen. Khan: Okay, then. All right, no problem.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, on October 05, 2015, the Minister of Finance predicated his budget on the projected oil price of US \$45, a mixed gas price to reflect prevailing market conditions inclusive of Henry Hub, US \$2.75 per MMBtu and Indonesia, US \$8 per MMBtu. We were further advised that revenue collection from oil companies in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015 stood at \$13 billion, some \$8 billion less than was budgeted. However, in his budget documents, the Minister has projected revenues from oil at \$3.245 billion but in his budget statement, projected oil revenues at \$5.449 billion for fiscal 2016.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. MARK]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, in a *Guardian* story dated Thursday, October 15, 2015, Petrotrin Chairman, one Mr. Andrew Jupiter, warned that the State-owned company may soon go out of business due to increasing debt, low productivity levels, escalating manpower costs, rising company debt which stands, as we speak, at some \$13.28 billion with a US \$850 million bond payable, due in August of 2019.

Petrotrin's management has indicated plans for a voluntary separation programme in which thousands of workers may be separated. On that same date and in that same newspapers, the Minister of Finance provided the country with new optimism insofar as oil prices are concerned. According to the hon. Minister, global experts, including the World Bank, the IMF, the Economic Intelligence Unit, the OECD, have all projected favourable oil price increases averaging around \$65 in 2016 and 2017. Now, this is only a mere 10 days after the Minister's budget projection of US \$45 per barrel.

Madam President, the question that is dripping from the lips of a perplexed population is exactly what is going on with our Minister of Finance. When did our distinguished Minister of Finance accidentally stumble upon these optimistic forecasts for crude oil increases? The nation has been stunned and flabbergasted by these latest revelations. But should we be, Madam President?

How does the Minister's optimistic outlook square up with that of the International Energy Agency which is predicting a slowing down in the world demand for oil in 2016, given the pessimistic outlook for the global economy and the expected arrival of Iranian crude should international sanctions be eased? I think the Minister should stop playing psychological games with the minds of the people.

Madam President, an objective analysis of the 2016 fiscal package has revealed an uneven distribution of Government's IMF-inspired austerity measures. It has placed the bulk of the adjustment burdens on the shoulders of those who are least able to bear or carry them. Both the foreign multinational corporations, as well as big and medium-sized domestic businesses have been engaged in what the Minister has said is an unhealthy practice aimed at exploiting loopholes in the Treaty of Chaguaramas which have permitted them to establish subsidiaries or branches in Caricom territories which serve as virtual tax havens.

These loopholes have prevented these corporations and business organizations from paying their share of corporation taxes and other taxes which could conservatively be estimated to amount to hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars that we have lost. These multinational corporations and national business entities continue to enjoy generous incentives, concessions and low utility rates, while denying the State and the citizens their fair share of corporation taxes and other tax obligations.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The Minister of Finance has stated his intention to plug the significant leakage in our revenue stream by constraining these multinationals from employing transfer pricing mechanisms, inclusive of moving transactions to lower tax jurisdictions with lower tax rates through the introduction of transfer pricing legislation. We look forward to the Government tabling in this Parliament, the appropriate legislation to plug that significant leakage in our revenue stream.

The time has come for the nation to engage in an equitable and fair distribution of the burdens of adjustment, which every stakeholder should carry a fair share of the fiscal adjustment burden. A social compact involving labour, business, Government and civil society is urgently needed in our country. This mechanism is necessary if we are to ensure that the draconian austerity measures are not unevenly—

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you—are not unevenly distributed between the fundamental players in our society. Therefore, Madam President, we call on the Government to allow this country to develop its own national, economic and social development strategy, and not have powerful interest-driven, global financial institutions impose their will and prescription on our sovereign democratic Republic and its glorious people.

Madam President, I have sought, in the few moments, or minutes allotted me, to put on the public record some pressing issues concerning the working people, and relating to fiscal measures, the negative impact of these measures; some issues relating to public safety, crime and national security; procurement; the pernicious property tax and the dreaded revenue authority. I looked at some highlights of the energy sector and transfer pricing. Clearly, this Government does not have a clue as to what is required to manage and grow this economy. [*Desk thumping*] They are devoid of ideas as evidenced by their rush to seek IMF advice, remembering always that it was the same IMF who utilized manipulated statistics to justify severe impositions on the citizens of this country that proved totally unnecessary to our circumstances in the final analysis.

11.30 a.m.

In closing, may I share with you and this honourable Senate as I opened, a pertinent quotation as I end? It is from one Criss Jami and he states and I quote:

“Just because something”—is not—“a lie does not mean it”—is not—“deceptive. A liar knows that he is a liar, but one who speaks mere portions of truth in order to deceive is a craftsman of destruction.”

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

Madam President: Sen. Shrikissoon.

Sen. Taurel Shrikissoo: Thank you, Madam President. Let me first thank you for allowing me the opportunity to put forward my contribution with respect to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015. As I begin, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as President of this honourable Senate, a position which brings with it great honour, recognition and responsibility.

In keeping in the congratulatory spirit, I would also like to extend sincerest congratulations to the Minister of Finance and his team for being able to unveil the fiscal package for 2016, a mere 28 days after election. [*Desk thumping*] By any standards, it is a remarkable feat. What makes this feat even more outstanding is that given the reduced period of preparation, the Minister and his team were still able to meet with key stakeholder groups, whose opinions influenced the fiscal package of 2015/2016.

After listening to the hon. Minister's presentation, there were certain areas which he highlighted that I would like to say as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and a Member of this Senate, I was particularly pleased with. [*Desk thumping*] While I would have preferred a report revealing a more positive economic position for Trinidad and Tobago, I was grateful that the hon. Minister did provide an overview of Trinidad and Tobago's economy. While some may present different interpretations of these figures or indicators, the figures reveal that management of Trinidad and Tobago's economy needs urgent attention and a collective response to fiscal prudence. It is in my view that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are better informed of our economic climate which can guide our decision-making while having realistic expectations.

Second, amidst falling revenue I was heartened by the Minister's conscious effort to reduce expenditure to a level less than that of 2014/2015, with the liability on personnel expenditure being the sole reason for total expenditure to surpass 2015. Other areas of strength that I would like to commend the Minister for are his conscious effort to reduce the fuel subsidy; the largest allocation to crime and national security, which demonstrates that it is a problem that is affecting us both socially and economically; the consideration of granting financial autonomy to the Judiciary; the increase in personal tax allowance; the establishment of an independent statistical office; and the strengthening and resourcing of all state institutions which play roles in funding, training and developing markets for the small and medium enterprise sector. While there may be other areas of strength, these are the few that really stood out and that I thought was quite important to me.

Madam President, as my contribution unfolds from this juncture, while the nominal values that I may use are of importance, I would like us to give some consideration to the general trend that we are developing. Our last fiscal surplus was recorded in 2008, having a value of \$2,974.5 million. Subsequently, in each successive year, after 2008

until 2015, as a country, we would have recorded continuous fiscal deficits. 2009, \$6.6 billion; 2010, \$2.8 billion; 2011, \$2.3 billion; 2012, \$4.5 billion; 2013, \$6 billion; 2014, \$4.4 billion; 2015, \$7 billion—all fiscal deficits—and the pre-adjusted fiscal deficit for 2016, \$21.4 billion. We have established fiscal deficits as our *modus operandi* in terms of our fiscal packages for the last eight years.

Madam President, I feel the need to emphasize this point as if we are to sum the value of fiscal deficits, 2009 to 2015, we will get a whopping value of \$34 billion. That is to say, that if we were to use 2016 funding to address the deficits created, we would have really been spending 80 per cent of the revenue collected in 2016. This would only leave 20 per cent of our revenue to deal with the matters of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This situation is further exaggerated in 2016 with a fiscal deficit of \$21.4 billion, 13 per cent of GDP, the highest ever that I could recall.

I would like to say at this juncture that we are all aware of the Greek financial crisis, and one of the fundamental factors that caused or perpetuated this economic calamity in Greece was the fact that they had recorded persistent and continuous fiscal deficits. I ask at this juncture that we pay attention to our expenditure, as our expenditure continues to exceed our ability to earn revenue.

As the hon. Minister of Finance pointed out in his budget presentation, at the end of 2010 net public sector debt stood at 32.2 per cent of GDP; by the end of 2014, 40.2; and 2015, 46.3. Again, I just want to remind—just look at the trend, while the values are important, the trend is very significant. At the end of 2015, total public debt was twice that of 2007, while revenues for the corresponding period only increased by a mere 45 per cent. Our debt level doubled while our revenue earning potential or the revenue earned recorded less than 50 per cent growth.

One may argue that an increase in Government spending is absolutely necessary for there to be economic growth, but the last four years we have recorded relatively little movement or growth in our GDP. Was it justified? It is for this reason that I did say earlier nominal values are important, but the trends reveal more. We have to consider that we are in a period of declining revenues. We have seen that we are actually recording increased expenditure, continuous and increasing budget deficits with one of the largest being recorded in 2016 before it is pre-adjusted, and we are seeing an increased debt level.

Madam President, this runaway horse of expenditure must be captured and bridled if we as a nation are to return to positive economic growth supported with strong reserve balances and a reduced debt burden. Having now been confronted with the sharp reality that we are spending or consuming more than we are earning, there is the thrust now towards diversifying the Trinidad and Tobago economy, but I would like to say that over the period 2009, or 2005 rather, to 2015, we have seen significant contributions from the non-oil sector playing a greater role in its contribution to GDP.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. SHRIKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

In 2005 it was 40.5 per cent contribution to GDP from the oil sector, but by 2015 it fell to 32.1 per cent, indicating or indicative that the other areas of our economy were actually performing, contributing 67.4 per cent of GDP at that time. The real question at this point in time is: is our economy diversified? We are seeing various sectors of the economy demonstrating signs that they are stepping up. At this point, we want to evaluate the revenues that Government would earn from oil revenue, and we are seeing that oil revenue for the Government which was its largest source of revenue was actually falling during this time period.

In 2005, revenue for the Government from the oil sector averaged just about 40.5 per cent, but in 2015 it fell to 24.1 per cent after it was adjusted, and in 2016 a mere 13 per cent. The question, therefore, is as Government is faced with a challenged of reduced revenue, we start to hear of an increased thrust towards diversification. It is almost as if the fall in Government revenue is driving the need for diversification, and I am saying today that that is not precisely what should be the case. I would like to say here that diversification is meant for building a sustainable economy and sustainable sectors. The Government can benefit from revenues when those sectors are developed. I would like to say as well that the Government having to look for alternative income streams to supplement its revenue, does not equate as I said to diversification.

I agree with the Minister of Finance with his thrust towards diversification, and his suggestions and strategies with respect to the Maritime economy as well as the establishment of an International Financial Centre. But these are long-term strategies and we require something more immediate now.

I just want to recall from the budget the Government's projected projects for north-east Trinidad, the construction of a Wallerfield to Manzanilla highway, a new first-class road between Valencia and Toco, a new fast ferry port in Toco, and which will all contribute to the opening of the entire north-east region of Trinidad and make available new industrial and commercial space. Excellent! I am saying excellent, but what I am saying is Trinidad and Tobago, if you look at our municipal corporations, we have 14 such geographical spaces. Why are we saying that this method of diversification should only be concentrated or plans were only given for north-east Trinidad?

Sen. Khan: Do you want to give way? I intend to deal with that comprehensively when I deal with local government, and what plans we have for the 14 municipal corporations in the context of that development thrust.

Sen. T. Shrikissoo: I thank you, hon. Senator. I look forward to the contribution. But I would like to say as a resident of Princes Town, I would like to see some areas or some areas of development for Princes Town. And I would say to you that one of the reasons that Princes Town is close to my heart is because there is where I reside and

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

there is where I work. I know that there are significant resources in Princes Town that have remained relatively untapped, and in tapping those resources we can actually improve the local economy or the sub-economy of Princes Town. So I look forward to that contribution.

What I would like to say as well here today with respect to my contribution, with respect to Trinidad and Tobago, is that as a nation if our diversification thrust needs to be successful, we as a nation must also be competitive.

Madam President, as presented, our economy has been experiencing lower revenue generation prices. Our budget deficits are increasing. Diversification is being seen as a way forward for the economy, yet the Global Competitiveness Report defines competitiveness as a set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of an economy which in turn sets the level of prosperity that a country can earn. So there is a link between competitiveness, productivity and prosperity. However, in the latest report of Global Competitiveness Report or Index, 2015/2016, out of 140 economies being analysed, Trinidad and Tobago has been ranked 89th out of 140.

In 2012, we were 84th; in 2013, we were 92nd; in 2014, we were 89th, and in 2015, we are again 89; slipping from a position of 84th in 2012 and maintaining a position of 89, 89 out of 140. We are seeking to diversify our economy, we need to be more competitive but our competitiveness remains the same and in the lower half of the Index.

11.45 a.m.

I would like to examine this Index for a brief moment. It says that the Global Competitiveness Index identifies 12 pillars upon which an economy is evaluated into three sub-categories: Basic requirements, Efficiency enhancers and Innovation and sophistication. I would like to just look at basic requirements first. Let us remember that our ranking is 89th so that any rank above 89 will be pulling our rank up and any rank below 89 will be pushing our scores downward.

Under Basic requirements, Infrastructure had a value of 51 or ranking of 51; Macroeconomic environment, 54; Health and primary education, 60. These indicators would have been pulling our average up for Basic requirements but Institutions, 108. What this 108 constituted at this point in time and pulling our average down—and I am going to give you the factor and the score. Diversion of public funds, falling under institutions, 124 out of 140; Public trust in politicians, that is us, 128; Irregular payments and bribes, 104; Favouritism in decisions of government officials, 137; Wastefulness of government spending, 112; Business costs of crime and violence, 136 out of 140; Organized crime, 117; Reliability of the police service, 116; Ethical behaviour firms, 125; classed as basic requirements for competitiveness for Trinidad and Tobago; all indicators that I am not very proud of today.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. SHRIKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The other areas such as the Efficiency enhancers, the second category, and the one that stands out most there is the Goods market efficiency which has a rank of 104 out of 140 and the market size which is 102. What is keeping our market efficiency down? Burdens of customs procedures, 127; Degree of customer orientation, 137; Agricultural policy costs, 113; Trade tariffs and duties, 122; all affecting our competitiveness. And the last area that the report looked at was Innovation: Capacity for innovation, 106; Company spending on R&D, 119; and the University-industry collaboration in R&D, 105.

Madam President, I am saying today that if our economy is to progress, if it is to experience economic growth, we need to be more competitive. These indicators are saying that our nation and our competitiveness as a nation, we have not progressed over the last four to five years, and it is an area that we must address.

Under the category Innovation, we looked at University-industry collaboration in R&D and I just want to say here that we are seeing an increased expenditure on GATE and we are hearing about rationalizing of GATE expenditure for those who can afford and those who may not be able to afford, and that is okay. But I also want to suggest that one of the ways in which we can rationalize GATE is to determine the skills set that is required for the advancement of Trinidad and Tobago, and fund those programmes whether or not those students could afford it, yes or no. This would actually allow meaningful value to be derived from our educational system and the funding that is provided by GATE.

Madam President, we have been stuck at the bottom of the competitiveness ranking for too long and Governments, successive Governments, have left us here. I am asking today, from this Bench, that the present Government assists and puts policies in place to allow us to be able to, at least, move into the upper half of that Index over the next two to three years.

Financing the deficit: Madam President, having explored the need to diversify and improve our competitiveness, our economy is being most impacted by the need to become more competitive. But when we look at financing the deficit that the hon. Minister has put forward, we are seeing here that there are approximately 200,000 small and medium-size businesses in Trinidad and Tobago, employing in excess of 200,000 people, one-third of the workforce, and contributing more than 28 per cent of GDP. The CSO estimates that small and medium-size businesses constitute over 85 per cent of all registered businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, when we introduce these taxation measures—as proposed by the hon. Minister—a 300 per cent in Business Levy, a 300 per cent in the Green Fund Levy, a re-introduction of the property tax at old rates until revised, we are saying that these measures can have a direct impact on the number of, or on the small and medium size businesses which dominate or which constitute the majority of businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us examine the Green Fund Levy. According to the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, Chap. 77:01, Part XIV, the purpose of the Green Fund is to provide financial assistance to community groups and organizations for activities related to: reforestation, remediation, environmental education, public awareness of the environmental issues and conservation of the environment. Madam President, today we are seeing the possibility of the increase in Green Fund going towards meeting recurrent expenditure. This is not in alignment with the law which governs the Green Fund.

Business Levy: we are seeing a 300 per cent increase in business from 0.2 per cent to 0.6 per cent. But again, as the Minister rightly pointed out, Business Levy, it is not an income earning tax by itself, it is a prepayment by corporations which we get a credit for against corporation tax at the end of the year. So whatever business levy you pay during the year is deducted from your corporation tax due. So then, by increasing business levy, we are not really increasing taxation or revenue, we are actually offsetting it by the tax credit to be derived later on from corporation tax. It is in this light that I would like to say that the revenue projected to be earned from the increase in business levy may not actually materialize. The issue here is that the funds were directed towards dealing with the fiscal deficit. If it is not realized, the fiscal deficit remains exposed again.

VAT has been decreased from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. My challenge here is to understand, why did we increase Business Levy, why did we increase Green Fund Levy, but we sought to decrease VAT? I know that there may have been alternative reasons but what I am saying is in a time or at a time when revenue generation and earning is important and critical for Trinidad and Tobago, we would have reduced a particular tax for which the country is comfortable with since its inception. So I am asking here with respect to VAT: although there was a \$4 billion projected increase in VAT revenue, if this decrease in VAT does not bring about a quantum of revenue to be derived, \$4 billion represents roughly 20 per cent of the fiscal deficit. Therefore, if it is not fully derived, the fiscal deficit remains exposed again.

To touch on another point with respect to the sale of assets programme, I am a bit concerned about this and I want to use the dividends that the Government receives from NGC as the example. We are seeing use of dividends to be derived from NGC for funding recurrent or current expenditure. The dividend is the payback to Government for the investment made in the past and the Government is entitled to use that dividend whichever way they chose because that is their return on investment and I am okay with that. The challenge I am having here is

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. SHRIKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

with the IPO that was released. Here it is, we are seeing that the Government raising revenue from an IPO and we are seeing here that as the funds are raised from the energy sector, the sector that requires investment, the sector where declining revenues are being experienced, the sectors that we need to develop, we are consuming the entire capital raised from that sector for current expenditure. In years to come, there would be no benefit from this money that was actually raised from this IPO.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Excellent point! [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. T. Shrikissoon: So we are actually consuming the potential for—

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Eating our capital.

Sen. T. Shrikissoon: Exactly. Eating our capital, as Dr. Dhan would say. Very much concerned.

With respect to Clico, we are seeing the sale of assets being used to fund current expenditure. May I remind this honourable House that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago incurred significant debt in this bailout plan, and to use the revenue to be derived from assets and not putting it in place to offset the debt that has to be repaid into the future is a dangerous precedent which leaves our debt level higher and not addressed. It is important that we do so.

As I come to the end of my contribution, two issues that I must address and I must speak of, is the labour issues and foreign exchange reserve position of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago enjoys a low unemployment rate of less than 5 per cent, but at the low levels of employment, the majority of the business sector is starved for workers. So we are seeing here a lower unemployment rate but the business sector is starved for labour. This situation clearly retards investment. What is alarming in this case, over the past years, we are seeing increase in expenditure on programmes such as CEPEP and URP. In this budget, there was not anything explicit on that issue so we await the Government's response to see how we can take this labour portfolio away from those products or programmes and incorporate it into our productive sector.

With respect to foreign exchange, I commend the Minister for intervening and at least going back to an old distribution system that could somehow, in some way, ease the burden of the supply of foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*] What I am concerned with, though, is the demand created for foreign exchange in Trinidad and Tobago. We know that the manufacturing sector or the business sector requires foreign exchange and they must be prioritized.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

But, on an October 01 edition of the *Business Guardian*, Mr. Ramesh Ramdeen, CEO of TTMA, reports:

“Foreign credit card purchases devoured \$570 million for the year so far. This excludes today’s Cyber Monday...and upcoming Christmas purchases.”

In the last year, \$530 million; \$1 billion over two years. This practice is saying that as individuals, as consumers, we are consuming US \$1.6 million per day via online transactions. What is worse about this is that this is technically an import and can have and would have a negative impact on the economy. So while the supply of foreign exchange is important, we need to consider the demand that we create for foreign exchange.

Financial autonomy: I would also like to commend the hon. Minister of Finance for giving consideration to the financial autonomy of the Judiciary. I am sure that this financial autonomy will improve the efficiency of the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago. It is in my view, should there be earlier crime detection by the police service coupled with greater efficiency in the administration of justice, the possibility of reduced crime can occur as this can, in itself, be a prohibition for people who choose to engage in this act.

So we are seeing here that this financial autonomy can bring about effectiveness in the Judiciary, independence of the Judiciary not compromised and being effective.

12.00 noon

Our Constitution allows us to recognize three arms of Government: the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature. The Executive being the Government’s Cabinet, and we are seeing here that the Government has financial autonomy and that is why we are here to debate the issues. We are now seeing that financial autonomy given to the Judiciary and I applaud the initiative. What I would like to suggest today is that our Head of State, Office of the President, remains under the supervisory control of the Government. In keeping with independence, in keeping with the effectiveness of performing duties, I would like to suggest that financial autonomy also be considered for the Office of the President.

Madam President, as I close I would just like to summarize:

1. The need to restrict expenditure so as to reduce continuous financial deficits;

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. SHRIKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

2. The immediate examination of our country's debt profile and our ability to service our obligations;
3. The need to diversify an economy, not just to meet Government expenditure but to build a sustainable economy within all sectors;
4. Care needs to be given to the use of the Green Fund as we are violating the law which governs the use of these funds;
5. Business levy may not bring in the projected revenue as this is a tax credit against corporation tax.

Lowering of VAT may not earn all of the additional revenue the Minister has projected, and our prosperity in our nation lies at the heart of productivity. Production is actually one of our watch words. Our capacity to produce is directly impacted on our competitiveness. Can we strive to make our nation more competitive?

The demand for foreign exchange, the demand for foreign exchange, not only the supply, must be managed. Labour shortages, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises must be addressed. The budget statement 2016 only really paid attention to labour at a macro level and not a micro level. And to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, my humble suggestion of please consider financial autonomy for the Office of the President.

With these few words, I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*].

Sen. Daniel Dookie: Thank you very much, Madam President. It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to participate in this debate, and let me also take the opportunity to offer to you my congratulations on your appointment as President of the Senate and, of course, to congratulate my colleague, Sen. De Freitas, on his appointment to the office of Vice-President of the Senate.

Madam President, I had the pleasure of listening to the hon. Minister of Finance in both Houses and I would like to describe the structure of his presentation as an artist painting a picture. He began to paint a picture of where we came from and as he continued his portrait, he painted a picture of where we are. And as he engaged his presentation he painted a picture of where this Government would like to take Trinidad and Tobago and he also painted a picture of how we are going to get there. And as he painted this picture of where we came from, the picture seemed very unattractive. But he continued his painting, highlighting where we are today, and the unattractiveness seemed more glaring.

But Madam President, as he continued to paint the picture of where we are going as a nation, the portrait began to look beautiful. And as he highlighted in his painting of his budget picture, how we are going to get there, I felt optimistic, I felt happy, because what started off as a painting that was unattractive ended up as a beautiful portrait of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Over the next few minutes I would like to engage in some details regarding where we came from, where we are today, where we are going, and how we are going to get there.

As I examine the period 2010 to 2015, where we came from, I would like to state that corruption, wastage, inefficacy, and in particular deliberate inefficiency, is a multibillion-dollar business enterprise, designed to benefit those who have masterminded it. Madam President, I can describe where we came from, as indeed the hon. Minister of Finance did in this presentation 2010 to 2015, as the period of corruption, wastage, inefficiency and deliberate inefficiency.

Madam President, that leads us to where we are today, when you examine our current condition as an economy. The hon. Minister of Finance, indeed, highlighted the challenges we face with major balance of payment deficits, a loss in our official reserves, increased fiscal deficit amounting previously to 4.2 per cent of GDP, arrears in relation to wage settlement, cash flow challenges, cash balances challenges, increases in our public sector debt. And, Madam President, what this means for this new Government is to put into action prudent measures to bring about a balanced budget by the year 2018, as articulated by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Madam President, one would understand that given our current conditions, the Minister of Finance, would have had to address certain aspects in his fiscal package. And as he began to articulate where we would like to go as a nation, in terms of bringing about fiscal prudence, he addressed the areas of revenue collection and the elimination of wastage, corruption and inefficiency through the mechanism of institutional strengthening.

And he highlighted a number of areas or institutions in which he would like to take us, in terms of using the dynamics of these institutions to bring about fiscal prudence and he touched on a few. But before I get into a couple of them, let me state that we have witnessed a breakdown in our institutions over the last few years and we have seen the interference of the independent institutions over the last few years by crooked politicians. Madam President, every attempt has to be made to enhance our institutions as a means of development. And I dare say, interfering with these independent institutions should result in severe penalties.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. D. DOOKIE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Michael Porter, the world's renowned expert, or one of, in the areas of competitiveness and strategy said in his work, that even though you may have the right macroeconomic fundamentals and microeconomic fundamentals, if you do not have effective and strong institutions that provide an enabling environment, your competitiveness as a nation could be eroded. And he further argues that nations do not really compete, it is firms who compete and it is the competitiveness of firms that nations rely on to improve the nation's overall competitive position.

Madam President, in this regard, I would like to focus a little bit on two measures or maybe three that the hon. Minister of Finance articulated as a means of taking us to where we want to go as a nation and to bring about fiscal prudence.

On one side, I would like to address the area of revenue collection and on the other, I would like to address the area of the elimination of wastage and mismanagement. I heard the hon. Member, Sen. Mark, speak about the high cost of operating revenue authorities, but I also heard him say, as he referred to a quotation from someone, that oftentimes when you speak a portion of the truth, oftentimes the intention is to deceive.

Madam President, Sen. Mark highlighted, from my recollection, one point about revenue authorities and he focused on the cost of operating such authorities. But when you engage literature, you would come to note that autonomous revenue authorities (ARAs) are fundamental institutions in the developmental agenda of nations. [*Desk thumping*] And it is part of what is now referred to as new public management, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is taking this nation into the era of new public management. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not just about how much, but it is also about how. And revenue authorities, according to literature, as an objective, focus on getting the taxpayer to comply voluntarily. In doing so, Madam President, it is important for the Minister of Finance, as he did, to determine what is the tax potential of Trinidad and Tobago. And he would have compared that with what we actually would have collected, and in doing so, he would have identified the tax gap and he is articulating the view that our tax potential is significantly greater than the level of taxes we collect as a nation.

And he also, in his solution, is articulating the view that the Revenue Authority may be the best intervention to eliminate that gap, to close the gap between what we can potentially collect, as opposed to what we are actually collecting, Madam President. Madam President, literature teaches us that revenue authorities been very effective in closing, if not eliminating, the tax gap. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

12.15p.m.

But he did more than that, Madam President, he spoke about the need to incorporate the informal economy into the formal economy. Oftentimes in the developing world, the informal economy is larger than the formal economy. And the Minister of Finance is articulating the view through the operations and functioning of the Revenue Authority that incorporating the informal economy into the formal economy, can increase our tax performance.

So, Madam President, when you look at literature and you examine the benefits and the effectiveness of ARAs, autonomous revenue authorities that are independent, some of the objectives in terms of that particular intervention includes building trust between Government and citizens; instituting fair and equitable systems of taxation. Those two together help to improve our tax performance. If we can agree, Madam President, that our tax performance is our dependent variable, we can hypothesize that autonomous revenue authority significantly improves tax administration; found in literature; hypothesis proven.

You can also hypothesize, that ARAs significantly improves voluntary participation by taxpayers, again, found in literature, proven hypothesis. You could also hypothesize that voluntary participation significantly improves tax performance. You can also hypothesize that in developing countries, the informal economy is oftentimes larger than the formal economy. And further, you can hypothesize that bringing the informal economy into the tax system, significantly improves your tax performance.

Therefore, we can conclude that the hon. Minister of Finance is focusing on institutional strengthening. In this case, Madam President, the advent of the Revenue Authority as an intervention that will improve the tax performance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I have heard, Madam President, a number of arguments regarding property tax—as I am on the issue of tax. I think Sen. Mark described it as a regressive tax, but I do not think that is a fair assessment. I wish to state that the rationale for property tax is a benefit principle. I wish to restate that, the rationale for property tax is a benefit principle, not a cost principle or a cost disadvantage.

And literature teaches us that property tax accounts as a source of major revenue for local government authorities. In the developed world, it accounts between 40 per cent to 80 per cent of local government revenues, or .5 per cent to 4 per cent of GDP, and in the developing world, just .5 per cent of GDP or a maximum of 40 per cent of local government revenue.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. D. DOOKIE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

But, Madam President, I said it is a benefit principle because the revenue gained from this type of taxation is used to enhance the lives of the citizens of its country. [*Desk thumping*] I think I should restate that. It is a benefit principle, and the revenues gained for this type of tax is used to provide services to the people of the country, and hence improve the quality of their lives. [*Desk thumping*]

If you examine it, you have to look at the outlay versus the benefits received. Accordingly, when you look at the potential benefits that property tax revenues are used to provide in terms of servicing communities, you often find as found in literature, that one of the benefits that this type of tax provides—and that is in the context of using the revenue to provide services—is that it increases the property value of citizens of the country.

Madam President, you can hypothesize that property tax is a fair and equitable tax, supported in literature. You could also hypothesize further, that property tax enhances the living standards of citizens, and you can further hypothesize, that the services funded by property tax, increase the value of properties owned by citizens.

Madam President, evidence to show that property tax is a benefit principle, and we ought not to run away from it. We ought not to propose this tax only focusing on what it can cost the taxpayers, but when you compare the benefits that taxpayers will receive from this type of intervention, you will conclude without doubt, that the benefits far outweigh the initial outlay. [*Desk thumping*]

So, on the revenue side as articulated by the hon. Minister of Finance, certainly our tax potential needs to be pursued relentlessly and the intervention of the Revenue Authority is a vehicle that can be used as other countries have used it too, to improve the tax performance of the country.

But also, the hon. Minister of Finance addressed the area of cutting wastage, corruption, inefficiency and I dare say, deliberate inefficiency, through the advent of institutional strengthening. He proposed the concept of the general accounting office. Let me state that the general accounting office concept, and the general accounting office as an institution, is a well-established institution in the developed world. The GAO, Madam President, is in the accountability business. When you look at the operations of these types of institutions worldwide, you would recognize that they have been very effective in fighting wastage, fraud, abuse and mismanagement in Government, and the outcome of that, Madam President, is value for money.

You would find that the GAO, provides significant benefits to a particular nation; it keeps the population informed; it has discretion on publishing findings; it also audits information, and they can also choose what to audit. The result of this, Madam President, is that it reduces corruption, improves inefficiency and very important, it builds trust and morale in society, a major finding of the benefit of the general accounting office.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, if you take, for example, the Point Fortin highway, one can say that there is no formal reporting mechanism that is independent. One can argue that there is no formal reporting system as it relates to budgeting. One can further argue there is no formal reporting system to the public, reporting on issues of tendering procedure, variance, cost management, debt arrangement, and this failure to report on an independent basis, leads to a loss in confidence. The point is, that these areas of reporting and accountability can be addressed effectively by an independent general accounting office.

This is necessary because I can tell you, as long as corrupt politicians can satisfy their clientelistic network, by manipulating Government resources, they keep themselves happy and the society unhappy. Weak institutions, or no institutions, allow corrupt politicians to control Government resources and turn the delivery of public goods into favours. This conduct is referred to as “clientism”, and this becomes the *modus operandi* of corrupt Government. Madam President, this is no need for me to draw examples of favoured contractors who would have benefited through this type of conduct in recent times. But what I can say, is that if we are serious about bringing about accountability, if we have to focus on cutting wastage, eliminating corruption, improving efficiency and more than that, Madam President, weeding out deliberate inefficiency, we need to ensure that our institutions are strengthened, and what the hon. Minister of Finance is articulating, is that the general accounting office, Madam President, can provide significant benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, by ensuring that when you undertake large projects, there is value for money. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam President, the Minister of Finance examined the strengthening of institutions, on the one hand, increase our revenue collection, and that is through the advent of the Revenue Authority, and on the other hand, ensuring there is value for money by eliminating wastage, corruption, mismanagement through the advent of the general accounting office, through institutions, that have been proven to bring significant benefits to nations.

Madam President, as my colleague Sen. Shrikisoos would have articulated information from the World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report, and this is just to highlight and to prove that the direction in which the hon. Minister of Finance is taking us regarding institutional strengthening, is absolutely necessary. And quite rightly, he would have stated that there are 12 Pillars of Competitiveness. I would like to focus on the Pillar of Institution.

The hon. Senator would have identified our falling ranking. I also want to point out that there is also a weighted average score that really tells us if we are getting better or getting worse. If you look at institutions as a pillar overall, in 2011 we had a weighted

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. D. DOOKIE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

average score of 3.7. In 2015, it fell to 3.4. I should say, Madam President, that the weighted average score is from one to seven, with one being a lowest performer, seven being your highest performer. Therefore, Madam President, we have not just fallen in terms of our rank, but when you look at our weighted average score overall, we are not getting better, and this, Madam President, tells me that the hon. Minister of Finance is on the right track by ensuring that there is institutional strengthening for our nation.

12.30 p.m.

And, Madam President, just to point out a few, public trust in politicians: in 2011, 3.7; 2015, 3.4. Wastefulness in Government spending—I repeat, wastefulness in Government spending, Madam President, 3.1 in 2011, 2.5 in 2015 and, one more, Madam President, strength of investor protection, weighted average score: 6.7 in 2010, 5.8 in 2015. If we are to truly engage in improving the competitiveness of our nation, we need to ensure that we have enabling institutions to provide an enabling environment for our firms to compete.

Madam President, referring to the same report, and this is just to tell us in a more serious way how much we need the general accounting office, when you look at problematic factors in doing business, corruption was ranked as our second most problematic factor in doing business, and you could equate corruption with wastage. In 2011, it was not ranked in our first three.

And further, Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago being ranked as a high income group which sounds good, but according to the report we are in the bottom three of the least competitive economies in this particular high income category. So, Madam President, what it tells us is that we need to focus on strengthening our institutions to ensure as the Minister of Finance indicated that he is pursuing to increase our revenue collection and to ensure that there is the cut out of wastage and corruption in our affairs in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

For the next few minutes I have, Madam President, let me just speak a little bit on the role of ICT in national development. I am sure you would agree that ICT is an enabling tool and it is a major driver to development as it often helps transition your economy to a knowledge-based society, a knowledge-based economy and also promotes the improvement in business intelligence which, by the way, helps to improve the ease of doing business. Madam President, where we were in 2010? We had the Data Protection Bill, the Electronic Transactions Bill passed in 2011 on the foundational work of the previous PNM administration then but, interestingly, the subsidiary work and regulations needed to make these Bills function in terms of what it can deliver through its use and through its operationalization was not done.

And in 2010, we had certain platform technologies in place and the question that arises is: what has happened since? I say this in the context that we had an entire Ministry to deal with science and technology. For, example, Madam President, we had our platform technology: e-government, and the e-government backbone providing benefits such as Government Internet gateway, access to information from Ministries. You had Government broadband network which allowed for Ministries to be sharing information—Ministries and Government agencies—and had these platform technologies been leveraged, maybe today we would have been able to have complete e-government services in Trinidad and Tobago.

I say this, Madam President, because ICT as an enabling tool, as an enabling resource, can bring about a higher quality of life for the people in our country by ensuring that if these platform technologies are used properly, you can deliver complete Government services to the people without the citizen having to leave his remote location. So, Madam President, I just wanted to share that a little bit.

In conclusion, what I attempted to do, Madam President, is to look at the budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, look at what exists in relevant literature and develop a conceptual framework. If we are to state that institutional strengthening as a latent construct—meaning that as an independent variable, the revenue authority and the general accounting office considered as institutional strengthening—we can hypothesize that the revenue authority improves revenue collection, and we can further hypothesize, Madam President, that improving revenue collection would improve our fiscal performance. We could also hypothesize in our conceptual framework, Madam President, that the general accounting office, if used properly, would reduce, eliminate corruption, wastage and inefficiency and that in turn would improve our fiscal position.

We could also hypothesize, Madam President, that ICT can act as a moderating variable to moderate the relationship that exists between the revenue authority and the general accounting office working hand in hand to improve our fiscal position, working hand in hand on both the revenue collection side, working hand in hand in terms of the expenditure side by the reduction and the elimination of wastage, mismanagement and corruption. At the end of the day, Madam President, I express confidence that success in pursuing these initiatives as articulated by the hon. Minister of Finance would lead to an improvement in our fiscal position, balancing the budget by the year 2018 and, of course, going further, engaging or having fiscal surpluses.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. D. DOOKIE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

So, Madam President, let me say what a joy it has been to participate in this debate. I trust that my contribution would have added value and, so Madam President, I sincerely thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Thank you very much, Sen. Dookie. I think this is an appropriate time to take the lunch break. So this sitting will be suspended until 1.45 p.m. We will return at 1.45 p.m.

12.38 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: Madam President, as a young person, as a woman, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, it is my honour and it is a privilege for a person with a humble background, that is myself, to stand in this Chamber in these hallowed halls of Parliament referred to as “the seat of democracy in Trinidad and Tobago” to deliver my maiden address in this budget debate. [*Desk thumping*]

Over the past few weeks, following the debate in the Lower House on this Bill, the people of this nation made their voices heard with regard to the expectation of the conduct of Members in this Upper House, as well as the Lower House of Parliament. The people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President, want power to be exercised with dignity and grace, not with vengeance and spite. [*Desk thumping*] I trust that we as leaders here will set the example. I trust that in my time here, I will not violate that expectation, and I implore the same of my colleagues on both sides of the Senate, as well as on the Independent Bench.

But as I say that, Madam President, I want to bring your attention to our Standing Orders, “Rules of the Debate”, which speaks to “Time and Manner of Speaking” and Standing Order 42(5) indicates that:

“It shall not be proper for a Member to leave the Senate immediately after speaking.”

I raise this, Madam President, because on reflection after the presentation of the hon. Minister this morning, he left immediately after. And, Madam President, when a person comes to this Senate they ought to follow the rules and the guidelines and if nothing else, I found it was very rude and distasteful for him to speak and get up and leave.

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, if I may, with respect to the enforcement of the Standing Orders, I trust that you would leave that to the Presiding Officer. All right?

Sen. K. Ameen: Certainly, Madam President.

Madam President: Let us not make any statements at this stage about the absent of other Members.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, I simply wanted to bring it to your attention, because as we begin this first day it is very important for us to ensure that we start on a good foot, and I wanted to bring it to your attention.

1.50 p.m.

Madam President, I also want to congratulate you on your selection, your election, and I want to wish you the best in the Chair, and I know that Trinidad and Tobago is looking. Madam President, in the lead up to the general election the People's National Movement had been very vocal in their disapproval of the way the economy was being managed by the People's Partnership Government. They gave their commitment to do things differently and the population was so anxious to see what would come in the first budget. If this budget was meant to kick start the confidence in this new Government, I can tell you that they have instead created fear, doubt and regret in the minds of citizens.

This budget brought property tax, increase in VAT, increase in prices of goods and services. The insistence, Madam President, of a multimillion-dollar rapid rail project at a time when we face so many challenges. Madam President, in my contribution I will seek to look at the impact this budget will have on the youth of our nation, the draconian removal of the gender development from this budget, the emasculation of local Government, the impact of the callous failure of this Government to keep the social safety net intact to protect the most vulnerable in our country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I came into politics because of my passion for people and because of my dedication to improving the lives of people in our country. I truly believe in creating opportunities for our young citizens and building Trinidad and Tobago's capacity and global competitiveness through our future generation. The youth is the hope of our future. The challenges of the urban youth on the East-West Corridor, those from the middle-class homes and the rural youth in Trinidad and Tobago, vary across ethnicity and geographic locations, but it is important that every young person has opportunities to access education and to reach their full potential. As a nation, we are tomorrow, the opportunities we create for our youths today.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. AMEEN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, I believe that the failure of this Government to provide GATE to all students as proposed in this budget will promote social segregation along economic lines and classism in education in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in the labour market. This Government has an unrealistic approach to the crisis that faces young people in acquiring tertiary education in this country. Students of low income, middle income, as well as privileged homes deserve the same opportunities as top performers to access tertiary education, [*Desk thumping*] and this access must continue in academics, as well as in the technical and vocational studies so that they can make use of opportunities in the job market, locally, regionally and internationally. There are many opportunities, both in the private sector and in the public sector that our young people cannot access because they simply do not qualify and reduction in this funding of GATE will reduce our young people's chances of succeeding.

Madam President, I found it rather unfortunate that the Minister of Finance during the Standing Committee's examination of this budget, and again this morning, asked: why should a person whose family is rich be entitled to GATE? So, if a young person lives on their own they might get funding, but if they continue to live with their family and you think that they are rich, no funding? What is the message we are sending? What are we creating? Madam President, I believe that there is too much room for discrimination with the proposal made in this budget for GATE, and there is a likely chance that what happened with Government's scholarship going to friends, family and party affiliates under the last PNM regime could happen again, and we must not allow that. [*Desk thumping*] Please, do not make tertiary education funding a welfare system. It is a myth that class does not exist in Trinidad and Tobago, and education is a key to removing those barriers—the great Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world” and our country.

I honour the hard work all students put into graduate and postgraduate studies, the sacrifices that families make, and this Government should honour that too by leaving GATE intact. Madam President, I listened to announcements of a graduate programme and that is nothing new, the graduate programme exists, but, you know, opportunity is a hell of a thing. The Executive Report on the Committee on Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago, which was chaired by Professor Selwyn Ryan, reported in 2013 that 87 per cent of males and 79 per cent of females did not pursue continuing education. The People's Partnership Government in the last five years brought the rate of tertiary education participation up to 65 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Psychologists agree that greater dissatisfaction in their quality of life is often the root of disruptive behaviour of young people in communities and increase their predisposition to risky behaviour that could bring them in conflict with the law. In other words, ask any “youth man” in the prison system or on the street and they will tell you, frustration, fight down; dissatisfaction with their quality of life leads to violence in schools, use of drugs, guns, and violent crimes in the community—lack of opportunities.

Madam President, this budget failed to expand and develop the opportunities available to young people. I mentioned before that the graduate programme is not new. The proposal to increase the OJT stipend will bring that stipend up to about \$6,000, and that is good for the OJT, but that raises their stipend above many—the salary for many entry-level jobs, and there are people in the public service who are saying, “You want to pay OJT more money but you are grouching to pay me my back pay”. The Minister of Finance made a big issue about the negotiations, the conclusion of negotiations and the payment that would then be due to public servants. People, young people as well, who are entering the workforce will have that challenge to have certain responsibilities but to see OJT persons being paid more money than they are, and we have to look at that.

Madam President, the People’s Partnership approach of decentralization of education evened the playing field for the urban youth, the at-risk youth, as well as the rural youth. Placing academic and technical and vocational programmes in communities increased access, increased completion rates and graduation numbers. It lends to entrepreneurship, small and medium business growth, stimulating local economies, bringing more income into families and improving communities. When we speak about fighting murders and violent crime, when we speak about reaching our at-risk youth, we must speak about creating opportunities, real opportunities that are accessible to them. Sadly, there are many areas deemed hot spots, and, sadly, many of those areas are represented by Members in the Lower House from the party in Government, and the representation should have spoken more into measures in this budget, measures to be proposed to reach those at-risk youth in the hot spots.

Madam President, I move to gender, but, as I spoke about young people, I want to join in congratulating Shivani Prabhudial of Lakshmi Girls’ and Ashisha Persad of Naparima Girls’ College, joint winners of the President’s Gold Medal who topped the list of scholarship winners for 2015. [*Desk thumping*] More and more girls are excelling in this country to the extent that boys are considered at-risk. The challenges these girls will face as they chart their way into the world will be very different to that of the current generation of female leaders. International culture is re-examining the very definition of gender. Policies and programmes must be a part of every Government’s agenda.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. AMEEN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, do you know that the word “gender” is not mentioned even once in this budget? The budget is a slap in the face of decades of Caribbean feminism. This invisibility is not about a letterhead, it reverses decades of State practice in this country and Caribbean advocacy. It is a step against the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals 2015—2030, which were adopted at the General Assembly meeting a couple of weeks ago in New York. At that assembly Barack Obama, President of the United States, said:

“When women succeed, America succeeds. And we should be choosing policies that benefit...us.”

I endorse these sentiments. When women succeed in this country, Trinidad and Tobago succeeds. Is this Government choosing policy that would benefit all of us—our women and girls—without leaving our men and boys behind?

This Government has trivialized gender development in this budget. Social development and family services is not gender development. I trust that this Government, in fact, I call on the Government to demonstrate a public commitment to women’s rights and gender equality by bringing back the Ministry of Gender Development. [*Desk thumping*] With the exclusion of the Ministry of Gender how can there be focus on gender issues in a meaningful way? Gender equality issues are still at large and they include inequality in women’s wages, the high incidence of poverty amongst women-headed households, domestic violence, sexual harassment, high rates of maternal and infant mortality, women and leadership, the achievement of girls and boys in education. Madam President, there is no mention of the gender policy in the budget, but I do acknowledge that the PNM manifesto hinted at going back to the 2009 proposals, but that did not manifest itself in the budget that was presented.

2.05 p.m.

Madam President: Senators, I want to remind all Senators of Standing Order 51(1)(e) where we listen in silence. There is also a convention that when a Senator is making a maiden contribution that there are no interruptions. Can we listen to the Senator, please. Thank you.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you very much for your protection, Madam President.

I ask: what happens to projects such as the Women City Centre project, the national women commission; programmes for domestic violence and safe homes for women? Family services in my opinion does not address gender development.

There is the issue of gender budgeting as well. It takes policy and clear directive to ensure that those things make their way across the board. But instead what we have seen is a violation, and it is not a matter of making it a political issue, because at the end of the day, regardless of who is in power, the citizens of this country deserve to have those opportunities and that development.

Madam President, I move now to the proposal in the social benefits. This budget effectively decreased the buying power of citizens. Whatever your salary is, your salary went down effectively. The VAT reduction headline is a huge deception. The proposal to decrease the VAT from 15 to 12.5 per cent, but then increase the range of items that we have to pay VAT on, is a very dangerous lie and misconception put forward to the public and citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] I, like the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, look forward to the unveiling of the items that will remain free of VAT, as was made under the previous administration.

Because of this decrease in buying power, it becomes so much more important to keep our social safety net in place. [*Interruption*] Madam President, “dey not bothering me, yuh know”, I could go ahead. It becomes very important to keep our social safety net in place. While I encourage transparency, as spoken to in the budget with regard to social support programmes, I want to urge Members of the Government, do not play political football with the most vulnerable in our society. Do not point fingers at politicians. The new Members of Parliament on the Government Bench, will face the same frustrations that led to the constituency distribution programme of some of those social services. I agree you should have continuous audit and hold those persons in public service who are responsible for those programmes accountable.

I also want to urge that the empowerment element that was included in all of those programmes be maintained. Teach people to fish, rather than give them a fish. Wean them off of the programme so that we do not become welfare people. Many of these programmes, for example, if you are participating and you are the recipient of a food card, you are expected to participate in empowerment exercises. Those people who qualify for the baby care grant would be required to participate in parenting classes and so on, which at the end of the day would make them more independent and less likely to return for the benefit.

Social programmes must not be made inaccessible to those who need them most because of additional bureaucracy. I can tell you from my own experience in working in communities, the people who need it the most very often are not going to line up or sit in the social welfare office all day. Because they want to help themselves, they will go out there and attempt to help themselves. Very often people who are not deserving are the ones who will find time to sit in the office and return every day, and that bureaucracy is what separates the people who really need and those people who only want. So we must be careful that we do not eliminate those who really need it.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. AMEEN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, I want to just slip across to local government. I heard the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government on TV6 yesterday. He spoke very well about allowing primary health care, social services and so on to be administered by local government. I just want to remind that this is the same Government who immediately took away the power of Members of Parliament and constituency offices to have a say in the distribution of social services, and now there is a suggestion to have councillors do the same distribution. I wonder if it was just a proposal, a suggestion or what it was.

Madam President, local government is the arm of government that is closest to people. In this budget the allocation of every regional corporation has been slashed by up to \$8 million each. That is only for their development programmes. We speak about empowering local government. The Act that governs local government came into being in 1990 and, time and time again, local government strengthening will be spoken about in the public domain, but the truth of the matter is that local government is a creature of politics as is central government. There are many who would have difficulties relinquishing certain powers to local government.

Madam President, because of the People's Partnership Government empowering local government, councillors are actually now better off than Senators, and I will tell you why. The People's Partnership introduced councillor offices. Councillors now have offices, they have staff, they have a vote to pay expenses for their offices. Senators do not have offices. If I have to see someone, I might have to see them in my gallery at home. Where do you meet with constituents? How do you improve representation? The People's Partnership did that with the introduction of councillors' offices. The appointment of chief officers after two decades of the law providing for it was done under the People's Partnership Government. Under the People's Partnership Government there was increased funding for regional corporations across the board. In addition, every Ministry took an approach to have corporations have a say as to where projects went, and there were meaningful projects and a variety of projects. It was not just about paving roads.

Unfortunately, I see decreases, so that regional corporations will have challenges in maintaining cemeteries, maintaining roads, continuing to provide sanitation services, yet we speak about empowerment. One of the saddest things I heard in that interview on TV6 Morning Edition—and I trust that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government could somehow dispute that in his contribution in this House—was that there is a proposal, a suggestion, to remove proportional representation from local government.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The introduction of proportional representation increases the say that our citizens have. I want to urge that proportional representation be allowed to find its way into more areas of representation rather than being removed. That, in my opinion, will be a reversal of a positive step in democracy in our country. Removing proportional representation will be taking power away from the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I sat as a councillor in 2003, my first election. In that term elections were due in 2006, three years after, and for four continuous years, elections were postponed under the guise of local government reform. I look forward to the Minister giving the assurance that this PNM Government will not postpone local government election. I ask that particularly because there was an announcement for by-elections, and it is traditional that when you are less than a year away from an election that you do not keep the by-election to fill the vacancy. I am wondering if the announcement of by-elections, less than one year from local government election, is a signal of the intent or the possibility to postpone the local government election again. I trust that—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Khan: You want to give way a little bit?

Sen. K. Ameen: I know in your contribution you will address it. It is a very real concern. I want the Minister, Madam President, to address it in a meaningful way. I look forward to his contribution in particular, because as a person coming out of local government I know how critical that first arm of representation is to people.

Madam President, I want to tell you that this budget has really put people on a back foot in this country. I come from a very grass root, if want to call it that, community and I can tell you of the regret in the minds of some of the people. Today I just want to reiterate, as I close, that it is important for this Government to ensure that whatever budget allocations are made under the various Heads, that they will be utilized in a meaningful way to continue to provide opportunities for the young people of our nation, not just by saying we want to develop young people, but by putting meaningful and realistic programmes in place.

I want to hear from the Government some reversal of the draconian removal of gender development, and the lack of mention in the budget the fact that it is not catered for. I also want to hear about the proposals for local government, the emasculation of local government, and I also look forward to hearing the Government's measures to keep the social safety net intact to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Madam President, I thank you for this opportunity.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

2.20 p.m.

Madam President: May I congratulate Sen. Ameen on her maiden contribution.
[*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. It is a signature honour for me to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015. As usual before I begin, let me once again congratulate you on your election as President of the Senate.

Madam President, on September 07 a new administration was elected into office, and this is our first budget presentation. And from all indications it seems that we are on the right track. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, Member for Diego Martin North/East, and my own MP incidentally, for a job well done. [*Desk thumping*] He had one month and he surely stamped his authority on this budget.

I know there was some apprehension when an engineer, a former Minister of Works and Transport, was selected by the hon. Prime Minister to be the Minister of Finance and not an accountant or an economist. But I want to say, Madam President, that an engineering mind is one steeped in logic, systems, cause and effect. It is data driven, situation driven and seeks logical and scientific outcomes to problems. As an engineer myself, I fully endorse this approach of the hon. Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] and I have no doubt that the hon. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East will prove to be one of the better Ministers of Finance [*Desk thumping*] that this country has seen. Having inflated his ego, I now want to say that the hon. Minister of Finance had no intention of breaking the Standing Orders. And just for the record, I hope I am not invading on the President's authority, but it says that:

“It shall not be proper for a Member to leave the Senate immediately after speaking.”

I was just wondering whether he is a Member. But having said that, Madam President—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, I am so sorry. But if you look at the interpretation section, Member means either a Member of the Senate or a Minister from the House of Representatives.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I stand corrected, Madam President. But having said that, he had no intention of breaking the Standing Orders. There was an important meeting as he spoke, as he was delivering his presentation, between our Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the hon. Prime Minister of Grenada which he had to attend, so he kindly asked to be excused. So just for the record.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for his astute and visionary leadership in leading the People's National Movement Government to an election victory on September 07. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam President, I want to draw to the attention of this Senate one aspect of Dr. Rowley's leadership that is worthy of special mention, and that is his focus on the youths. The hon. Senator, Miss Ameen indicated gender and youth. On assuming the role of political leader of the PNM way back in 2010, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley may a clarion call for the youths of this country to come forward and take charge. This they have done admirably over four elections. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam President, as we kick off this debate in this Senate, like the other place, our team here is made up largely of fresh, young faces. [*Desk thumping*] I wish I could have said the same thing for the other side—save and except Sen. Ameen. But I proudly say today in this Senate that the People's National Movement has put the future of this country into the hands of the next generation of leaders. [*Desk thumping*]

I now want to begin my core contribution on an aspect of the budget that has gone largely unnoticed until this morning because a lot has been said about developed countries and we want to be a developed country by 2020, 2030. UNC said they want to be First World. All that was said. Developed country has nothing to do with skyscrapers and infrastructure deficit.

Take Switzerland, for example. There are very few skyscrapers in Switzerland, but they tend to lead in all aspects of human development by the United Nations—corruption, happiness, what have you. And it all has to do with the governance and the strength of public institutions. Sen. Shrikissoo mentioned how important institutional strengthening is.

And it is in that context I was happy to hear the Minister of Finance this morning paying particular attention in delivering this debate on the institutional imperatives of the People's National Movement Government. He spoke about the creation of the Revenue Authority. He spoke about the creation of the statistical institute. He spoke about the creation of the general accounting office.

And I just want to add a fourth one here, the economic development board. Because the economic development board will now deal with medium and long-term economic planning. This is the modern equivalent of the old five-year development plan, and there is so much technology now, so much software. You can do simulation; you can do forecasting; you can do scenario building. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir—these are all available tools to the economist now in their predictive models for the performance of the economy, and in particular scenario building.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

So, Madam President, the institutional strengthening component of the budget I am extremely happy about and this administration is also very happy about. [*Desk thumping*] With regard to the macroeconomic parameters, a lot will be said about that, in particular my colleague Sen. Lester Henry will go at depth in dealing with the macroeconomic parameters, how we left it in 2010 and how we have met it now in 2015. But I just want to quote one aspect of this budget presentation which I think captured the whole sense of 2010 vis-à-vis 2015. It is on page 14.

“Madam Speaker, notwithstanding billions of dollars in borrowings, tax amnesties, extraordinary dividends, sale of assets, and high oil and gas prices our cash balances at the Treasury moved from a positive \$6.5 billion on May 24, 2010...to a negative of \$8.5 billion in the middle of September 2015, a reversal of \$15.0 billion.”

The Minister of Finance went on to say:

“What this means is that we are unable to use the resources of our surplus funds, including the Green Fund...”

To correct Sen. Shrikissoon, we did not assign the Green Fund to recurrent expenditure. They put it as collateral against the overdraft from the Central Bank. Okay? It goes on to say:

“To put it simply, in order to maintain its inordinate and unsustainable levels of expenditure, the previous Government maxed out our overdraft at the Central Bank, taking us from a positive cash position in 2010 to a perilous situation in 2015 where we were running on fumes”—as it were—“to use the local parlance, dangerously close to the legal overdraft limit.”

To put it another way, we were on the verge of insolvency. Madam President, that is all I would say on the macroeconomic situation.

Now, I just want to speak about two other aspects of governance which we have implemented as a new Cabinet, and it has to deal with Cabinet oversight.

Madam President, there is something called the Standing Committee on Energy. This is a committee of the Cabinet. This committee’s operation is fundamental to the performance of the energy sector. The energy sector as you all are aware contributes 50 per cent of government revenue and approximately 70 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. My understanding, regrettably so, is that under the previous administration this committee, which is usually chaired by the Prime Minister, rarely met. Sometimes a year would pass and the Standing Committee of Energy in an energy-driven economy has not met. No wonder the energy sector is in the state that it is in.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Under the Manning administration the Standing Committee of Energy met religiously every month. Both Dr. Rowley and myself served on the Standing Committee of Energy under Mr. Manning. Today, under the Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, this committee has been reconvened, and it will be meeting very, very regular. [*Desk thumping*] It is chaired by the hon. Prime Minister and includes about six or seven other Government Ministers including the Chairman of Petrotrin, NGC, T&TEC and NP, and includes three other persons, Prof. Ken Julien, Mr. Malcom Jones and Mr. Steven Gardiner.

Madam President, I want to go on the record today that Prof. Ken Julien is somebody that this country should be eternally grateful for. [*Desk thumping*] It is a young Prof. Julien who became Chairman of T&TEC under Dr. Williams that brought gas turbines into the country and converted T&TEC into a gas turbine electricity-generation outfit. It is Prof. Julien who was responsible, among other people, for the industrialization of Point Lisas and going downstream of gas. [*Desk thumping*] And most importantly, Madam President, it is Prof. Julien who has been singularly responsible for this country moving into the LNG industry where it was a debate as to whether you continued downstream in Point Lisas or should go to LNG. He was responsible for the signing of Train 1. Today, this country survives on LNG. Had it not been for the LNG industry we would have been bankrupt.

And I just want to praise the hon. Basdeo Panday at this time. Because after Train 1 was signed, we demitted office in 1995, and on the verge of Trains 2 and 3, Mr. Panday had a document in front of him whether to sign off on Trains 2 and 3. And the story is told that Mr. Panday called in Prof. Julien and said, “Professor, is this a good deal?” And he said “yes”, and brother Bas signed immediately. Ladies and gentlemen, that is good leadership.

So, Madam President, the energy sector is now in good hands. We have another standing committee on infrastructure, again which is chaired by the hon. Prime Minister and we will have Cabinet oversight of all major infrastructural projects to be undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam President, I now move on to the portfolio aspect of my contribution, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. For those of you who followed the PNM’s campaign in September and August, you would have heard that our political leader virtually spoke every night on two transformational areas of governance in Trinidad and Tobago. They are, one, the implementation of the local government reform agenda and, secondly, the creation of the ministry of rural development. Put another way, I have been

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

appointed the transformational Minister, and I want to thank the Prime Minister for assigning this portfolio to me and to assure him that when I succeed—and I say when I succeed—in this exercise, Trinidad will be a totally different place in terms of systems, in terms of governance, in terms of service delivery and in terms of the developmental adjustment as we move the pendulum from urban to rural [*Desk thumping*] and to semi-rural.

So allow me, Madam President, to quote quite extensively from the best manifesto that was ever prepared in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And to my good friend the author who is sitting two chairs on my right. Madam President, I read from page 54 of this glorious document.

2.35 p.m.

“To achieve this transformation, the PNM will:

1. Amend the relevant revenue and taxation laws to allow Local Government bodies to retain certain taxes collected within their boundaries.”

—in particular, land and building taxes. And let me rebut land and building taxes. Tell me a country in the world that does not have land and building taxes. [*Desk thumping*] You know, there are poor people in this country, especially old people, when January reach and they “eh” get to pay their land and building taxes they are worried. There are people who feel if you do not pay your land and building taxes Government will seize your property. My mother, as January 2nd reached, first thing she is going to the Warden Office to pay land and building taxes. Whether it is a hundred, \$200 or \$2,000, sometimes it is \$6 for the lot of land.

Madam President, this is money that will stay with the regional corporation.

- “2. Amend the Municipal Corporations Act to give Local Government Corporations a level of autonomy and executive authority similar to what is now enjoyed by the Tobago House of Assembly.
3. Ensure that as a matter of policy that first preference for the award of contracts for work done by Local Government bodies is given to contractors and service providers from within the geographic boundaries of”—the—“Corporation...” [*Desk thumping*]

I do not want to cast aspersion on anybody. Over this last administration you go to Diego Martin and all the contractors are from Penal and Couva and what have you. It just does not feel right. You have to build the local economy, okay,

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

and local economy, local value, and Sen. Vasant Bharath you are well aware of all these things. Why did you all go down that way? And that is what we are trying to corroborate with this local government reform.

“4. Give greater responsibilities and authority to the Municipal Police.”

I will be working closely with the Minister of National Security to put this system in place.

“5. Provide the Local Government Bodies with additional responsibilities as it relates to planning and building approvals...”

Why should Town and Country, you have to come to Port of Spain or San Fernando to submit a plan to build a flat house? All this could be easily handled at the level of the regional corporation.

“6. Completely restructure and decentralize the system of the implementation of local”—government—“infrastructure projects.

7. As first respondents in the event of a natural disaster...”

I just want to compliment the local government bodies. This is one area that has worked excellent over the last five or six years; in fact, the last 10 years. The first respondents in the local government corporation has worked excellent and we plan to build on that as we coordinate the efforts through the office of the ODPM.

“8. Foster and create a formal consultative process and forum where NGOs, CBOs and other civil society groups and interested parties...”—in the communities could work closely with local government bodies before the implementation of plans and programmes.

And finally:

“9. Utilize the detailed regional development plans prepared for the 14 Municipal Corporations under the previous PNM Government, suitably updated, as the basis of future development.”

Just for the record, Madam President, the 2013 local government election, for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, a political party produced 14 individual manifestos for the 14 municipal corporations. [*Desk thumping*] Again, I do not want to tell you who the author is, but he is putting his hands up. [*Laughter*]

[*Sen. Sinanan raises hand*]

So, Madam President, we are serious about local government reform. Local government reform has been, Sen. Ameen said a lot has been said about it in the past. I will go back in history, there was a Hazel Manning plan where a lot of time and effort

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

was spent on the local government reform process. More recently, there was the Suruj Rambachan consultation in 2013, and a lot of good ideas are locked into those two documents. But, what these programmes lacked was the commitment to totally and truly devolve power and authority.

Because, Madam President, we are steeped and trained in centralized power. The power of the Cabinet, the power of the Minister. Nobody wants to give it up. For local government reform to work, it is our thesis that the umbilical cord must be cut from the Ministry of Local Government. [*Desk thumping*] Because you cannot be half pregnant, it is either you are devolving power or you are not. The example I like to quote is the US system. The Governor of the State of Georgia is the Governor of the State of Georgia. Obama cannot tell him what to do, you know. He runs the State. It does not matter whether he is Republican or Democrat. Federal government is different to local government, to State government, and that is the system we plan to implement. [*Desk thumping*]

So, if Penal/Debe Corporation and if Princes Town Corporation, as my good friend Sen. Shrikissoon, remains in the arms of the UNC, so be it. “We ent afraid that, you know”. We may never win the 14 corporations, but what we will do, it would not stop us from devolving power to the corporations and let them handle their own—[*Desk thumping*]

It is in that context, Madam President, as we speak with all this budget debate and thing going on, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government have already set up two committees. One is a Ministerial Oversight Committee whose mandate is to provide oversight for the transitioning of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and to ensure the highest level of collaboration among key Ministries and Government agency. That ministerial committee is chaired by your good self and includes four other Ministers. And there is a technical committee who will do all the hard work as it were, and that committee is headed by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and it includes, inter alia, some local government stalwarts in the person of Mr. Martin “Terry” Rondon, Alderman Clyde Paul, the Mayor of Point Fortin; Mr. Jarrette Narine, Mr. Lennox Sankersingh, some of the guys who have been working this local government system for quite a while.

So, Madam President, we are serious, and I just want to go on the record to say that if you go through the local government budget, as Sen. Ameen has said, we know because it was based on the old mould, and it is under-resourced, and this will be the last year that it will be under-resourced. Because, from next year as we roll out this empowered regional corporation—because what used to happen is that the local government system is under-resourced, but the work is being done by other state agencies and other special purpose companies.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

For example, last year and the year before, the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, under an infamous sport Minister fixed hundreds of grounds to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Okay, none of it coming through the corporation. You just appear and you just see lights on a ground and not knowing from whence the authority came, and what we have is this myriad of state entities that is cross wiring the system among themselves, and everybody hustling to do a work, and it is not coming through the correct channels of the local government institutions, and that is where local government authorities will now be empowered to handle all works in their area. As I said, this is the last year of the under-resourcing of local government, and we have a tight timeline to implement this reform.

To address Sen. Ameen's question, I want to give this Senate and the nation the assurance that under no circumstance, and I mean no circumstance, whether reform finish, in between, or not finished, that this PNM administration will postpone the local government election. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I leave local government, Madam President, I have something to expose here this evening [*Holds up document*] it is called One Alexandra Place. "Mr. Vasant Bharath watching meh and smiling". One Alexandra Place was supposed to be the headquarters of the Ministry of Local Government. In October 2009 a lease was entered into between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Nahous Investments Limited. A lease that was renegotiated in August 2010 to the tune of \$600,000 plus VAT—monthly lease \$600,000 plus VAT. Everybody knows the building, One Alexandra Place. The Ministry of Local Government entered into a contract in February 2010 with the Government Human Resource Services Company Limited to do design and layout for the outfitting, and with Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited to provide project management.

In April of 2010, tenders were invited, Cabinet approved \$27 million for the project and bids ranged between \$18 million to \$23 million. Unfortunately, the tender was aborted because it was claimed that the tender document did not provide sufficient information to allow the tenderers to bid properly. Having said so, a new project charter was done by Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, and in September 2011 a new tender went out. Eight companies were invited to bid. Two actually submitted bids. These two companies are called; Elvis Marketing Limited and COSL. Remember that, COSL. Elvis Marketing Limited was disqualified for failing the technical evaluation. What is so technical about

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

outfitting a building? All outfitting means is partitioning and putting office furniture, you know. So, you ended up with a sole selective tender for outfitting a building, a non-specialized contract. And the sole selective tender was coming from a company that had no track record in outfitting buildings. Believe it or not, a contract that was originally tendered ranging from \$18 million to \$23 million, COSL bid price was \$74.3 million.

Hon. Senator: My goodness.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The board of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited wrote the Ministry of Local Government saying that they have a sole selective tender, but the price is 200 per cent higher than the estimated price. I can trace no correspondence after that, save and except a Cabinet Note which authorizes PSAEL to spend \$71.17 million on the project.

It was a PS—I do not want to call his name in the House—who was so enraged by this action that he intervened. He contracted a quantity surveyor to evaluate the quantum of work done on One Alexandra Place, and with a push and a stretch, the quantity surveyor valued the work done as at \$24.12 million. The amount paid up to that time was \$28.7 million. The outstanding invoices amount to \$30.96 million. This matter is now before the Solicitor General for her advice.

Hon. Imbert: With onward transmission to the police.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, onward transmission to some law enforcement agency. Since leasing the building, Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago citizens have paid \$45.52 million in lease rent for the five years.

Hon. Senator: Repeat that, how much?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Forty-five point five two million dollars in lease rent. The contract value, as we speak, is \$71.17 million, bringing it to a total of \$116.69 million, and not a single person has occupied that building today.

Madam President, I want to make this point to you today and to the nation, in particular, we, during the course of this budget debate have been announcing these scandals; we are not doing this for the entertainment of Trinidad and Tobago, you know. We plan to deal frontally with some of these matters. [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to leave you all with one other piece of information here. Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, which is a UNC nest, if I should say so myself, the manager Project Engineering and Maintenance Services, the person who

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

signed off on this contract and who signs off on hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts under PSAEL, he was employed in 2013. He graduated with a Bachelors in Civil Engineering in 2010. He was three years old.

Hon. Senator: Three years' experience.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: An engineer with three years' experience. Hon. Colm Imbert told me that to be registered as a certified engineer you have to have four years. He is not even a registered certified engineer, but he holds the position of Manager, Project Engineering and Maintenance Services. The Manager, Legal and Estate Services, Corporate Secretary—understand Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited is the largest manager of land in Trinidad. They own all Petrotrin lands. Because Caroni lands have now been vested in the State. So, they are the private largest landowner. The Manager, Legal Estate Services and Corporate Secretary is a lawyer with five years' experience. This is the type of thing that was going on over the last five years. I say no more.

Let me just spend the final 10 or 11 minutes to speak about my pet subject, rural development. Madam President, I would like to now deal with rural development, as I just said. I just want to preface what I say, that over the years a lot of things have been said in Trinidad about discrimination; ethnic discrimination, political discrimination; some of it may well be true. I do not know. But, what I do know, as somebody who was born in Mayaro, is that if there is any discrimination occurring over the years and the decades, it was rural discrimination. Toco/Matelot, largely Africans, strong supporters of the PNM, rural neglect; Moruga, largely Africans, strong supporters of the PNM, we won Moruga, rural neglect; Cedros/Icacos, largely East Indians, part of the Point Fortin seat, strong supporters of the UNC, rural neglect.

The middle of the Cunapo Southern Main Road, Biche, midway between Rio Claro and Sangre Grande, East Indians, UNC supporters. Rural neglect.

2.50 p.m.

The point I am making is that the economic forces that foster development always favour urban areas and areas of high density settlement. I do not want to bring in Dr. Mahabir too much in this debate, but they use concepts like rate of return on investment, market size, pay-out, value added tax, multiplier effect, all that gravitates the developmental capital into the urban areas.

The point I am making, Madam President, is that the rural development can only take place at the pace and level that is required by direct Government policy intervention. This is the rationale and *raison d'être* for the creation of the Ministry of Rural Development

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

and Local Government. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, Madam President, the first policy position that was articulated by the hon. Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, it occurred on January 24, 2012 at the Basse Terre Community Centre in Moruga.

I remember it like yesterday, when he announced that the new PNM administration will have a Ministry of rural development. And to understand the importance that the Prime Minister has placed on this Ministry is that we have cut down the number of Ministries from 33 to 23 and yet he saw it fit to have a Ministry totally dedicated to rural development. That is the level of importance that had been assigned to this—[*Desk thumping*] Because rural development, for it to take place two things have to be in place. You must establish an economic base and you must establish connectivity, otherwise you do not stand a chance, like a snowball in hell.

I will quote two examples. The same example that Sen. Shrikissoon gave, Toco/Sangre Grande. The economic base will be the Port service in Tobago. The connectivity is provided for by the road from Valencia to Toco. It will open up the area for development. Tourists coming from England to Tobago could come and spend a day in Toco and go back in the afternoon. And that will spur the growth of the Toco/Matelot economy.

Coming down to Moruga/Tableland which is actually the Princes Town Corporation, includes, Moruga/Tableland, eh, so watch it. Moruga/Tableland the economic base will be provided for by the new fishing port in Moruga. [*Display a picture of the port*] This is the design for the port. That was done since I was the Member of Parliament for Moruga. It was done by Royal Haskoning, the world's premium marine engineering firm out of Holland. [*Desk thumping*] That port will be built starting from this year [*Desk thumping*] to provide an economic base for the people of Moruga. The port includes an offshore island with a causeway, with berthing facilities for 125 pirogues. Few people know that Moruga has the largest fishing fleet in Trinidad and Tobago. And it will provide cold storage facilities, marketing facilities as we build the economy of Moruga and the connectivity will be provided by a total upgrade of the Moruga Road from Petit Cafe Junction straight down to Gran Chemin. You know the geography I am speaking about.

Madam President, finally, I just want to give a taste as it were of some of the rural development policies that we are thinking about now and we are thinking about putting in place. I will quote about three or four examples.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

One, we will be creating a rural housing policy. Rural housing, we do not want no La Horquetta, and no Edinburgh 500 to invade the rural areas, where you bulldoze 30 acres of land and build 500 or 600 houses. We will be going with a programme called “Village Expansion”. I will quote Moruga as an example again. Instead of building 300 houses in one spot, you go to Marac you build 20 houses. You go to La Lune, you build 30 houses. You come to Gran Chemin you build 50 houses. You go to St. Mary’s to Samuel Cooper to Fifth Company. So at the end of the day in the Moruga area you build 300 houses, but it is spread across the various villages so the villages absorb the housing area and not vice versa. Because, Madam President, “country people does not want to leave their village”, you know.

Madam President: Hon. Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: “Country people does not want to leave their villages”, that is why there is so much ancestral voting because they come to live and to work but they still go back to Moruga, they go back Rio Claro, they go back Mayaro to vote. And that is the concept, the rural living that we are trying to think.

Rural transportation, rural banking. Why it is somebody from Biche has to go to Sangre Grande to take out \$500 from the bank? Why can we not encourage the bank to put ATM machines in all these villages [*Desk thumping*] and you can have the service for rural communities? Rural connectivity, broadband Internet access to all rural areas. As a matter of fact, this Government is so visionary that the tconnect portfolio has been moved from the Ministry of Public Administration to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, [*Desk thumping*] because that is the technology that we will be rolling out to these rural communities to bring about their development.

And finally, ladies and gentlemen, rural utilities. T&TEC has a policy now that if you have to put three telephone post to reach your house you have to pay them \$20,000, the capital cost to reach your house. That cannot operate in a rural area. Because rural people will never get anything. So direct government intervention in the rural landscape and we are committed to a rural developmental policy that will be second to none. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government will be working closely with two Ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries because the economic base, while I said in Toco, it will be the port and in Moruga the port, by and large the average rural community, the economic base will very likely be agriculture, forestry, poultry farming or something to that effect. And the empowered regional corporation will be working very, very, closely.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. F. KHAN]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

In closing, I want to say that rural development does not mean the urbanization of rural areas. It means allowing rural areas to access the same facilities and amenities that their urban counterparts now enjoy.

So, Madam President, very shortly, in this Trinidad and Tobago environment our vocabulary will be expanded. We will now be hearing names Marac and Bois Jean Jean; Mayo; Flanagan Town and Whiteland; La Fillette, Sans Souci and Matelot; Mafeking Village, Mayaro—my own home town. You will be hearing places like Bonas and Cedros; Four Roads, Tamana; Nestor, Tamana; Coryal, Tamana; Mundo Nuevo; Brasso Seco. These are some of the names that will be now on the national radar.

Madam Speaker, before I close, this rural boy who was born in Mafeking in Mayaro, “ketching crab and pulling seine” will now champion the cause to rural development. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, thank you.

Sen. Jennifer Raffoul: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to speak. It is an honour to serve our country in this capacity as Independent Senator. I would like to very briefly introduce myself since my experience until this point has influenced my recommendations going forward. I hope to offer technical recommendations and a spirit of genuine collaboration so we can move our country forward. I am an economist, a social entrepreneur and holistic health practitioner. The combination of these has influenced my perception of development and quality of life. First, my feedback as an economist.

I commend the hon. Minister of Finance for his efforts on balancing the budget. [*Desk thumping*] From here on, my comments focus more on quality of expenditure rather than quantity. I would like to comment on our national goals and development indicators. As an economist there is growing international consensus, GDP per capita alone is not an adequate measure of well-being. GDP cannot quantify households’ production, technology changes or quality impacts. Bhutan has the infamous example of their national happiness index. Might I suggest that Trinidad and Tobago prioritize adoption of the UNDP sustainable development goals as our measures of well-being since they are cross-sectoral and more accurate indicators of progress towards improved quality of life.

What struck me most about the budget presentation, was the approach of the public sector still being the primary driver of growth. Might I suggest greater partnership with the private sector and NGO sector for the sake of efficiency gains and debt reduction. And might I suggest specific instruments to help with these partnerships. Regarding partnerships with the private sector, [*Cell phone rings*] the allocation of \$20 million towards the instruments of PPPs is commendable. Public/private partnerships have been on the agenda—[*Interruption*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President: Sen. Raffoul, just—could I please remind all Senators this is the second reminder. Please take off your cell phones.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Thank you. Public/private partnerships have been on the agenda for several years. Might I suggest we treat this with utmost priority for the near future?

Regarding partnerships with the NGO sector, might I suggest exploration of the instrument of social impact bonds? Social impact bonds are also called, pay-for-performance contracts, and they incentivize efficiency of development outputs and impacts, rather than just committing funds without delivery. Social impact bonds pay partnering entities for results not just activities. The Harvard Kennedy School of Government offers free technical assistance to help developing countries to design and implement pilot projects using the instrument of social impact bonds.

And now for improved outputs within the public sector. Might I strongly recommend technical assistance available through institutions of which we are members and shareholders, including, the Inter-American Development Bank, Latin American Development Bank and the World Bank. They are strong in capacity as well have grants and budget support at low rates of 1 to 2 per cent repayable over 20 years, that is, much more attractive than private debt instruments.

Specific areas these institutions can offer technical assistance on, include social protection, public financial management public sector strengthening and mass transit. And on the issue of procurement reform, might I suggest we treat this with utmost priority, emphasizing transparency and value for money.

Second, my set of recommendations as a social entrepreneur. Social entrepreneurship companies are defined as those that have a social impact subjective like a traditional NGO, but they have revenue generating component for operational sustainability and scalability. In most developed countries social entrepreneurship entities can now register as a Benefit Corporations or B Corps. Presently, there is no option for Trinidad and Tobago-based social entrepreneurship initiative to register as a B Corporation. Updating the legislative framework to include the option to register as a B Corp may help support the local entrepreneurs to attract local and international investment. It may also attract other international entrepreneurs to operate here and it may help to catalyze greater social impact as a result. I would also like to suggest increasing the art and culture allowance from the maximum TT \$2 million per year to a higher limit to stimulate support of cultural businesses and to strengthen diversification efforts.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAFFOUL]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

And third, my set of recommendations as a health practitioner. I commend the intention of the hon. Minister of Finance to stimulate growth in the agricultural sector. Might I suggest, partnership with the permaculture industry? Permaculture is a system of mixed organic agriculture that minimizes or eliminates the use of external chemical inputs. The T&T based institute, Wa Samaki Ecosystems is supported by the UN to conduct regional training programmes on agricultural development around the Caribbean. I suggest we partner with these recognized regional experts.

On the issue of waste management, a recent report from the World Economic Forum stated that Trinidad and Tobago is the number one waste producing country in the world, per capita. When I read the report I expected that we will be highly ranked, but I did not expect that we would be number one.

3.05 p.m.

Our dumps are unlined and toxic chemicals such as mercury, lead and their more toxic products of their anaerobic digestion leach out into the air, water supply, fish and food supply, leading to increased rates of cancer, autism and other learning disabilities, Alzheimer's, hormonal imbalances, infertility, et cetera. To prevent this, let us examine the possibility of a national composting and recycling programme either in partnership with SWMCOL, the private sector or a social entrepreneurship system.

And finally, within the set of recommendations towards improving the health industry, I would recommend greater partnerships with holistic health practitioners such as functional medicine doctors, integrative nutrition health coaches and other holistic practitioners which are a strong complement to the medical system and focus on prevention and reversal of chronic disease and prevent the high costs of care.

In conclusion, permit me to mention two observations I recognized during my first sitting in Parliament during the budget presentation: first, the water bottles that sit on our desks, when instead we could be using reusable pitchers. EPA plastic is the number one ranked hormonal disrupting chemical, according to the environmental working group. And furthermore, these disposable single-use bottles go straight into our dump or waterways.

The second observation that I noticed is that when driving past this building on evenings, the lights are always on 24 hours in every single room, without any automated turning off. I suspect the air conditioning is the same. How do we use our resources? My point is, let us not just mandate to the population what they must do to drive the economy, let us take personal responsibility to improve our own actions and impacts thereof.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Thank you all for allowing me this opportunity to give feedback and recommendations for going forward. As always, I am here to offer technical recommendations, a spirit of collaboration and service.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: May I congratulate Sen. Raffoul on her maiden contribution, and may I also correct an oversight on my part because Sen. Shrikissoon made his maiden contribution today as well. So I want to congratulate him. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam President. Let me congratulate you at even this late stage on your election as President.

Madam President, from Mayaro to Macqueripe and from Cumana to Cedros, as candidate Clarence and now as Minister, the farmers, the fisherfolk, agro-entrepreneurs, those involved in agro processing, everybody who is involved in agriculture, fisheries, and everybody who is dependent on land, have said to me, let us do this. What they are saying to me, Madam President, is that there has been enough talk on agriculture and fisheries and food production; there has been enough talk on rural development and dealing with our rural economies and it is time for action.

I have said across the Ministry, I believe everything that has to be researched in agriculture, fisheries, food production, has already been researched. There are very few things for us to research. I believe that every conference that has to be attended to, Trinidad and abroad, has been gone to. I believe that every publication that has to be published and produced has been produced, and it is time for us to get down to the business of putting farmers and fisherfolk in front in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I owe it to my colleague, Minister Colm Imbert, the Minister of Finance, for giving me a little breathing space by a typographical error which showed that this Ministry was allocated \$831 million. I enjoyed those few days when people did not come to me knocking on my door. They expressed sorrow and said, “We told you so. The Government will let you down and not deliver as you have set the priority needs of the Ministry.” The allocation is a little more than that, \$1.2 billion. [*Desk thumping*] But it is not how much the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries gets—it is not how much we get—but how we spend it. That is what would matter in the first year, and because of that, in the first year, I as Minister, have set three goals for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. C. RAMBHARAT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Those three goals relate to the structure of the Ministry, governance of the Ministry and the institutions within the Ministry, and the people, and the way we interact and the way we deal with the people who are employed in the Ministry, and those who we service as a Ministry. So those are the three areas I am going to report on and talk about in my contribution today: structure, governance and people issues in the Ministry.

Let me say right off, Madam President, as Minister in this first year, I have said publicly, I take personal responsibility for two things in the Ministry. Because let me say, Madam President, my first day as Minister I said to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, I know my place. I am not one of those people who misunderstands the role of the Minister. I have no power to hire or fire. I have no power to spend and I have no power to contract. So in this first year I have given myself two main responsibilities: one, personal responsibility for oversight of spending in the Ministry—oversight—and second, personal responsibility for governance in the Ministry in the first year.

Let me first talk about structure. This Ministry has finally gotten the range that a Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries requires. Across the campaign I made the point, it is almost impossible to talk about agriculture without talking about land. In our country, agriculture requires land, and it became impossible for things to move for farmers and those who require land and those who require tenure, and those who require issues relating to land to be resolved by having agriculture in the form of food production on one side, and land on the other side.

It became more complicated by having fisheries thrown in the environment area and more complicated by having forestry cast aside, and in many instances, Madam President, it was not just that the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing, this finger did not know what this finger was doing. And what we have found after five years, we have found a lack of motivation in the Ministry. The Ministry has become so fragmented that most of the people in the Ministry do not know what the other is doing, and we have found an inability to service farmers and fisherfolk and all those other people who rely on lands, in particular State lands, in the country.

So the very first thing the Government has had to do was to bring those components back together. So this Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Fisheries and Forestry, as I describe it to the employees, is now one happy house, capable of servicing all the needs of the fishermen, the farmers and those who rely upon us for services. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2015**Tuesday, October 20, 2015*

What it means, Madam President, is that we have to spend some time doing rationalization, and one of the most important things we have to do is remove the duplication. For example, in the Ministry of Food Production you would have had a communications department, a human resource department, and an accounts department. In the Ministry of Land and Marine Resources, you would have had the same structure. Across in Forestry, you would have had the same structure.

What we have to do in first five weeks is work on removing duplication because if we do not do that we end up with three human resource departments; we end up with three communications managers. In fact, we ended at one stage in the early days of my getting there with three photographers to the Ministry because of the amalgamation.

So in the first instance, we have to deal with bringing the components together and removing the duplication. We have to focus the Ministry on getting expertise in the right places and the specialists in the right places. I gave a story at the World Food Day celebration on Sunday about my very first meeting with the heads of department in the Ministry, and I needed a conference room that could hold maybe 100 persons because we had everybody—maybe quarter of the Ministry—showing up as a head of a department to bring me up to date on what is happening in their section. And when I went through the various presentations it was replete with duplication. There was a complete absence of streamlining. But most important, Madam President, there was a complete lack of expertise, not that we do not have highly qualified people.

In the Ministry I am sure we have some of the most qualified people in the country. We did not have people in the positions where they could perform and advise a Minister of Government. And I said, when a Minister sits for technical advice, no Minister in this country—perhaps no Minister in this world—should sit with more than eight to 10 people providing advice so I can produce the policy direction that the Ministry needs to have.

And when we looked at this structure, which as I say, is one of the priority areas in the first year—we also look at the internal structure, the way the Ministry is configured to respond to the needs of the farmers and the fisherfolk. And one of the things I have made the newspapers over and over for—I have made the newspapers in the last five weeks for two issues: hunting and the second one was the Ministry's decision that it would not renew those employment contracts that expired.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. C. RAMBHARAT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

At the end of September several contracts expired. I do not have the number as yet. Across the various components of the Ministry, I have not been able to get a handle on the numbers, but I can tell you this. The Ministry contained various types of employees: the public servants, the contract employees who were retained on one, two or three-year contracts. We also had short-term contracts and we had a category that really surprised me because it was the first time, despite a long period—a long history of interaction with the public sector—something called independent contractors. And that is the one that bothered me the most. So in the former Ministry of Food Production, for example, there were 87 persons as at September 30, 2015, who were on these non-tax contracts—

Hon. Member: What!

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Contracts which allowed them to be independent contractors. So every month that contract would just be a—one page would just be re-issued, giving them another term for a month and there was no tax to be paid and no NIS to be deducted, and as a lawyer, Madam President—and Franklin Khan sometimes says that people forget I am a lawyer. But as a lawyer that concerned me. Not only did I feel that the Ministry as an employer was exposed, but these employees were exposed because they were treated as independent contractors, which they were not. And some of these employees were the ones complaining that the Ministry sent them home. But as an independent contractor that is what happens. Your contract comes to an end and you go. And that is the nature of the relationship and I am sure not many of them were aware of that.

So that is one category of contract that was not renewed. Then, Madam President, across the Ministry, what we found was that there were persons employed on contract—short-term contracts, various types of contracts—with nothing to show for their period of employment. For example, in training, when I asked how is the Ministry measuring the impact of all this training we are doing—in one section, for example, \$1.5 million a year being spent on salaries for training without any measurement of the impact. In other words, if you are spending money on training you must be able to demonstrate that this is having an impact on production; this is having an impact on profitability; this is causing this particular percentage increase in the contribution of agriculture or fisheries to household incomes in the rural communities.

We cannot train and spend taxpayers' money on training because we do it every year and we have a training calendar. So those persons who were on those short-term contracts involved in that particular training, at the end of September there was no renewal until the Ministry makes an assessment of what it has to spend and what it has to do in relation to training and how it is going to manage it.

3.20 p.m.

Then we have, for example, when we go across to the lands section, we have former lands Ministry, 108 persons on short-term contracts, again month to month contracts, in key positions that should really be filled by persons in permanent jobs, but what we have done is continuously roll over, roll over short-term contracts without taking the steps to fill those positions.

So we are going to head into another crisis, Madam President, because at the end of November, of this, 108 contract positions, maybe 100 are going to come to an end in November and we will have to take a decision as a Ministry, whether we are going to extend those contracts, or what we are going to do and how quickly we can fill those positions with people who can fill it on a permanent basis, which brings me to last point I am going to make on the employment issues. What we have also found is that many of these people filled the positions without having been interviewed. Many of these people filled positions for which they are not qualified, and I heard Sen. Ameen talking about the PNM and making sure that we keep our education programmes.

Madam President, I am not only a proud product of this investment that this country makes in education but I am also a former lecturer at the university and I have my former students all through this Parliament, and if it is one person who is going to stand up for locally qualified competent people to find jobs, especially young people in the public sector, I am going to be that person. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot because we have been doing it, because we have these contracts continuously rolling over, we cannot deprive qualified people of holding a job on a permanent position in Trinidad because we are too lazy to do our work, and I am that Minister who is willing to spend the extra few weeks to work with my PS and to work with the experts in the Ministry to make sure we do the right thing because that is what we promised on the campaign. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, when we talk about structure, we also talk about the former Ministry of Lands and making sure in the amalgamation of this Ministry that we put things in place to protect the assets of the taxpayers of this country. I want to talk today about two or maybe three land transactions that have been in the public domain, and I want to put on record what these transactions are about.

The first land transaction is one I am very familiar with because it had its life in Caroni Limited from where I came and it had its life a long time ago, and this involves a company called SIS. So if I may summarize, Madam President, somewhere around 2001, SIS was granted by Caroni Limited a commercial lease,

Appropriation Bill, 2015

[SEN. THE HON. C. RAMBHARAT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

a lease for lands which were to be used by SIS for commercial purposes. My own understanding and having seen SIS put that land to use, this 30-acre parcel, it was used for stock piling material, buildings were constructed on the land, and it was used for what I consider to be a complete industrial purpose.

When I was in Caroni I demanded that SIS pay the premium and the commercial rent that was due on those lands and they resisted, and eventually between 2001 and 2002 SIS paid the premium and the commercial rent for the land. Fast forward, Madam President, to 2014, when the Commissioner of State Lands wrote to SIS and says, “Your rent is outstanding. You have \$7.376 million outstanding, without interest”, very soon after—that demand was made on August 11, 2014, and a few weeks after on September 03, 2014, the Commissioner of State Lands apologized to SIS saying, “I am sorry. That land is agricultural land and I am out of place to ask you to pay commercial rates.” And since then, SIS has been in the position where the Government owes SIS, because having paid that million dollars back in 2001—2002, that covers the period they have been in occupation of that land because it is regarded as agricultural land, and the taxpayers of this country have lost revenue on account of it.

Let me tell you another one, Madam President, and let me tell the country, there is a 75-acre parcel of land that became contentious and it was in the media. This transaction started in 2001 when SIS asked permission to occupy a parcel of land and the Government of the day agreed. They agreed 75 acres of prime land made available to SIS at the grand sum of \$11,250 a month or \$135,000 a year—75 acres of prime land. To date, SIS continues, notwithstanding the fact that Town and Country Planning has said that that land is agricultural land that forms a buffer between the industrial estate and the residential area, SIS continues to occupy that land, but let me tell you this, Madam President, and let me tell the country, that land, the Commissioner of Valuations has put a valuation of \$300 million on that land. At the current rental rate SIS is paying, it will take 2,222 years for this country to earn the \$300 million from SIS for which that land has been valued by the Commissioner of State Lands, and to date no one has stepped in.

In fact, SIS has been boldfaced enough to make an application to Town and Country Planning to have that land approved. SIS has submitted a programme to use that land for agricultural purposes. Three hundred million dollars in land held to ransom by Super Industrial Services Limited. So when I talk about structure, in this first year this Ministry must be structured in a way that we can account to the taxpayers of the country for every square foot of land; [*Desk thumping*] we must

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

structure the Ministry in a way that no one person can hold the country's taxpayers to ransom; we must structure it in a way that the bribes that are being paid now for documents to be signed cannot take place; [*Desk thumping*] and that is a commitment. In the first year that is a commitment that I make to the country, that in dealing with structure these things will not happen. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me switch now to the second area, governance, and good governance. And I speak, in particular, not only governance of the Ministry itself, Madam President, but the various state enterprises and agencies that fall under this Ministry and they include ADB, the Seafood Industry Development Company, NAMDEVCO, EMBD, Caroni Green, Agricultural Society. Those are the agencies. I will make one point that I have made to all these entities so far. Somewhere along in their history, and as boards rotate and management rotate, a number of these agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, forget the word "development". ADB has forgotten, Agricultural Development Bank, not to sit and wait for farmers to come for loans, but to go and develop the sector. The Seafood Industry Development Company has forgotten that their work is not to process fish. Their work is to develop on a holistic basis. The broad framework for the Seafood Industry in Trinidad and Tobago to be sustainable and profitable especially for those rural economies like Moruga, Mayaro, Toco, that depend on it.

Let me tell you something about the ADB, Madam President, that really surprised me. In this budget debate in both Houses, we have heard all sort of stories, some of which I have heard before, but when I reached in the office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I found this document. The Auditor General had sent it to the Ministry since June 2015. There is a gold seal on this document—it was not broken—and it reads:

"REPORT
OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL
ON THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE"—ADB—
"FOR THE YEAR ENDED
30 September, 2012."

When I found this I had already met with the management of the ADB, the senior management, and I myself asked them about contentious, controversial transactions that I knew went down in ADB. Then when I opened this, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Madam President.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, I am in the wrong House—I broke the seal, and this is what the Auditor General is saying:

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. C. RAMBHARAT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

“At 30th September, 2012, loans totalling \$9,906,384.00 had been disbursed for the following purposes:”—Agricultural Development Bank.

- “a) Construction of a two storey building with the company director’s residence situated on the mezzanine floor.
- b) Debt liquidation for a business involved in the distribution of products such as baby food...and confectionary.
- c) Construction of accommodation which included a master bedroom, Jacuzzi, walk in closet, wrap around patio, recreation room, loft, study, living room and dining room.”

And then finally:

- “d) Equipment purchase and infrastructure works for an outdoor dining facility for a sports bar and lounge.”

As I said, when I met with the management, I asked them in particular about two transactions, one relating to a sports bar in Chaguanas and one relating to a hardware.

So, Madam President, when I talk about governance, I talk about avoiding this situation and making entities like ADB accountable, because when they lend money for Jacuzzis and lofts and wrap around bar, they deprive the farmers and the fisherfolk in my constituency of Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] This money could have been spent on what we spoke about, what we have been speaking about, that ADB headquartered in Port of Spain, operating in San Fernando and Chaguanas, in Sangre Grande, is not reaching way out into the rural communities where farmers need financial support and business development support, and this will change when I talk about the second priority about good governance. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, Caroni Green much talked about. I myself in my life as a columnist wrote on Caroni Green. There have been four audits. This is the fourth and it says final, but I am sure it is not the final one. This one covers the six-month period January 01 to June 30, 2014 and it is just indicative. This report talks about the expenditure of \$4.387 million of taxpayers’ money on an initiative that was supposed to produce food and assist farmers financially. \$4.387 million spent from which the farmers share was \$291,000. In fact, security, vehicles and public relations got more out of this project than the farmers themselves got out of the project.

Let me tell you, Madam President, why the farmers did not get their share—Sharks Roti Shop, Subway, Charmaine’s Roti Shop, KFC—because those involved in Caroni Green spent their time buying and eating while the farmers suffered on the outside. And this is just one of four audits and they all sing the same story, they all say the same thing,

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

and at the end of Caroni Green—this was when it was called Caroni Green Initiative and the past Government rewarded that initiative by creating a special purpose company called Caroni Green Limited and took the problem from Caroni Green Initiative and put in it in Caroni Green Limited where they continued along their merry way, burning through taxpayers' money without accountability.

3.35 p.m.

At the end of it, Ernst & Young, the auditors, have said to this country that \$1.7 million in cash cannot be accounted for, and this will go to the office of the Attorney General because somebody has to answer to the taxpayers of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you, Madam President, under this issue of good governance, I will issue to every board and agency under my watch, a letter of expectations where I outline, in accordance with the state sector monitoring manual, my expectations as Minister. I am not going to leave them on their own. And that letter will set out what I expect; what the manual expects of them; how they are going to be reporting; how they are going to be accountable and how their performance is going to be measured in accordance with the law, because I am not leaving state enterprises and agencies, within this Ministry, to do what they have historically done.

Let me get, Madam President, to the third area and that third area deals with people, and the Prime Minister had already announced the move of the Ministry from St. Clair to Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*] Today, I could say to those employees in the Ministry, Madam President, that on January 01, 2016, New Year's Day, they will be in their new home. [*Desk thumping*] Again, I have taken on the responsibility personally of making sure that this decision of the Government does not slip and nobody causes us to stay in St. Clair until Carnival is over because "we by the savannah". On January 01, we will be down in Chaguanas. And that is just the first move but let me outline the importance of that move.

In my own time working in this country, I found that I spent too much time on the road, too much time in traffic, too much time away from my children when they were growing up, to get into Port of Spain. And it is wrong that somebody living in Fyzabad must make their way straight up to Port of Spain to work and back home through the traffic when this Ministry has operations in south west Trinidad.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. THE HON. C. RAMBHARAT]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I met a lady working in the lands department in San Fernando, our regional office in San Fernando, and I asked her—because I could not help but notice that she was pregnant. I asked her, “Where do you live?” and she said “El Socorro”, and I said, “Do you know that this Ministry, lands, is within walking distance of your home?” So the move to Chaguanas is not just to be in a new building, the move to Chaguanas is to make life easier for those employees of the Ministry who make that long commute. But that is just the first move.

The second part of the move is that some employees would need to go in some of the outlying offices. Those offices would need to be expanded. And I will give you a classic example of how the system does not work. At that office in San Fernando, fisheries permits are issued. When I spoke to the fisheries officer at that office, I was told that fishermen must come from Mayaro to San Fernando in Cocoyea to get their permits, and fishermen in Icacos must come to San Fernando to get their permits; and the fisheries officer must come from Sangre Grande to issue the permit. So the fisheries officer drives past all the fisherfolk on the east coast to come to San Fernando in Cocoyea to issue a permit.

When I went to Mayaro, my constituency, on the weekend and I went back for the fifth or sixth time in the last five weeks to that Ortoire fishing facility and found that there were offices unoccupied since that facility was built. I know for a fact that a fisheries officer under this Ministry can occupy an office in that building and issue fisheries permits from Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] And when we talk about decentralization and taking employees off the road, that is the second part of it, of putting the employees of this Ministry close to where they live and close to where the farmers require their services, so that they will be taken off the road and the farmers will spend less time on the road, and this Ministry will become more efficient. So that is the third element of it, Madam President, on the issue of people.

And why have we taken this approach? The fact is, it does not matter how many billions the Minister of Finance has allocated, if the system is broken and inefficient, if the employees are unmotivated and have difficulties working because of the long hours to get to and get from; it does not matter how many concessions and how much incentives we give to them, the farmers of this country will not be serviced. And as candidate Clarence and as Minister, I have gone far and wide and I have listened, and I understand, that farmers say to me, “They do not feel supported” and this is after several years of several billions being spent on this particular Ministry.

My commitment to this country, in this first year, this Ministry will focus on the structure, that is discipline and organize to service the needs of our farmers and fisherfolk. This Ministry will focus on governance to bring discipline, accountability, and to ensure that those state enterprises and agencies do not take us along the road that the Auditor General says that the ADB took this country. This Ministry will focus on people, knowing that many of our employees come from rural areas where they could stay and work in service of farmers and fisherfolk. We will focus on those three priority areas in this Ministry because, as I said at the beginning, it does not matter how much money we get, it matters how we spend it. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Let me congratulate Minister Rambharat on his maiden contribution and I now invite the next speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Nadine Stewart: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to address this honourable House. Madam President, permit me to say thanks to the Almighty God whom I know for sure favoured me with this open door through the certainty and confidence that the hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has vested in me. Furthermore, allow me to additionally pay tribute to the People's National Movement, my family, my friends and well-wishers for the constant support as I embark on this new journey.

It is without hesitation and humility that I accept this appointment to serve as a Government Senator in the Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. I am reminded and guided by the famous quote of the former American President John F. Kennedy and it reads:

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

[*Desk thumping*] It is my intention, Madam President, to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago with distinction and class as I seek to play my part in making my beloved country a better place.

Let me congratulate you, Madam President, on your elevation as President of the Senate and I know for sure that all standards will be upheld as you preside. I would like to further congratulate all appointed Senators, especially the young, vibrant faces and voices, like myself, who I can assure you, Madam President, are eager to make salutary contributions to the decision-making in this country. I look forward to working with all hon. Senators as we deliberate on various pieces of legislation in the best interest of this blessed country.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. N. STEWART]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I am extremely pleased that all Senators—in Government, Opposition and on the Independent Bench—have thus far cooperated in a debate which stands singularly apart from some of the expressions I would have heard in the Lower House. My intent is not to be disparaging in anyway but I believe we should all ascribe to a higher level of political discourse and for this, I certainly congratulate every Senator.

Madam President, it gives me great pleasure to join in this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015, and to make my maiden contribution to the national community and this august Senate on the examination of the budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The budget revelations thus far have been quite shocking and disheartening. I have listened to the contribution of every Member of the Lower House—Ministers, Members of Parliament—and as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President, I was left in awe. The billions that were lost, we cannot recover; the nepotism, the cronyism, the corruption, we cannot undo, but there is an outcry from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago for justice and for persons to be held accountable. [*Desk thumping*]

And it is at this juncture, I would like to salute the hon. Minister of Finance who has carefully informed us of the devastation left to this country by the previous administration, and for the solid delivery of what I would describe, a sound and prudent budget. As citizens, we were forced into reality but our Minister chose fact over fiction, truth over lies, and economics over politics [*Desk thumping*] in the presentation of this budget statement.

Madam President, this is one of the few times I have seen a budget almost nationally praised. In preparation for this debate, I asked a few persons to share with me their reaction to this budget, and one young Trinidad and Tobago citizen who is currently aboard completing studies, she said to me, “This budget is very citizen-focused. Many of us felt isolated and left in the dark when it came to our well-being and funds”. Every man on the street is now showing astounding interest in national affairs, and this sends a strong signal.

Before I get into the substance of my contribution, I would like to respond to Sen. Ameen’s claims that the People’s National Movement, or the Minister in his budget, did not mention anything about gender affairs or gender equality. With your authority, Madam President, let me direct Sen. Ameen to page 69 of the PNM 2015 Manifesto, which, by the way, is now policy.

Sen. Ameen: I said the budget, not the manifesto.

Sen. N. Stewart: Let me direct you to the manifesto which is policy.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

“The 2009 Draft National Policy on Gender and Development, formulated by the PNM, will be used as the basis for incorporating gender perspectives in all activities of government and civil society, thereby promoting the full and equal participation of men and women in the development process.

The status of women in Trinidad and Tobago compares favourably with many middle income developing nations. The equal rights of men and women are guaranteed under the 1976 Republican Constitution and the PNM has always been and remains committed to promoting gender equity and equality.”

[*Desk thumping*] So, Senator, this is now PNM policy which means there is no need for a repetition in the budget statement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, whilst I recognize the importance of this fiscal package to the well-being of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, permit me to focus my contribution on the impact of this budget for us, the persons residing in Tobago. I am delighted to bring the Tobago perspective to this honourable Senate as too often Tobago tends to be lost in debate and national issues. I am particularly pleased with the opportunities and hope that this budget provides for the people of Tobago, and the budgetary allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly can only be described as fair and reasonable.

You see, Madam President, we, in Tobago, are not unreasonable people and we are not oblivious to the current economic situation.

3.50 p.m.

Given what is happening in international energy markets and given the corruption, waste and mismanagement of the former administration, we really thank the Minister of Finance for responding to the island’s needs and we are heartened with the increase.

For fiscal 2016, the total budgetary allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly is \$2.772 billion, [*Desk thumping*] a 5.9 per cent increase over the \$2.609 billion allocated to the Assembly in fiscal 2015. Of the overall allocation, Madam President, \$2.345 billion is provisioned for recurrent expenditure, \$4.4 million is allocated to capital expenditure. In total, the Assembly is allocated just about 4.4 per cent of the national budget.

Madam President, this represents a significant departure from the traditional practice of allocating to the Assembly the barest minimum of 4.03 per cent that has been customary since the ruling of the Dispute Resolution Commission in 2001.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. N. STEWART]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I am delighted at the expressed interest of the Minister of Finance to allocate funds to the Assembly based on Tobago's developmental needs and not some slavish adherence to a mathematical formula as prescribed by the DRC. [*Desk thumping*] It should be noted other than the spike to 4.07 per cent, in fiscal 2013's presentation which, of course, was prior to the THA election, this is the first time in the past five years that Tobago has received a larger percentage of the national pie.

Let me mention here, Madam President, that over the last five years there was a late receipt of allocations from the central Government. Transfers were oftentimes very tardy and this caused serious implications to the Tobago House of Assembly. This has resulted in delays in the Assembly meeting some of its commitments, including payment of salaries and arrears to public officers. The THA, Madam President, in many cases, had to use an overdraft facility that cost them millions of dollars that could have been used for additional development.

I could recall that in the lead up to the 2013 election, the second tranche releases to the Assembly that were due in early January were only released after the Tobago House of Assembly, which was in a bid to starve the Assembly for funds at that critical time.

The central Government has given Tobago its commitment that they will review and revise the process and mechanism for providing budgetary resources to the Assembly, with a view to reducing delays in the receipt of transfers by the Assembly, to give greater flexibility over expenditure and to allocate resources with a greater sensitivity to Tobago's development needs.

Madam President, beyond the direct budgetary allocation to the Assembly, there is an allocation of \$1.3 billion to central Government Ministries and State agencies operating in Tobago; an increase of 5.5 per cent over the 2015 allocation to facilitate expenditure in Tobago by these entities.

Madam President, what is particularly heartening with this allocation is that when it comes to examining the composition, significant chunks goes to improving the security architecture in Tobago. Ensuring Tobago's security is important. This is because of the peace and serenity that we are accustomed to, which represents our quality of lives as Tobagonians.

We also anticipate that with more sensitivity to Tobago's security, there is an expectation that there will be a rigorous operation and organization of the specialized Tobago security plan. This, of course, will increase the level of comfort that we are going to have as Tobagonians, as Tobago is vulnerable.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, I would just read from the Development Programme objectives. Ministry of National Security, Upgrade of Coast Guard facilities in Tobago. We have the upgrade of the regiment facilities in Tobago, upgrade of facility in Tobago for the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force Reserves, and, of course, construction of the long-awaited Old Grange and Roxborough Police Stations. The Roxborough Police Station has been functioning out of the nurses hostel and the police officers are demanding and they deserve a place to call their home, and we are happy that the Minister of Finance, in his budget statement, guaranteed that the construction of these police stations are finally going to be underway. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, there are other programmes geared towards improving water security in Tobago. This, for Tobago is very important, as earlier this year we faced a major drought and there were significant challenges with the Water and Sewerage Authority and most times distribution of water was rationed to as low as three hours per day, in the wee hours of the morning.

I remember my mom being up at some of the most ungodly hours in the morning in order to get the water supply that came through the taps, for washing and storage of water, et cetera. Some of my neighbours had to resort to the olden days of getting water on their head, carrying it from one place to the next, to ensure that they have a quantity of water for the upcoming weeks.

There is an assurance that the current challenges being experienced, with respect to the reliability of water, will be addressed, and I really praise this administration as provisions would be finally made for the Water and Sewerage Authority to initiate desilting of the Hillsborough Dam in Tobago.

Madam President, the allocation of the Assembly strongly supports and is in line with the strategic priority areas identified in the comprehensive economic development plan for Tobago 2013—2017. I will illustrate by making a closer examination of the allocations to the Assembly in some of the critical areas.

Before I get into that, Madam President, I want you to allow me to say thanks to the previous administration of 2007 to 2010, for their investment in ensuring Tobago's economy as diversified. That investment today has made the Cove Industrial Estate a reality. [*Desk thumping*] The sum of \$1 billion was invested in a natural gas pipeline that runs through Cove. The sum US \$100 million was invested in a 64 megawatt electricity plant, which is dual powered. It originally used diesel but has recently started using natural gas. This has gotten us closer to our mantra in Tobago of "Clean, Green, Safe and Serene" and there are now more opportunities for affordable energy.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. N. STEWART]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, previously rich companies would have expressed interest in setting up industries in Cove but they had concerns about the lack of an industrial port. Our Finance Minister gave us the assurance in his budget statement that a new port will be built at Cove. [*Desk thumping*] This will ensure that in Tobago, Cove Industrial Estate becomes a viable location for conducting and attracting business. [*Desk thumping*]

Critical to our overall diversification efforts is the development of the tourism sector with particular emphasis on Tobago. The tourism sector, which was negatively affected by the global financial crisis is now showing signs of recovery.

Madam President, the current condition of the airport terminal in Crown Point continues to present a significant challenge for domestic and international passengers, which has made our island less competitive than its Caribbean neighbours, most of whom have recently upgraded their airport facilities. We have the Grantley Adams International Airport in Barbados, the Sangster International Airport in Jamaica, amongst others. General prospects and supports have been named in the budget for the tourism sector in Tobago and this includes modernization of the ANR International Airport with the construction of a new terminal. Air and sea transport system would be rationalized to facilitate greater alignment between demand and supply.

Madam President, the efficiency and reliability of air and sea travel is important to encourage domestic tourism. We do not only need to ensure our air and sea bridges are functioning effectively for international purposes, but this is important for inter-island travel as well. We in Tobago, we are competing with the rest of the world for good and services coming out of Trinidad. So there must be improved predictability in order for us in Tobago to access the Trinidad market.

Madam President, some of my friends have expressed that some of the reasons that they do not come to Tobago is the unpredictability of the air and the sea bridge. In Tobago, we tend to lose out on a lot of business and business prospects, because persons are not sure if they come to Tobago, they would be able to return home when they are ready.

Madam President, we do not expect that these things are easy to resolve. We do not expect that. However, we can no longer complain about not having representation on state boards. There are representatives from the THA on various state boards, including the Airports Authority, the Port Authority, amongst others, all of which are integral to Tobago's effective functioning and there is a Tobago voice to advance the needs and recommendations of the Tobago House of Assembly.

*Appropriation Bill, 2015**Tuesday, October 20, 2015*

Madam President, the appointment of the Member of Parliament for Tobago West as Minister of Tourism is further evidence that this administration is serious about the commitment to the tourism sector in Tobago.

Madam President, there is increased funding to facilitate the tourism rolling plan. The allocation to the tourism sector in the development programme estimates of the Assembly increased by 69 per cent from \$15.5 million in 2015 to \$26.2 million in 2016.

Madam President, the allocation to the Assembly also supports the development and resilience of the social sector in Tobago. For instance, as it pertains to housing, provision is made to accelerate the housing programme of the Assembly that was severely affected by the lack of budgetary support from the Central Government over the last five years. In this regard, the allocation to housing will certainly go a long way in allowing the Assembly to respond to the needs of the over 7,500 applicants who are awaiting public housing in Tobago. It will address the chronic mismatch that exists between the demand and supply for public housing in Tobago.

As it pertains to health and safety support network, the budget caters for the expansion of health services, improvement in health infrastructure and the expansion of social safety net programmes in Tobago to protect vulnerable groups. Among the social safety net programmes, Madam President, allocations for the Roxborough Health Centre for use as a district health facility and renovation of over 17 health centres, provision of dental equipment to Charlotteville and Canaan Health Centres and the purchase of a mobile dental unit.

Madam President, provision is also made in the budget to improve and upgrade the physical infrastructure in Tobago. In this regard, upgrade and expansion of the existing road infrastructure and the construction of new roads such as the Mount St. George/Castara Road and the extension of Store Bay Local Road to Shirvan will be undertaken.

4.05 p.m.

Clearly, Madam President, the budgetary allocations to the Assembly, treats comprehensively with some of the strategic priority areas as identified by the Assembly, in the comprehensive development plan for Tobago. Again, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance for his sensitivity to the needs of Tobago.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. N. STEWART]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President, the benefits for Tobago from the budget extends beyond the direct and indirect budgetary allocations. In this regard, the incentives for farmers and fishermen will be particularly beneficial. Indeed, the proposal announced by the Minister of Finance to exempt duties and taxes from inputs into the agricultural sector, like approved chemicals, approved vehicles and approved fishing vessels and equipment, will significantly benefit residents throughout Tobago, many of whom earn their livelihood from the agricultural and the fishing sectors. [*Desk thumping*]

I reside on the eastern end of Tobago which is commonly known as the country side, where farming and fishing play an important role in the livelihood of villagers. Therefore, I know for sure that these concessions will go a long way in boosting farming and agricultural activities in Tobago. These fishermen and farmers, they are encouraged by this initiative, and they are now more poised to continue with their self-employment and entrepreneurial possibilities.

Once again, let me thank the Minister of Finance on his decision to advise the Central Bank to revert to the old system of foreign currency management. The new arrangement managing foreign currency implemented by the Central Bank last year, has been having adverse effects, not only on the business community in Tobago, but on private individuals. Madam President, since the system has changed, the Tobago business community encountered several challenges to secure foreign currency to procure raw materials and supplies, as well as services. Madam President, residents also experienced difficulties to source foreign currency to fund educational and medical expenses abroad, even personal expenses as all through the year, persons take vacation trips to these countries. We hope that with the revision of the old system of foreign currency management, the difficulties experienced to secure foreign currency will, of course, be significantly reduced.

I wish to underscore the disappointment expressed by my colleague in the Lower House, concerning the Green Fund. When I heard the Minister of Finance in his budget statement alluding to what has become of the Green Fund, I was dispirited. Tobagonians have been contributing to the Green Fund just like every other citizen, through taxes. Yet, over the last five years no projects from Tobago were approved for funding.

Please permit me to provide a brief history of the Tobago experience with the Green Fund. This fund was established in 2011. This was a national programme, and Tobago was supposed to be treated in an equitable fashion. In 2011, a memorandum of understanding was signed and a suitable location for the office

was identified. This office was outfitted with office furniture and furnishings. In November of 2012, the office was procured by the Ministry of Housing and the Environment, and the official Green Fund unit in Tobago was in operation. Tobagonians were excited at the prospect this offered as it relates to environmental sustainability and maintaining, again, the island's brand as clean, green, safe and serene. Many excellent projects from Tobago were submitted for consideration, yet, none received funding.

Let me mention that in 2010, Madam President, Tobago recorded a number of bush fires during the dry season, which compromised the forest and watersheds in Tobago. There was an urgent need to restore these watersheds. The Tobago House of Assembly was considered a viable organization to apply to this programme. So, the THA applied for the reforestation project. This project was written up and submitted to the Green Fund but, sadly, that application was sidelined and placed into a bag of complications.

The then Attorney General Anand Ramlogan said that all Green Fund applications from Tobago are sub judice. No other application from Tobago was accepted. And, Madam President, this, not because the applications from the Tobago House of Assembly were substandard, as these proposals were consistent with the Green Fund Regulations. The rejection from that Green Fund programme was a low blow to Tobago. Our environment is our asset. We market to the outside world, and we thought that this programme would have assisted us.

Tobago has the oldest protected rainforest and preservation of the rainforest is critical. However, the dispute between the THA and the then central Government has caused diminished management. There is a responsibility to protect the forest reserves from the national and Tobago standpoint, but in Tobago it is even greater because of the rainforest. We would hope that fundamental responsibility goes back into the hand of the House of Assembly.

I can finally breathe a sigh of relief, just like other Tobagonians, that once again, the issue of regularizing land titles in Tobago, is now back on the national agenda. This has been in existence for a very long time, and it is an issue affecting a significant number of Tobagonians. Before the former PNM administration left office in 2010, this issue was close to being resolved. However, over the last five years, under the UNC-led Government, nothing significant happened to resolve this, except shameful attempts to politicize the issue, whilst paying lip service.

Madam President, I could recall again, prior to the 2013 THA election, in a hastily arranged function in Rovanel's Resort, Tobago, the then Minister of Tobago Development held a ceremony where she gave out about five deeds—two deeds, to fool us into believing that this issue was close to being resolved. However, after the

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. N. STEWART]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

demise of the TOP and their PP friends in the 2013 THA election, nothing else was heard; this issue remains unresolved. In our manifesto in the just concluded general election, the people of Tobago were given a commitment to treat with the issue of land titles and this we will do. So again, thank you, Minister of Finance.

Madam President, I want to jump right into one more issue. As we continue to treat with resolving long-standing issues, I want to talk about the issue of internal self-Government for Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is a widely held view that the then constitutional and legislative arrangements between the central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, has been a significant constraint to Tobago's development. Over the last few years there have been extensive consultations with the people of Tobago on the issue of self-governance, and there is a burning desire by the people of Tobago for self-determination. So now, the question should not be what—but the question should be how.

I am aware a Tobago position was submitted to the Cabinet months before the election but, of course, no response. However, with this new administration we await a much better form of alliance. Madam President, internal self-governance for Tobago has already been approved as official PNM policy by the Tobago council of the PNM, the general council and the national convention. This process has started and we know that now it has a very good chance of success. In the run up to the election, all political parties and individuals approved this initiative. I hope that my colleagues on the other side will come on board and respect the wishes of the people of Tobago for autonomy and not allow petty politics to hinder us. Over the next few months, I look forward to the day—hopefully very soon—when this House will engage in debate on this issue. The time has come to take a mature, sensible approach.

In closing, I would like to applaud the Chief Secretary and the Tobago House of Assembly for their resilience, being able to stand in the face of all atrocities over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] Every morning I would put on my television, and the Chief Secretary would be complaining about some issue or the other related to infringement on the THA from the then central Government through, of course, the Ministry of Tobago Development. The Assembly had a very rocky relationship with the central Government, and a lot more could have been achieved if we had a THA and central Government working together instead of at odds with each other.

So, Madam President, we look forward to all the prospects presented in this budget for everyone in Trinidad and Tobago. More so we are eager to, once again, experience a mutual, united and respected association with the central Government, as we move Trinidad and Tobago towards unprecedented heights of growth and development. Let us do this together.

Madam President, thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Thank you very much, Sen. Stewart, and congratulations on your maiden contribution. I think this is an appropriate time to take the tea break, but before we do this, let me just announce that all Senators who are to receive iPads, that you can collect your iPad in the J Hamilton Maurice Room during the tea break. So we will break for teas and we will return at five to five.

4.17 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.55 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon: Mr. Vice-President, thank you for allowing me to address this honourable Senate at this time. I would like to say I am very confident that you would be able to uphold the Standing Orders of this honourable Senate, and Senators would be reminded of the Standing Orders of this honourable Senate as we are role models, leaders and an international image of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, congratulations, Mr. Vice-President, on your appointment.

Before I commence my maiden contribution on the 2016 Appropriation Bill, budget, I would like to thank His Excellency for giving me the opportunity to serve in this capacity—actions hold more merit than words—and by entrusting the people of Trinidad and Tobago by allowing new faces to sit in the Senate for this Eleventh sitting to bring our diversity, our skill and our own passion for our country. I look forward to working with this honourable Table, this Bench and this honourable Senate.

Mr. Vice-President, I stand before you to join this debate to add value and highlight some concerns. Through you, I welcome open-mindedness and reception, at this time, on my interpretation of the 2016 budget. Trinidad and Tobago holds much merit. We have a lot of valuable resources and we have our major assets, but our most import asset is our people. We are leaders.

If you look at the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, it speaks about Trinidad and Tobago being the only country reaching the innovation driven phase, and this is very commendable because we do not really appreciate our national pride, we are not patriotic. I only understood this at the age of 24 when I was allowed to represent my

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

country as the only Caribbean speaker at an American Petroleum Institute in Galveston, Texas, only there you saw the strength and the unity of the Caribbean people. Every single Caribbean attendee attended my presentation to support me. I felt empowered and proud to be a Caribbean citizen, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to represent.

So in relation to this 2016 budget, I have noted in the budget statement, it was formulated with helpful suggestions from citizens, industry experts, economists, business community and this is a great practice, as the purpose of the budget is to build our country and reflect community goals like food for all, shelter for all, water for all, safety for all.

I would like to be advised on what percentage of the population was consulted, and in future these consultations should be formalized as keeping in the 2012 study, Strengthening Parliamentary Practices in Trinidad and Tobago, conducted by the European delegation which recommended as in other Commonwealth countries that before the budget is debated in Parliament, a pre-budget process is taken, no less than a month before the actual release of the budget, and this would allow Members of Parliament, key stakeholders, other NGOs, community leaders to have an input into the upcoming budget. This allows the inclusion of the public opinion into the formulation of the budget.

The 2016 budget statement speaks of the plan for the next six months to hold consultations with the main stakeholders, therefore the information discussed should be formalized and made available for the public to make review and comments. Mr. Vice-President, we are a developing country, as we strive for First World status with new projects and overarching policies to improve our country, this should not be at the expense of any Trinbagonian. All humans are created equally.

When I was in high school I did a very popular literature book called *Animal Farm* and it is based on these fictional characters where the animals were not being fed, they were being abused. When they could not work anymore they would be sent to the slaughterhouse. So they came together and they decided that they were going to overthrow the humans, so they were successful. So they came up with these new rules for the farm, and the first rule said: all animals are created equally. Unfortunately, the book later went on to say: all animals are equal but some are more equal than others. Later on it went on to say: two legs are better than four. My point: we are all equal and all the needs should be considered before setting objectives for our country. Venturing into new projects, we need to ensure that we do the proper feasibility studies, we do the assessments to ensure this is the way we want to go forward. We are looking at your economy, we need to look at what the needs of the people are.

Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago is one of our richest countries in the Caribbean. We are over 100 years in the oil and gas sector, and according to the oil price analysis that was done in November 2014, it says that the oil and gas sector accounted for an average of 42 per cent of the GDP; 53 per cent of the Government revenue and almost 85 per cent of merchandise export receipts over the last five years.

I would like to have the privilege to share some statistical data about our trend information on our oil and gas price, and according to the oil price forecast it says in 1995—I am using the West Texas Intermediate oil price, because that is what we are basing our analysis on—it was US \$18 a barrel. It climbed in 1996 to US \$22 a barrel. In 1998 it was US \$14, again, it fell. In 2000 it climbed to US \$30 a barrel. In 2008, we had US \$100 a barrel; in 2013 it was almost US \$98 a barrel. So, the point, this is not the first time we are here. We are a country that is experienced. We have subject matter experts in the various fields who are very competent, and I am saying that we can weather the storm with proper management of our assets.

In 2000, the then Government committed to put away revenues that were above the budgeted level in a Revenue Stabilisation Fund. I think in 2007, there was a Heritage Stabilisation Fund, which basically is to cushion the country against these inevitable volatility in the oil prices.

So, on October 05, there were multiple documents that were laid before the honourable House, and one of them was the *State Enterprise Investment Programme 2016*. It speaks of the different projects that we would like to be included in the 2016 expenditure. After reviewing them I had a few concerns. I would like some more clarification in the following areas. If you would like to follow, I am looking at number one, which is page 61, which speaks about NGC “Installation of the Pipeline from North West Peninsula Phase III to the Diamond Vale” project; proposed cost is \$35.2 million. We actually spent \$30.3 million to date, and this project is not in service, and the 2016 budget does not have any funds allocated for it. So, we have something outstanding, so I do not know what is the status of this project.

Another one is on page 67, which is, NEC “Asset Integrity Study”, revised from \$5 to \$15 million, which is assigned to commence in October 2015/2016 expenditure. So I would like to know the reason for this increase, because it is an asset integrity. We are not doing the remedial works yet, it is the asset integrity study that we are dealing with.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

On page 67, it speaks of “A Market Study for LABIDCO’s Administrative Complex” which is \$.2 million and “A Strategic Study for New LABIDCO Growth Model” which is estimated to cost \$2 million and it was deferred. I really think at this time we should relook at this, because this is for the development of the LABIDCO Industrial Estate and we need to look at the markets there. So this is something I would also like some clarification on.

Page 69, speaks of Petrotrin the CCR Unit is in service, however, there is a \$50.8 million assigned to it in the 2016 budget, which I would like further information as to why. And also, they spoke about the “Construction of a Ultra-Low Sulphur Diesel Unit” which is costing about \$397 million in 2016, and the construction works minus remedial works was about 99.23 per cent and there is a remark that says:

“Commercial production was delayed to mid-2016 due to structural steel and seismic design issues.”

Now, I am also concerned about that because your structural steel and your seismic design is actually your design phase or your pre-design phase which is even before you tender. So I would like to know at this late stage, why this is coming up as an issue and the reason for this?

I would like to now touch on national security. The budget statement, page 31, shared some information on the security agencies. I would like to know if we have statistical data to share on the activities due to smuggling of drugs, the arms, the ammunition and the extraterritorial water offences. As seen in the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, for the period of 2014/2015, there were 1,795 offences reported due to larceny and there were 2,011 offences reported due to burglaries and break-ins.

I would like to say that these petty crimes, as we class them, are very, very important to the public and the police service, because practise makes perfect, and the more you practise something the more you are willing to take the risk. So, I really would like for the police officers to demonstrate professionalism when dealing with the public in terms of taking note of these petty crimes and they should not be ignored.

One way we could deal with these petty crimes is implementing the anklet monitors where we allow them to do the community service and instead of we, dispatching police officers, we allow them to come into—that is the offenders, that is—the police station and make their report and log in every week.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I would like to touch on the prison officers. I was able to visit their website and I must say it is very user-friendly. There were many links that gave you good information, and it showed that in 2011, that was the last survey information it had on the website, it had 3,107 persons committed, and from that 11 per cent was due to larceny; 12 per cent was due to maintenance and affiliation areas; 14.5 per cent was due to possession of cocaine; 17.6 per cent was due to possession of marijuana.

There was a study conducted in 2013 by a nine-member special committee headed by Prof. Deosaran, and it had about 15 recommendations in the report, and it was reported in the *Guardian*, November 23, 2013 that due to budgetary constraints the recommendations could not have been implemented. I would like to just say we have these studies done, completed and in place. If the recommendations are applicable, I would hope that the Ministry would be reviewing these and looking at them because we want to make sure the convicted are reformed and that they can learn a skill, because you teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

I would like to speak on sports. Sports as the budget statement states, we aim to be a world-class sporting nation.

5.10 p.m.

I will like to be advised on the Brian Lara Cricket Academy which cost the country about \$1.097 billion, and, other than corrosion, I would like to know what is the status and the future of this project, as I noted in the State Enterprises Investment Programme there were no funds allocated to this project at this time.

I would like to move to education. I am a proud product of the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Oh, yes, okay, I am a successful product. Right. So, parents want a better life for their children. I know parents who leave 6.00 in the morning only to return at 6.00 p.m., and they have no accountability for their child because they are not there to send them to school, they are not there to receive them. We might be some of that because we are sitting here 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. in the evening.

I would like to say that balancing family life and demanding jobs can be very difficult, and we need to have things in place with the employers, that they need to have something like flexible time to allow persons to get the privilege to drop their children or spend time with them at those times, because we say that the parents are not there so the children—they do not know what is going on with their children. Every successful student firstly thanks God and their support

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

system, their parents, so parents need to invest in their children. Hence, parents need to be prepared for parenthood, not every parent is prepared for parenthood. So there needs to be more mandatory programmes, counselling, advice centres to help one balance a job, family, finding a safe babysitter and a trustworthy transportation system.

We really need to have support systems, as people who did this before, people who are going through it, because dealing with a new family is very difficult if you are doing it by yourself. We as a people need to understand that our culture is what defines us and not our legislation. That brings me to the point of single parents and the other parent who is not supporting the child, 12 per cent of the persons in the 2011 survey were in prison because of maintenance arrears; this is not helping anyone. Going to jail and doing the time but then the State is still paying to take care of your child, so men and women need to take responsibility and the State needs to claim back the money spent to take care of their children by seizing their assets to repay the State. I know we have things like if they have a fixed income we take away, but I am talking about for those who do not have steady incomes, we need to make sure they take their responsibility, so if we have passports to be issued a red flag comes up, if you are renewing your licence a red flag comes up, if you are going to purchase a new vehicle a red flag comes up, and if none of that works you seize the NIS contributions. So, they need to take responsibility.

I would like to now talk about something very much debated in this honourable House so far, and it is referenced to page 35 of the budget statement, which speaks about GATE. GATE Programme expenses is given to those most in need of it; I am not fully in support of this statement as my first year of my mechanical engineering degree there was no GATE, and my parents are not classed in the low income bracket so they had to pay for me to go full tuition, as well as—well I am from South so I had to rent because it was not feasible to reach there at 10.00 a.m. and travel home at 8.00 p.m. So with the cost of rent, which was about—in my time it was about \$2,200, I think it is climbing now, which is \$26,400 a year, plus a full tuition. For any parent it is difficult to afford, especially if you have more than one child who is living, of a university degree.

I would like to propose this, all universities have a rated on a Grade Point Average system. Most organizations request or require you to have a 3.0 GPA or above, and, what I am saying, if you are above 2.5 GPA then your tuition should be free, you should have it covered by GATE. If it is between 2.0 and 2.5 GPA, I would suggest that they pay half of their tuition. If they are unable to maintain a

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

2.0 GPA they will be removed from the GATE programme and they will have to pay their full tuition, and this is similar to the scholarship programme. Now, different institutes, or different tertiary education institutes, have different ratings for the different programmes, so this would definitely have to be varied according to the programme that you are pursuing, but it is basically rated on your GPA or your output as a student. So, it is very similar to the scholarship programme, if you are unable to maintain your B+ average you will be removed from the scholarship programme. So if you do not want to study it is not at the expense of the State.

This brings me to a very important point, every child and every person is created differently, and for that issue we should be rewarded for such because we have different merits. We have scholarships for many different disciplines so I believe that Trinidad and Tobago should have an athletic scholarship for undergraduate programmes other than physical education. If we want to promote sports this is one of the ways that we can ensure our future scholars. So if they have management and they want to pursue business they should be allowed to, based on their athletic capabilities. If they meet the entry level requirements they should be given a chance to be considered.

I would like to speak now about the graduate training programme, I am very supportive of the initiative for 500 graduate trainees to be placed in the different Ministries, [*Desk thumping*] that is excellent. I could say this because I once was a graduate trainee and graduate trainees need to work on projects that add value to the organizations, not photocopy and not make tea. So when you exit school you are full of eagerness, you are ready to learn, you are ready to work, you are ready to be entered into the world of work, you should not be met with blank stares and job insecurity issues. So, hence, a graduate training programme needs to be set up, and the person setting the plan needs to set milestones or set targets on which the graduate trainee will be reporting on a timely basis. If the intention is to fill the gaps within the organization with this graduate trainee, this needs to be outlined before, and this person should not be robbed of the specially tailored programme they are supposed to go through with.

If you are exerting to push routine work, this needs to be outlined before because every graduate trainee tends to have a different experience based on their supervisor. Now, I did my graduate training at a State organization and it had both good and negatives. Unfortunately I tried to prevent the negatives but there are certain things that just cannot be dealt with and maybe when you are planning it you need to take that into consideration. Because in one instance I had as a

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

graduate trainee, I was assigned work from my supervisor who went on leave and a senior engineer took over. The senior engineer decided that they would review the work, when they reviewed the work now, after a week no feedback; the name or the author of the document automatically changed, and my name was no longer there but it was the senior engineer.

The company at that time had nothing to deal with this scenario because, I mean, it is dishonesty, disloyalty; it is also a breaking of code of ethics of engineers as well, and being a graduate trainee it was very surprising to meet this in the world of work. And our culture is like, well, this is not the first time, and I find that is poor, this should be the first and the last. Unfortunately, the State organization values your years of service and not your merits so, unfortunately, this person is still there and now a leader in the organization. I do not know what can be placed, because if they go into the Ministries I would hope that it would have something to protect these young minds because you do not want that to be a repeat in the cycle.

I would like to speak about the student performance in the SEA 2015. This is part of the social sector investment booklet as well, and it is said that 10 per cent of the students scored below 50 per cent in the SEA exam, 2015. This, I must say, is very difficult, because, as Sen. Ameen had pointed out, "Education is your most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world", and this is a quote from Nelson Mandela. I looked at some past information and in 1995 UWI did a survey which showed that 22 out of 23 per cent of persons, or one out of four persons in Trinidad and Tobago is unable to cope with everyday reading and writing. Schools need to do an assessment to identify students that are struggling because we promise a school for all, nobody fails the SEA. We do not want to have a major gap in the system where these children are left behind and they are forced to create havoc in the classroom. We want to identify these children and their parents, because if the parents also have a problem with reading and writing they should be suggested to the ALTA programmes, and make this available because everybody has the right to an education, everybody should be able to read and write.

I would like to now touch on the benefits of the laptops programme for each student in schools. I would like to know if any information, or if it was ever reviewed or analysed to determine the impact of these laptops on the education system. If so, I very much would like that information. Also, with the Internet in schools, which is being promised in this budget statement, does this allow for online education and no teachers in the classroom? Does it mean that I can be on

*Appropriation Bill, 2015**Tuesday, October 20, 2015*

my smartphone during classroom time? Does it mean that I am going to do research while the teacher is teaching? Is the broadband going to be blocked only in the library area or is it going to be open? Is it that the school is going to be opened for longer hours so children can use the Internet with no supervision? These are the things that I would like to get some more information on in relation to the Internet in the schools.

A typical school day is about eight hours and most schools have about one hour lunch. I would like to suggest that during this one-hour lunch that schools look at having extracurricular activities for their students, like chess club, singing, dancing, music club, and this will encourage a kind of unity in the commonality with the students and can reduce bullying because you will have a group system and a unity system. Children would not be left out but they will have something to run to, a kind of closing the gap within the school system. So this brings me to the point on dealing with social media bullying, and this is a big issue that no one quite understands how we got here. The thing is it does not only exist with children; it exists with adults, because we see that comments, as posted online, with disregard of other persons' feelings or behaviour; it is just difficult.

We should not have to make laws for how we treat another human being, but, apparently it is no longer clear to be your brother's keeper and the power of words. In this Parliament we would need to address freedom of speech and infringement of human rights—and they even post these fight scenes with children in uniforms. In my time, which was not so long ago, that was unheard of. If we were on High Street the store owners would call the school and you would be reported and you would be dealt with, so I do not understand how we have reached this far.

Now, I must say that I have some friends who are teachers and they speak on the difficulty in disciplining children today in the school system, and, I must say I understood it when I heard because it is not very easy to discipline a student with weapons. In 2013, *Engaging Youth at Risk*, Executive Report of the Committee on Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago, had about 17 recommendations to deal with persons, because I think since 2009 the Parliament has been looking at students and weapons in the school and how to deal with it, and some of the recommendations were really good: curriculum should match the ability levels of learners, include learners with special needs that have been mainstreamed into other systems. Also, we need to have like remediation programmes, mentorship—teachers mentorship service learning, guidance counsellors—I think some schools have guidance counsellors, but they must be trained to deal with the complex factors that affect the youth and depressed communities.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

5.25 p.m.

Every teacher knows their best students, so they should be easily able to identify the students that need the extra help. Other than lessons, they would need other attention. I do not support suspending children; I believe in saving the time for the issue that happened. So, for example, you can be assigned to cleaning your school desk or painting it or cleaning the schoolyard, and this seeks to ensure that children understand the fulfilment of an honest day's work and adapt discipline and honour in trying your best. Parents need to take responsibility for their children, but now parents need to understand the role of parenthood in order to be good at it.

I will like to talk briefly on housing. I will just like to put a little note. How do we know the integrity of our public buildings in Trinidad and Tobago? Do we have an integrity register? If we tend to be a reactive society, I would like for us to be a very preventative one. So instead of only hearing of the 17 out of the 19 landslips fixed, I would like to hear of the life expectation of the bridge on the Mosquito Creek. I will like to hear of the lifespan of the San Fernando flyover or I would like to know how long again my public library can stand. Knowing this information formulates an effective budget and allows proper planning and prevents closure of historical buildings.

Safety is our number one priority, and crime is not our only threat. Natural disasters such as flooding play a key role. Initiatives such as beach clean-ups are great, but remember I spoke about national pride and patriotism. If you are patriotic citizens you should not be littering, and when persons are found littering they should have to do community service where they have to clean the beaches, the rivers and the drains, and I am sure they would learn a lesson that they would not forget. So they should not only have the penalty of payments. This would assist in social transformation and should be made law.

I will like to touch briefly on surveillance on page 67 of the budget statement. Persons are encouraged to install the CCTV surveillance system, and this needs to be supported by legislation, because if a person is videoed carrying out a crime would that mean automatic conviction or just evidence, or would the person be on bail and the innocent victim is now threatened? So we need to find out exactly what part of it.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to speak about public transportation. I must say this is commendable work to the water taxi and the coach services. These are exemplary service providers, and all public servants should go through the same training that these persons have gone through, because public transportation has been an issue with our country, and as we seek to improve we should go forward with that.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Food—I support the statement “we are what we eat” and cleaner eating is needed in the schools. The children snacks contain about 34 grams of sugar and juices contain about 40 grams of sugar. This only leads to obesity and diabetes. So the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I was glad to hear about the initiatives with our local farmers. I really think that we need to encourage our local farmers and find markets for the demand and supply if we are asking them to improve and do more in the agricultural system. So utilizing local contracts with our local farmers for things like fruit salads and the school meals is excellent.

I would like to speak about pension. After 30 years of service and you are paying your income tax, you have to pay taxes on your pension. I would like for this policy to just please be reviewed.

In terms of renewable energy, I am very supportive of the project that was outlined for the supply and installation of the solar lighting on the La Brea Industrial Estate. It is costing \$10 million, and I am very, very supportive of this project. Solar energy is one of our must-haves in this country. Yes, because of our gas we do not tend to want to go that way because of cost, but for office buildings, our schools, our hotels where lights are on all the time, this is the way to go. In terms of street lights though, it is very good for remote areas where you cannot get trenching. It is good for those areas. In terms of the street lights though, because it is only 2 per cent of our electricity bill, we may not want to look at it for use throughout Trinidad and Tobago, but it is definitely futuristic thinking, and I am very supportive of this.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to just touch on infrastructure as my last point. I would like to say that highway access routes are great for the creating of jobs, schools and it creates business opportunities and development for many societies. However, feasibility studies need to be conducted to determine the impact of the additional projects to the country’s economy, and this is very, very important. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, I would just like to inform you at this point in time you have five minutes left of your speaking time.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. With that, I must say to the Ministry of Finance and their team, the documents were very well prepared. It was a lot of information to read, because I read all the books. I tried my best, and it was a lot. I must say they were very well written; it was real easy to read. The team did an excellent job. I do look forward to a better tomorrow, a brighter tomorrow. I must say in closing I do think there is no better honour than serving your country on your birthday, so I am very honoured to be making my maiden contribution on my birthday. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RAMKISSOON]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I do thank God for that opportunity, and I do thank my family for supporting me and who came to support my maiden contribution. So I look forward to this Eleventh Parliament sitting, and I do look forward to working with each and every one of you. Thank you and God bless you.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, thank you very much, and I would like to take this opportunity to not only congratulate you on your maiden contribution, but I think I speak for everyone when I say “happy birthday”. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Allyson Baksh: Mr. Vice-President, it is with a sense of pride and gratitude to the Almighty, the political party which I represent and the hon. Prime Minister that I stand today to make my first contribution in this honourable House. As a young person, I am fully mindful of my responsibilities as a Member of this honourable House, and I intend to fulfil these responsibilities to the best of my ability.

My first comment with respect to the Budget Statement 2016, is that the substance of the budget adequately reflects the theme of the budget that is, “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, whether we believe it or not, whether we accept it or not, whether we like it or not, we are all on the same train, headed in the same direction, towards the same destiny. Some of the passengers on board may discern their responsibility and say, “Doing it together does not include me,” but I say to them today, if you cannot find it within yourself to be patriotic to your country and yourself, at least be patriotic to your children and the generation of tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*] This is not our country or our world. It is the country and the world of our children, for they have entrusted us as their caretakers. Let us not disappoint them. Let us all join in the clean-up and healing campaign. Let us all join in rebuilding our country and making it a better place for our children to live.

Oil prices may have fallen, but that does not mean that we should also fall as a nation. This is the time to show our resilience, our strength, our uniqueness, our ability to bond and fight as a nation, and our ability to be innovative in establishing solutions to our problems. We did it before, and we can do it again.

Most of us sit here today because some majority has put their faith, trust and confidence in us. Yes, they have entrusted us with their future and the future of their children, let us not fail them. Whether we hold a seat on the Opposition Bench, the Government Bench or the Bench as an Independent, our obligations, responsibilities and commitments to our nation are the same. Let us honour and fulfil it.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

While I am at it, I will also like to inform those who might not have noticed that our leader, the right and hon. Prime Minister is not targeting anyone in particular when he talks about corruption in this country. He is doing his job, the job the country asked him to do, the job he has always done and the job the people expect him to do.

In this country when you blow the whistle there are elements that will go to all means to get you out of the way. They will deface your good name, stain your good character, take away your job and attempt to tarnish your integrity in every way. However, none of this scared our leader. He kept on fighting and kept his eyes on his objective and purpose, with strength and humility. He has displayed that he is not one to take sides when it comes to the business of the country. He never joined the dog fight or showed disrespect for the chair he fills today. Many make negative comments about his leadership and choices, but he is not one to fall to the critics. He makes his choices and he stands by them.

Do you remember how many questioned the assignment of the hon. Colm Imbert as Minister of Finance? Well look at us today, because we are now seeing a man who has successfully stepped up to the plate with great strength, hard work and service to the people. [*Desk thumping*] This is only one indication of the great choices made by our leader, and his knowledge, understanding and choices in people.

People blame our good leader for the failures of others, with total disregard to the fact that this party has always honoured and respected their democratic process, and was always brave enough to make changes after failures and when necessary. We do not sit and become complacent behind failing leadership. We take action and give new blood a chance; this is why we follow a line of consecutive success. This is why we have the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley as our leader and Prime Minister today, and why this country will also see a change for the better, an end to corruption and a display of great governance. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, as you would recall, the last general election was held on September 07, 2015. This meant that the new government had just less than one month to prepare the annual budget. Given the time available to the new Minister to prepare the annual budget, the hon. Minister of Finance was able to effectively structure a balance between achieving some of the objectives set in the People's National Movement manifesto, while setting a policy direction for the next five years, while at the same time being mindful of the imperatives of adjustments required, as a result of the changes in the world economy. If only for this alone, the hon. Minister must be commended. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. A. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

What was the environment with which the hon. Minister was faced in framing the budget? A stagnant and ailing economy; a weakened domestic economy with significant decline in construction, distribution and manufacturing; a decline in the oil and gas sector for four years in a row and attendant lower government revenues from this source, without a recovery plan in terms of diversification or development of other forms of sustainable resources; significant foreign exchange leakage and capital flight as a result of mismanagement of the foreign exchange market by the Central Bank; balance of payment deficit; significant and increasing fiscal and budget deficits for the entire period 2010 to 2015; significant commitments made by the last Government with respect to wages and salaries, back pay for workers in the public sector, for example, prison, police and fire services, Public Transport Service Corporation and Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago security workers; last but not least, rampant over expenditure, wastage and corruption.

5.40 p.m.

It is against this background that the hon. Minister has prepared that budget statement 2015. The budget has been predicated on a crude oil price US \$45 per barrel and a mix of gas price of US \$2.75 per MMBtu Henry Hub and US \$8 per MMBtu Indonesia. These prices are based on sound estimates of projected commodity prices. The revenue and expenditure projection of \$41.6 million and \$63.1 million respectively is based on sound research and judgment guaranteed by the absence of corruption and bad spending.

The accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers review of the budget 2016 highlighted a listing of who won and who did not in the budget as follow: Winners—individual income earners, increase in personal allowance from \$60,000 to \$72,000 [*Desk thumping*] as at January 01, 2016; graduates, 20 per cent increase in stipends for OJTs as of December 01, 2015; recruitment programme for 500 graduates in all Ministries—\$55 million; all citizens—removal of immigration form requirements at all ports of entry; 10-year passport for persons over 18 years as of January 01, 2016; a reduction in the VAT rate from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent; reestablishment of Trinidad and Tobago revenue authority by the end of fiscal year 2016; agriculturalists—exemptions on all duties and taxes on various inputs into agricultural sector as of January 01, 2016; retirees—discounts on utilities later in 2016; free passports and driver's permits as of January 01, 2016; increase in the NIS qualification cap on join income to \$5,000 as of December 31, 2015; Judiciary—introduction of video-conferencing facilities for minor offences to reduce the magisterial, administrative burden and financial autonomy.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Losers—employers, increase in NIS contributions for employees as of July 04, 2016; increase in insurable earning class limit from \$12,000 to \$13,600 as of July 04, 2016; property owners, reinstitution of property tax and the reintroduction of old rates and taxes as at January 01, 2016; all citizens—15 per cent increase in super and diesel gas prices, super from \$2.70 per litre to \$3.11 per litre, diesel from \$1.50 per litre to \$1.72 per litre with immediate effect; adjusting of exemptions and zero-rated items.

Business—increase in business levy from 0.2 per cent to 0.36 per cent as of January 01, 2016; increase in Green Fund levy from 0.1 per cent to 0.3 per cent as of January 01, 2016; increase in VAT registration threshold from \$360,000 to \$500,000 as of January 01, 2016.

However, a closer review of the listing of losers will show that in actual fact there are no losers. The increase in NIS, for instance, will assist all citizens since it would ensure the enhancement and protection of the NIS benefits for all. The reinstitution of property tax too will ensure that the country obtains a sustainable and fair source of annual revenue.

Mr. Vice-President, may I take a moment to address this matter of property tax which has been a source of major discussion and hysteria by friends on the opposite side of this Senate. As indicated by the hon. Minister of Finance, the previous administration by deferring the payment of property tax has caused this nation to lose at least \$1 billion in revenue over their tenure. In this context, the 2016 budget proposes to have the phased reintroduction of property tax at the old 2009 levels and old rates as a starting point with special provisions for the aged and indigent.

Mr. Vice-President, what really is property tax? Property tax is an annual tax on real property. It is usually but not always a local tax. It is most commonly founded on the concept of market value. The tax base may be the land only, the land and buildings or various permutations of these factors. Property tax has been in existence for at least three millennia. It is common throughout the world and has often been the subject of political debate. The strengths and weaknesses about this type of tax are well known and possibly more widely understood than any other tax.

I would like to reiterate what my colleague, Sen. Daniel Dookie stated, that the property tax is a benefit principle. These are some the advantages of property tax, they are clear and they include—it is technically and administratively possible to introduce or maintain in almost any circumstances. It is cheap to administer. It is very difficult to avoid or evade. Collections success rates of 95

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. A. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

per cent are readily achievable. It is transparent. In general, there is a good correlation between assessed value and the ability to pay. If designed correctly, the tax can be marginally progressive. The revenue is predictable and buoyant. It is very well suited as a source of locally generated revenue for local governments.

Mr. Vice-President, I submit that the hysteria and “boogeyman” response to the property tax is unfounded. This tax represents an important source of revenue to Trinidad and Tobago and its reintroduction is long outstanding. [*Desk thumping*] The 15 per cent increase in the price of super gasoline and diesel fuel represents a marginal increase in prices of commodities which are backed by a huge subsidy which should have already been addressed by the last administration.

The marginal increases in the Green Fund Levy, the business levy and the VAT registration threshold all represent attempts by this administration to ensure that the burden of the adjustment occasioned by the economic realities of the day are borne equitably by all.

Mr. Vice-President, I would now like to turn to the specific issue of public administration in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Public Administration has been allocated \$1,184,531,491 in the 2016 budget. This sum will be used to ensure that the Ministry of Public Administration achieves its objectives for fiscal 2016. One of the major roles of the Ministry Public Administration is that of developing a stronger and more versatile public service in order to realise that highest degree of citizen, employee and business sector satisfaction.

I am advised that 2012, the Ministry of Public Administration embarked on a programme of projects aimed at creating a modernized citizen-centric public service, branded “Gold to Diamond”. It also represented a proposed change of the public services’ organizational structures from a traditional pyramid to a diamond shape. The phrase “Gold to Diamond” also captured the timeline of the public service renewal and the modernization programme from its beginning on the nation’s diamond anniversary, and the standard or quality of service citizens can expect from the public service.

“Gold to Diamond” also encapsulated the transformation and the modernization of the service delivery framework. The focus on transformation of the human resource management architecture and service delivery improvement initiatives simultaneously addresses people, processes and technology. The exercise not only focused on identifying new ways to ensure more coherent, efficient and effective operations across the whole Government, but also

*Appropriation Bill, 2015**Tuesday, October 20, 2015*

addressed the need for the Ministry to be results-focused, to deliver more efficiently and effectively on its mandate. This programme had laudable objectives, but alas, like many of the initiatives of the last administration, the programme was never properly executed. Nevertheless to say, the development of a proper strategic plan for the Ministry is still outstanding.

Since its establishment in 2001, the Ministry of Public Administration has been responsible of renewing and modernizing the public service. The Ministry is expected to head and facilitate public service transformation and enhance the human resources capacity of Trinidad and Tobago in order to fill critical skills gaps. It is the intention of this administration to ensure that a strategic plan which would provide a blueprint for the governance of the Ministry of Public Administration is completed. This would provide the road map for the modern public service development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, my colleague the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East has dealt in detail with respect to other matters relative to the Ministry of Public Administration such as ICT matters and matters relative to the urgent need to ensure that adequate accommodation is provided to officers of public service. It would suffice for me to add that this administration would ensure that the level of neglect of public officers which was a feature of the past administration will no longer obtain. Specifically, this administration will focus on the following areas: we will ensure that proper accommodation will be put in place for public officers. Unlike the previous administration all government assets will be fully utilized. In this respect we will achieve the completion of the government campus in Port of Spain to accommodate Customs and Excise, Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Immigration Division, education division and the Board of Inland Revenue.

We will ensure that the right people regardless of race, colour, creed or class with the right skills and on the basis of meritocracy are selected for the right jobs. We will work to provide a safe health and safety work environment conducive to productivity for all our public officers. We will also establish an inter-ministerial committee to assess public accommodation for Ministries in order to plan and expedite relocation of certain offices. We will also ensure collaboration, knowledge-sharing and the establishment of best practices in order to achieve greater efficacy in the delivery of service in public sector as a whole. There would be the implementation of interdisciplinary teams at various levels toward a transformed, rejuvenated and rebranded public service.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. A. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The intent would be to achieve diamond standard, quality assurance and significant improvement in the manner, space and time the public is served. ICT will be used to transform the way we do business in the public sector.

We will work on ensuring that one of the critical objectives of the Ministry of Public Administration, that is, the improvement in the staffing situation is attained. This can be achieved by the strengthening of the offices of the Service Commission, the Director of Public Administration and Chief Personnel Officer. Also, to ensure that the Government HR services company, GHRS, is reorganized to a greater efficiency. We will improve the quality of the recruitment process through embedding modern tools of recruitment and selection, multistage assessments, psychometric evaluation, competency-based structured interviews and sound reference checks on candidates.

GHRS will be used to undertake modern methods of recruitment selection for contract employment using globally accepted standards and best practices. We will work expeditiously on the operationalization of the new authorities to be created, namely the revenue and motor vehicle authorities. These institutions will facilitate an effective approach in the recruitment and selection of appropriate personnel, career planning, performance management, reward and compensation, training and development, promotion and advancement and in this way will improve the delivery service to the public.

Finally, we will ensure that the budget theme of “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let’s do this Together” underpins our development of the public service as a whole.

Finally, Mr. Vice-President, I will like to end my maiden speech/contribution to this Senate the way I began, the quote: “Youth is wasted on the young” has been attributed to one of the famous thinkers Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw. It is my intention during my time in this Senate to demonstrate that this statement is not reflective of this youth. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you, Senator, and I wish to also congratulate you on your maiden speech in this honourable Senate.

5.55 p.m.

Sen. Hafeez Ali: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I open giving thanks and praises to Almighty Allah for his graces and mercies and his favour in granting me this opportunity to give glory to him as I serve my nation.

May I take this opportunity also, Mr. Vice-President, to congratulate you on your appointment as Vice-President of this honourable Senate, and also to congratulate as well all the Members of this Senate as we come together to contribute to the nation’s business.

I wish to also thank the seventh Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, for the confidence he has shown in me to appoint me a Government Senator. And I wish to thank the Finance Minister for what I see as a people's budget, a budget of jobs, growth and opportunity, a budget to facilitate real change and real transformation. It is a budget that shows a definite pathway to making the PNM vision 2030 a reality for all to touch, feel, and experience. [*Desk thumping*]

It is a budget that invests in the right infrastructure to support our growing needs and demands for housing, child protection, drainage, mobility, technology and providing accessibility for senior citizens, the disabled and ex-prisoners. It is a budget that lays a framework for ensuring fiscal responsibility, and for improved quality service delivery in a more coordinated, accountable and transparent environment. It is a budget that provides a solid foundation for reducing the national debt and reducing the deficit within three years. It is a budget that will help Trinidad and Tobago improve its competitiveness, productivity and build personal responsibility for the collective success of the nation.

I thank the Minister for utilizing a format that is very easy for citizens to digest, and for placing the reality of the turbulent economic times that we face on account of the wanton waste, mismanagement and corruption of the previous administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, this is why it has no outcry in the public, because everyone understands the budget clearly. I wish to thank the Minister for providing hope and reigniting confidence in the economy on the account of more diligent management and leadership. I also want to share with the Opposition that corruption, waste and mismanagement, are all causes of inflation and places the current and future generation under undue stress and frustration.

Sen. Mark: That is your maiden speech?

Sen. H. Ali: Trinidad and Tobago is now living that reality, having survived five years and six months of UNC rule.

If it is one lesson we have learned from the past administration is that money spent does not necessarily equal value received. What I see in this budget is a focus on translating the budget into a seamless programme of implementation, as to a total capacity and capability for data management, programme planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation and a framework for improvement is developed within a result-based system. A framework for WASA to deliver water and not advertisements, telling you about water that you do not get. Mind you, WASA spent so much money on these "Government working for you" ads, they are now \$1.6 billion in deficit. That is the UNC style governance.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. H. ALI]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Under the Partnership we were spending more, but every major indicator of development was headed in the wrong direction. From the competitive index, the quality of life index, the corruption index, crime, poverty, unemployment, social inclusion of the elderly and disabled. Under the Partnership, not one area important to the people was progressing in the right direction. Under the PNM priorities for development are intact from my review of the budget. I see focused action to address excesses—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President is on his feet, behave yourself.

Mr. Vice-President: Can we allow the Senator to make his maiden speech—

Sen. Mark: It is mostly controversial.

Mr. Vice-President: Yes, I understand that, but can we allow him to make his maiden speech.

Sen. Mark: Otherwise we will invoke the Standing Orders.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator! Senator, continue, please.

Sen. H. Ali: I thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the protection. I would like to applaud the Government focus on comprehensive evidence-based public safety, health care, sport, entertainment, agriculture developing rural and urban infrastructure.

I welcome the PNM policy to get the right people with the right skills, and right standard of behaviour, following the right instruction, using the right plant and equipment, and the emphasis on doing the job right first. Essentially the PNM is assuring that quality will underpin all that is done, and the Government will seek to do things right first using the right people to get the best possible results.

This is a welcome development considering the rocky road we have traversed under the UNC administration. In preparation for my contribution, today WASA contractors shared the atrociousness that passed for management under the UNC. They related several instances where RFPs were sent out after submitted proposals to meet the requirement and the specifications were altered to reflect the submissions.

These stories have now become common place as we all know about the waste-water treatment plant that was granted for \$400 million more than the contractor that actually had the capability to complete the work. There is another project valued \$40 million in Tobago that was awarded without tender, and guess what, Mr. Vice-President? No water and no other local company was even given

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

the opportunity to submit a bid. Why is WASA so important? Why am I spending all this time on water? Water is life. Proper management of water resources in terms of water quality is critical to avoid detrimental effects on public health. Water and sanitation have also been identified as significant variables in determining disease incidents. Hence, inadequate access to water resources and sanitation services by the population could also lead to negative health impacts in the country.

And again, the pathway to success, [*Holds up document*] the PNM manifesto for 2015/2016 on page 30, will outline some of the initiatives to improve the water sector, and I will name a few:

1. Adopting and implementing the integrated water resource management;
2. Creating an appropriate institutional framework and organizational structure for effective water management, including the establishment of a water resource agency as a separate organization to manage the country's water resources;
3. Developing and maintaining an effective water resource hydrological monitoring network, reliable data collection and water resource assessment and development and maintenance of a national water data and information system;
4. Implementing a water reduction programme.

And there are many more, Mr. Vice-President, that we can easily look into page 30 of the PNM manifesto 2015, which is now Government policy.

A data-driven, evidence-based society: if nothing else the budget lays the foundation for a quantum leap in developing a more data-driven, evidence-based society, with the introduction of the statistical institute, reengineering of the CSO office and its operations, the health insurance and other developments that are based on improving information collection analysis, and sharing across public and private sectors.

Data being the new oil, the PNM plan to grow broadband and other data capture and processing capability will support a new look public utilities that emphasizes quality and is aligned to the infrastructure development national and regional development agenda. It is common knowledge that the CSO has been neglected for many years, especially in the last five under the UNC-led administration. It is also expected that the information released would be outdated, unreliable, untimely, and in some instances irrelevant to the

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. H. ALI]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

development needs of the nation. This direction shows that the PNM understands the critical importance of data driven decision making in both the private and public sectors. Accordingly, we will implement the draft statistics Act and create an independent statistical institute with a board comprised of representatives drawn from the public sector, including the Central Bank, private sector, the universities, market research organizations and the professionals.

I appreciate the fact that this independent institute will be led, managed and staffed by competent professionals and will be funded by the Government. Another commendable initiative outlined is the PNM's plan to provide Wi-Fi access connectivity in city centres, in all community centres and public spaces, and I hope, Mr. Vice-President, they start with Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Imbert: We will. [*Laughter*]

Sen. H. Ali: With all the misconception of the UNC-led administration, we must be separating fact from fiction. One fiction is that the UNC has said PNM has no vision or plan, but the fact is the PNM manifesto and Vision 2030 documents lay a clear pathway for Trinidad and Tobago achieving the sustainable development goals. [*Desk thumping*]

The fundamental concept behind the PNM vision remains improving the quality of life for all and stripping out non-value adding activities and reducing variation, so that the public utilities and other public sector agencies can focus on delivering what its customer, that is the citizens, the Trinidad and Tobago public actually wants. The objective of the PNM can be distilled to creating a nation that is globally competitive and focuses on consistently achieving customer public requirements, but doing so with the least amount of effort, surely, is the goal of any organization in every sector.

Mr. Vice-President, there are many myths that we can discuss here, but I will just indicate one more. The myth is, the PNM Vision 2030 is expensive to implement. But, the fact is, these approaches typically save far more than they cost to implement. Done well, they can also transform the customer experience and reduce cost. The vision is about doing things right, reducing the re-work, repairs are being more proactive, coordinated and systematic. The PNM aim is to adapt the way we deliver products and services, such as delivering more for less, while developing and maintaining our focus on customers, our citizens. The PNM is about reducing waste, variation and cost. It is about doing more, better, but with less. The PNM will be implementing an improved planning and execution regime that enables the state sector to measure benefits and actively demonstrate the savings made throughout the supply chain. Clearly, any cost of change should be set against the savings delivered by the change.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to now shift my focus to youth and sports in our 2015/2016 manifesto on page 61.

6.10 p.m.

The preamble of the youth speaks to the fact that:

“Our youth are vital to the future development of Trinidad and Tobago. They must be nurtured, listened to, protected and encouraged, given proper guidance and easy access to their education, personal development, health care and meaningful employment. They must be supported and provided with the means to grow and develop and there must be forums for their voices to be heard and their ideas, plans and programmes”—should be—“incorporated into”—the—“national policy. They must be given opportunities to participate in Government and the public and private sectors at the highest levels.”

To achieve this, the manifesto has set out 15 areas for development and implementation. I will just highlight a few areas, five areas of importance which can and will be developed by ensuring the necessary support for the already established Police Youth Clubs throughout the country, as well as organizations, such as, the scouts, and cadets. These areas are to:

- “Provide the youth facilities in villages and regions of Trinidad and Tobago that will allow positive recreation and healthy life styles among the young, so as to give vulnerable youth a safe haven to socialize, while receiving coaching, counselling and acquiring information on civic responsibility.
- Mobilize youth in natural setting”—that is in—“(their communities)”—and—“villages”, Mr. Vice-President.
- Promote and encourage the participation of the youth in all aspects of sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago; And to
- Foster a greater understanding of the needs of the young people and provide guidelines for youth development.”

Mr. Vice-President, there is a pathway for development of our young people using sport which can be best visualized using the figure of the pyramid. The pyramid can be divided into six levels started at its base which is the broadest or the largest segment.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. H. ALI]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

This represents the area of total participation and socializing of the young to take place. The level that contributes to this would be the primary schools, secondary schools and clubs, Madam President.

These activities take place mainly in the communities and villages. The three top levels consist of activities at the tertiary, high performance and elite levels. To this end, our Government will work with the necessary groups through the relevant Ministries responsible for sport and youth affairs, education, community development, culture and tourism.

Madam President on page 62 of our manifesto our government highlights:

“...that as many citizens as possible should be involved in Sports and Recreation and that Trinidad and Tobago must strive to be a world class sporting nation satisfying local, regional and international needs while providing sustainable employment and contributing to national wellbeing.”

To achieve this we have identified about 29 areas of development. I will highlight a few, Madam President:

“Increase the pool of talent from which world champions can emerge for International Recognition.”

The Ministry responsible for sport will ensure that our total participation programmes are adequately supported. I alluded to this earlier on when I dealt with the base of the pyramid involving primary and secondary schools and clubs. To this end the Barataria/San Juan constituency will be requesting the development of a sporting field, and an indoor facility for the San Juan Secondary School, whereby the school will have first class facilities which the community of Moreau Road and its surroundings will have access, of course, after collaboration with the school. In the Barataria area there will be a request for establishment of swimming pools and indoor facilities which will contribute to the total participation programmes. These two additional facilities will further contribute to the widening of the total participation programme in the communities. Two, to:

“Use Sports to reduce the high incidence of chronic lifestyle diseases prevalent in Trinidad and Tobago.”

This will necessitate collaboration with the Ministry responsible for Health in conjunction with organizations that promote healthy lifestyles. To promote Trinidad and Tobago as an attractive location for major international sporting event. This will necessitate the development of national sporting associations to dominate their respective field of endeavour. So that, when we host events, we

*Appropriation Bill, 2015**Tuesday, October 20, 2015*

will be in the finals of those events, Madam President. Using sport as a catalyst, we will be able to use our diverse culture to attract tourists who will travel with their respective teams. In this way, we will be able to become a major destination for international and regional sports and develop and promote sport tourism.

To—"Promote Trinidad and Tobago as an attractive location for major international sporting events"—will also necessitate the development and improvement of youth sport infrastructure and facilities across the country ensuring that they meet the highest international best standards.

Madam President, we will:

"Create a Sports Institute of Trinidad and Tobago that will capture and hone the skills of young athletes while growing and modernising the Sports Industry."

The sport policy speaks to a sport institute. This was established in 2007 at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and is known as the Academy of Sport and Leisure Studies. Some of us may recall that this institute offered as much as 130 sports scholarships. This institute was established to produce athletes on a consistent basis who would be able to perform on the world stage. This institute is a major step or level in the pathway for the development of our athletes.

There were 12 disciplines included in this programme that offered young people for the first time an opportunity to obtain a tertiary education while becoming world class athletes. The programme has been derailed and a review would be in order. However, the physical plan is a necessity as it is a major component in the development of our sporting industry. In keeping with our manifesto and the policies to be developed, the following areas must be addressed:

- to redefine the pathway for the athlete;
- to develop and increase the pool of athletes that play sport;
- identify potential elite athletes, hire the best coaches;
- strengthening the administration of national sporting associations;
- provide facilities to top class standards;
- provide financial support to the associations; and
- establish a research and development unit at the institute of sport.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. H. ALI]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

The vision of the institute was a sporting campus which would have included, the Manny Ramjohn Stadium for athletics; the Ato Boldon for football; the Brian Lara Stadium for Cricket and a further development for cycling, swimming, hockey as well as indoor facilities for boxing. To achieve the policies outlined in the manifesto it is necessary to attract and hire the best minds who understand and are willing to implement these policies.

Brian Lara was hired and was responsible for developing linkages at top universities in England and Australia. MOUs were developed with these institutions to assist in developing our institute to world class status. Even Gordon Greenidge one of the best batsmen in the world was hired to create linkages and develop relationships in India, Australia, and England as well. Brian Lara, Gordon Greenidge and Larry Gomes were exemplars to become world class players.

Madam President, none of these persons are with the Academy of Sport and Leisure Studies today. The programme has lost its way. There is a saying that goes like this, “a people without a vision shall perish”. Thank God there is a change in Government. The PNM Government is a Government with a vision and it is left to us to achieve that vision.

Madam President, the PNM winning the September 07 general election could not suddenly make everything perfect overnight. However, the budget sends the right messages for the right time. The implementation will take us to the right path to growth, sustainable development and opportunity. Trinidad and Tobago will recover revenues through property taxes. We will provide relief to the vulnerable, through more sustainable programmes, social housing and increase grants for pensioners, the disabled, the children with special needs. Trinidad and Tobago is on the pathway to betterment for all when we work together.

From the signals given by AMCHAM, the Chambers of Commerce, NGOs, CBOs and faith based communities, all partners are ready to make sacrifices for success. Sacrifices to assure as a country we can achieve greater success and optimize our full potential. The budget clearly shows the PNM is ready. The PNM is ready to provide a leadership with vision, leadership with integrity, leadership with consistency, accountability and transparency, necessary to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. The budget sends a strong message that the PNM will do more than just talk. The new PNM will do it right the first time. We will do it together.

Madam President, in closing I leave all with our watch words, a reminder of the posture required to deal with the turbulent times ahead. “Together we aspire, together we achieve.” I thank you Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Madam President: Thank you very much Sen. Ali and congratulations on your maiden contribution. I now recognize Sen. Richards.

Sen. Paul Richards: Good evening, Madam President, and allow me to begin by giving God thanks and praise for this opportunity, this blessing, to serve my country at this level, and also allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as the President of the Senate and also the Vice-President who had chaired the session earlier on today. Allow me also to congratulate Members of the Government senatorial Benches and also Members of the Opposition senatorial Benches, and, of course, my associates in the Independent Benches. It is my distinct honour and privilege to be able to deliver to this august House this evening, what is my maiden contribution.

I pondered long and hard about what I should focus on. Given His Excellency's wisdom in his choices of Independent Senators and a variety of competencies and trainings, I decided to stay to my comfort zone, my area of academic training, which is education, which I do believe, if one thinks about it, is the foundation upon which any great and sustainable society is built. When we look at the great civilizations of the world, the Egyptians and even in more modern times, the Americans, the UK, China, India, we realize they have been able to transform their societies into sustainable models through education and the education system.

At this time, I would like to quote from Martin Luther King on education, and I quote:

“Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

Very often we neglect the character side of it, and we see where it has led us, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but around the world.

Earlier on, the Minister of Finance focused a lot about the austere times we face in Trinidad and Tobago, and the dialogue in the last 10, 15, 20 years about the need for diversification. In this instance, into agri-processing, maritime, fishing and fishing processing, aviation, creative sectors, the financial sector and the ICT and software design sectors. But what is going to drive this? What is going to make the difference in Trinidad and Tobago moving forward in a sustainable manner?

6.25 p.m.

It is obviously the development of the human capital. The society cannot move forward. It cannot be sustained unless we continue to invest in our people through education. But it begs the question: what is our concept of a comprehensive education system that will serve our country in the best stead, not in 10, not in 15 years, but for the next 50 years?

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I quote from the Education Act of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 39:01 page 11.

“3. The powers conferred on the Minister by this Act shall be exercised so as to ensure—

- (a) the promotion of the education of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the establishment of institutions devoted to that purpose by means of which he shall thereby contribute towards the development of the human resources, physical mental, moral and spiritual of the community;
- (b) the establishment of a system of education designed to provide adequately for the planning and development of an educational service related to the changing needs of the community;
- (c) the effective execution of the education policy of the Government.”

Madam President, I ask the question: how successfully have we been able to do that in the last 50 years? We have seen great gains as is evidenced by our country’s prosperity but now we face different times. How successfully have we been able to fulfil this education mandate in Trinidad and Tobago, a mandate that should provide the foundation upon which we build a holistic and sustainable nation, but that begs further enquiry into our very concept of education itself and the systems, processes and structures that support same? This is a question we must ponder at this stage in our country’s history. My delivery is not to apportion blame but to stimulate thought and further enquiry.

Let me start to lay the context by an interesting editorial in yesterday’s *Express* which quotes liberally from a soon-to-be-published document and research by Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, noted criminologist and also former Chair of the Police Service Commission. Prof. Deosaran, from a soon-to-be-published study on race, crime and education said that his:

“...findings reinforce what seems to be evident from the list of scholarship winners where government schools have once again had little impact.

This contrasts deeply with the strong presence of awardees from the so-called prestige schools, many of which are government-assisted denominational schools. Among the latter, Indo-Trinidadian females dominate.

Notable from Prof. Deosaran’s research is the finding that among prison inmates interviewed the vast majority went to government secondary schools.”

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

This is not to say that government secondary schools cannot produce model citizens, but these findings are quite interesting for thought. He goes on to say:

“Something is seriously wrong with the education system as a whole when so many young males and minds can find suitable in it to hold their attention and keep them motivated in the pursuit of knowledge.”

Ninety per cent of the inmates, according to Prof. Deosaran’s soon-to-be-published research, between the ages of 18 and 35 have gone to government secondary schools. That should be alarming to most, if not all of us.

It is commendable that the present Government continues—and the past few governments have continued to show that education is at the forefront of budgetary allocations, either in the first place or in the second place, in this instance. Allow me to just go back until 2009—I think 2008 was the last time Trinidad and Tobago recorded a fiscal budget surplus. In 2009, education and training was allotted \$7.12 billion; 2010, education and training, \$7 billion approximately; in 2011, education and training, \$8.325 billion; 2012, education and training, allotted \$8.718 billion; 2013, 9.149; 2014, 9.820; 2015, 10.126 and for 2016, 9.763.

It means that we understand, as a country, the importance of training and developing our human capital. But spending money and investing money is not going to accomplish that. We must do some sincere and objective enquiry as to if we are spending the money—investing the money—in the right way to provide for a sustainable future of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Vision Statement of the Ministry of Education:

“The Ministry is a high performing and dynamic organization leading a quality education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of 21st Century learners to contribute to the education and versatility of holistically developed children who are able to satisfy the human capital needs and sustainable development of society.”

The Mission Statement of the Ministry of Education is:

“To educate and develop children who are:

- able to fulfil their full potential;
- healthy and growing normally;
- academically balanced;
- well-adjusted socially and culturally;
- and emotionally mature and happy.”

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Are we achieving those goals? That is the question. What is the education mandate? Just to quote from the *Social Sector Investment Programme* publication, 2016:

“There are approximately”—250,000 students—learners—“in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. A total of 36,000 children at Early Childhood Care and Education Centres; 126,000 pupils”—at the nation’s—“Primary Schools; 96,000 students”—are at the nation’s—“Secondary Schools”—and participation at tertiary level institutions is reported at 65%.

The mandatory attendance age in Trinidad and Tobago is between the ages of six and 12 years old. When we go back to those numbers, 126,000 students at primary schools, but only 96,000 at secondary schools. That is a significant disparity. Where are those 30,000 children? Where are they? Have they been absorbed into vocational schools? Are they just falling through the cracks? Have the gangs taken them? Why are we not more outraged that 30,000 students are not making the transition from primary to secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago? We seem quite comfortable about that. That amounts to 12 per cent of the student body.

Let us look at the primary school system, and there are four basic levels of education system in Trinidad and Tobago: the Early Childhood Care, which is two to five years old; primary school, which is around six to 12 years old depending on when one’s birthday is; secondary, which is from 12 to 17 or 18 and tertiary level, above 18, generally speaking. We have just lauded the results of the secondary entrance examination where we tend to specifically focus a lot on the upper 90 percentile, and that is great. Those who do well must be lauded. They must be complimented. They have worked hard and they have achieved. But what about the lower 20 percentile? Why are we not focusing more on them? Why are they not the subject of our deeper enquiry as to why they are not coping with the system as presently configured? That is the kind of introspection, I think, this country needs to apply at this time.

In 2015, 18,357 students wrote the SEA examination—51 per cent boys and 49 per cent girls. The examination was written on May 07, 2015. A summary of the results reads as follows: 14 per cent of the students scored 90 per cent or more; 80 per cent of students scored above 60 per cent; 90 per cent of students scored above 50 per cent and less than one per cent of students scored under 30 per cent.

We really need to take a deep, hard look—while we must celebrate those who have done well—as to why such a large percentage is still under-performing in Trinidad and Tobago. If we are to consider ourselves as global leaders or competitive, are these the results that we must remain comfortable with? I do not think so.

Let us look at the SEA examination. It is a standardized examination, or in my opinion it once was, in any case, where the students at 11 or so, write an examination at one point, which was one examination. In 2011 or 2012, a component called the Continuous Assessment Component was introduced. And this is a document published by the Ministry of Education that is supposed to add value by ensuring that varied abilities, learning styles, interests and talents of primary school students are identified and met through a system of delivery of a specified curriculum.

It was introduced, according to this document, by an open invitation to interest groups and the public participants comprising students, parents, educators and community members. And according to this document, it was supposed to institute mechanisms to maintain integrity in this CAC process, given that in some instances up to 20 per cent of the final SEA grade came from this component of CAC. Now, keep in mind, SEA as we know it, was a standardized examination. It is one examination delivered in a particular way and it is monitored by CXC and the local Ministry of Education. When we introduce another component we may not be as sure as we want to be that it remains as standardized, given some of the concerns I am going to elucidate in a while.

The integrity of the CAC process was supposed to be maintained by a rigorous system of monitoring, moderation and examination administration established in collaboration with CXC. This is to ensure the validity and reliability of CAC scores submitted by teachers. Teachers are a large component, a significant and critical component, in the administration of the CAC component of the SEA. The Ministry of Education has deployed, according to this document, 145 monitors to report on the implementation of the CAC in all schools, and the CAC monitors were supposed to work along with curriculum officers and report on the CAC to district curriculum coordinators.

The pilot project of the Continuous Assessment Component of primary school pupils is supposed to take up 20 per cent of the SEA score. There have been serious concerns about if this was actually applied in the way it has been prescribed and its implications for the final grades in the SEA. And this is not to say that I do not believe our students—we have said in this document, the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2016*, that this is the best year of performance for SEA students.

I believe our young learners can achieve great things, but it must be done in the right way, and if there are concerns about the process by which we are getting these grades, we are not doing our young learners any favours. As a matter of fact,

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

we may be—and I stress may be doing them a great disservice. So some more enquiry needs to go into that and if it has been applied in the way that best suits its original mandate.

Madam President, please allow me to go through 14 points of concerns regarding the Continuous Assessment Component of the SEA as outlined by the President of TTUTA, the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, Mr. Devanand Sinanan, and I will try to précis as I go along in the interest of time.

1. While this was supposed to remove the overdependence on one summative high-stakes test and instead shift the focus to formative testing, which is an approach to assessment that can test a broader range of competencies over a period of time, that net effect of the CAC was that teachers were now doing more testing than teaching owing to the high-stakes nature of the SEA.

Let me just also contextualize this by saying, Mr. Sinanan and other educators and education administrators agree in principle to the CAC component of the SEA, but it must be applied in the right way.

2. Teachers continue to complain that they did not get sufficient training to teach the broadened curriculum which now includes specialized subjects such as music, physical education, dance, agricultural science, art and drama.

So teachers are saying they did not get sufficient time to teach the broadened curriculum. What impact has that had on learning and the student body?

3. It is unreasonable to expect a primary school teacher to teach such a broad range of curricula and TTUTA continues to call for the introduction of subject specialists in the areas of dance, music, drama, art, agricultural science, and physical education in addition to normal classroom duties within the same time frame. While these areas were added to the curriculum, nothing was taken out from an overloaded curriculum, to which creative writing and character and citizenship education was given greater prominence and emphasis.

6.40 p.m.

4. Formative testing requires a significant amount of non-contact time in order to prepare and mark tests. This requires that teachers complete a significant amount of work at home, thus encroaching significantly on their private—lives.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

5. Teachers continue to complain bitterly about the lack of adequate resources and facilities to deliver this broadened curriculum.
6. Formative testing requires a lot of record keeping which is time consuming and requires large amounts of storage space...
7. Concerns have been expressed about the quality of standardization in the marking of these assessments.

Keep in mind that this is going to contribution, or this has contributed supposedly to 20 per cent of the SEA final grades. So we see the kind of questions in terms of integrity that we may be facing here.

8. Information and instructions from the Minister of Education to schools were inconsistent and very often contradictory, leading to mass confusion.

This should be shocking to us all. Given what stakes are afoot with SEA in terms of placement and the future of students. This is not to say that SEA is the final bell on someone's life, but it is certainly a critical juncture in anyone's education process.

9. The CAC monitors were very often not sure about their roles.
10. Unrealistic deadlines for the submission of marks and information were very often the order of the day. Such information was required to be uploaded onto computer systems which were not always available at the school.

So we may not have had some marks going in for some students. This is what this is suggesting. It was possible.

11. The whole assessment process quickly turned into an evaluation exercise owing to the high stakes nature of the SEA, placing undue pressure and stress on students, parents and teachers over a prolonged period of time.

Is this effective application as something so critical?

12. There was never a comprehensive plan governing the introduction of the CAC, with no pilot testing to determine the viability of the reform contemplated.
13. CAC assistant teachers sent to schools were also not sure about their roles and have been adequately trained or have not been adequately trained to perform these tasks.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

And 14 and finally in this course:

TTUTA continues to call for an independent review and evaluation of the CAC against its overall objectives, in light of concerns repeatedly expressed.

There is also quite a bit of information related to parents and teachers concerned on several blogs throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And I spend some time on this to say that if we are to really have the kind of education system that this country needs, something as critical as primary school education and the assessment of that must be done in the proper way. We cannot have these kinds of possibilities where the integrity may have been compromised and then are boasting about the best ever results in a particular year, because when we do that we give our students a false sense of accomplishment and I think we owe them more than that.

Madam President, I want to go back to the issue of the 30,000 unaccounted for students between primary and secondary schools, and a quote from Prof. Deosaran again, which is *Newsday*, July 20, 2013. Education Minister Garcia recently lamented the fact that only 5 per cent of the national scholarship awardees came from Government schools. We have long discussed the issue of the prestige schools versus the Government schools dilemma in Trinidad and Tobago, ad nauseam, year after year, decade after decade, and I quote from Prof. Deosaran and which is titled, “The Prestige School Dilemma”.

“From our research, we find that students from an upper or middle social background...”—have often been served—“out of...chances”—of—“getting into a ‘prestige’ school. In fact, for those from a”—primarily—“upper class background, they have a 90 percent chance. For students from a poor, working class background, they have a 40 percent chance.”

Now, there has been so much discourse and discussion about prestige schools and the limited allocation of spaces in those compared to Government secondary schools, and I reiterate my point. I still believe that model citizens come out of the Government school system. I am not going to condemn all students coming out, but there is obviously something that we need to look at regarding our Government secondary schools. I think we have a great opportunity, because the denominational schools do so well, to perform some sort of enquiry and try to translate that model to the Government secondary schools.

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

It is an opportunity we have because we certainly have a model that is working. We just need to enquire as to how it is working, why it is working effectively. There are several factors and variables involved there. It is not beyond us to figure this out, because I think we continue doing ourselves a great injustice as a country by just settling for that paradigm. We do not have to settle for that. We can find out what is going on.

Quoting again—because he has done quite a bit of work in this area—Prof. Deosaran, *Newsday*, July 17, 2014:

“At a public lecture entitled ‘Equal Educational Opportunity: The Class, Race and Crime Connection’, sponsored by UWI Faculty of Social Sciences on November 27...results from a preliminary longitudinal study (812 students from seven Govt Assisted and 15 Govt secondary schools) which showed among other things:

- (1) 85 percent of those students who attended Govt Assisted”—so-called—“(prestige) schools were into ‘further studies’ within three years after leaving Form Five while less than 50 per cent...of those who attended Govt schools did so.” They usually “went to work...
- (2) 61 percent of those who attended a Govt Assisted School went into UWI”—or other tertiary level institutions—“compared to 23 per cent from the Govt Schools. The others went into institutions like Costaatt, UTT, private business schools etc.
- (3) In terms of ‘Doing Further Studies’ within”—these—“three years after leaving Form Five, 85 percent from an Upper Class background”—the CAC is based on parental occupation, parental educational level—“60 percent from Middle Class and 31 percent from”—so called the—“Lower Class”—which often speaks to that level of discrepancy in this system.

Madam President, it is not my style to just proffer the problems. I think we have to be responsible and also suggest some solutions. This paradigm is not inclusive to Trinidad and Tobago. There is underperformance at various levels across the world, but there are various jurisdictions that had been very successful in diagnosing, identifying and remediating the challenges faced by students in state-sponsored schools or Government administered schools. One of these is a very well-known and very widely administered protocol call “Response to Intervention”.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

“Response to Intervention...is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.”

Which means we are taking a proactive step. We do not wait until they get to SEA to realise that they have a problem. All students go through what is a three-tiered approach to dealing with some of the challenges that many students may have. It is also, in addition to academic intervention, very effective in behavioural intervention which I will get to later in my discourse, which is also a challenge in our nation’s secondary schools.

In the first tier:

“...students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction provided by qualified personnel to ensure that their difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction. All students are screened on a periodic basis to establish an academic and behavioural baseline and identify struggling learners who need additional support. Students identified as being ‘at risk’ through universal screenings...and...results...”

And this is all standardized testing. It is not based on someone’s subjective interpretation.

The length of time for this first step usually would not exceed eight weeks. During that time the student’s progress is closely monitored and logged, and a scientific assessment done of that student or all those students. Usually, you get about 70 per cent of students getting through this stage successfully. If the student is not responding to that stage, which usually moves in to about 30 per cent of the student body, stage two or tier 2 is implemented which focuses on increasingly intensive instruction to match their special needs on the basis of performance, rates and progress. They change the teaching styles sometimes. They do what is called a differentiated curriculum, so that these students are approached in a different way because they may have a different learning style and a different attitude for different subject areas.

When that is done effectively, usually you are left with 10 per cent of the students who are now put through a different level of protocol, diagnoses at a different level, so that all students have a chance to do well. The new best practice in education is not that the student is failing. It is that the system is failing. The system is failing the student. Students do not fail. Systems fail. We need to get out of that antiquated idea, and I am using this term not to be disparaging where we

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

tend to think of students as 20 years ago “duncey head” or lazy. That is not the approach of best practice education in this global situation. We must focus on each student as an individual and deal with their needs. That is the way we will make progress in this situation.

RTI is a possibility in terms of remediation in Trinidad and Tobago, but RTI can only be implemented if you have the systems in place such as trained school psychologists, trained social workers, behavioural psychologists to be able to identify the issues with the students, and also they are trained in remediation methods, different kinds of curriculum, et cetera, to make a difference in that student’s life. Imagine for a moment those 30,000 students again who are not making the transition from primary to secondary schools, where are they ending up? The frightening suggestion sometimes is that those are the ones ending up in our nation’s prisons. It is not always so, but it is a possibility we must consider.

Another area I want to focus on, Madam President, is the issue of special needs in Trinidad and Tobago, which I think has really been bandied about and persons and children with special needs have only been given lip service in this country for way too long. When we look at the early beginnings of the special education and so-called inclusive education movement in Trinidad and Tobago—because this word “inclusivity” has a specific meaning. I was dismayed to hear an educator recently and a senior level educator, recently talking about inclusivity in a special education context but saying, “But we have nine special schools.” You cannot be thinking of inclusivity and thinking of special schools. Special schools have a place in inclusive policy framework, but inclusivity specifically means that educational services and support systems are provided in the general education classroom setting. That is what inclusivity means, which means there must be support staff, trained teachers and professionals. This is what is considered best practice around the world.

Just to give a quick history of the special education movement in Trinidad and Tobago:

“In 1980, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago agreed to formally incorporate the ‘Institutional Schools’ into the education system. These schools were re-designated, ‘special schools’”—and they were:

- “The School for the Blind, Santa Cruz
- The Schools for the Deaf at Cascade and Marabella
- The Princess Elizabeth School for Physically Handicapped Children, Woodbrook”

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

We now in terms of protocol refer to these individuals as differently abled.

- “The School for the mentally handicapped at St. Ann’s Hospital and
- The Training Centre at the Lady Hochoy Home, Cocorite and its branches at Gasparillo and Penal.

The Cabinet of...Trinidad and Tobago, by Minute 3901, dated October 03, 1980 determined that the Special Education Unit was to be established in the Ministry of Education.”

It came into effect on January 01, 1981.

6.55 p.m.

The Special Education Unit was given responsibility for:

- Coordinating special education throughout Trinidad and Tobago;
- Supervising and developing curricula for special schools and regular schools where students with special educational needs were enrolled; and
- Collaborating with other Government Ministries in the prevention of disorders.

It is interesting that we really have not progressed much since that. We talk about education and special needs in Trinidad and Tobago but we have not done very much to concretize or establish a special-need policy or the supporting legislation that must govern the administration of persons with special needs in Trinidad and Tobago.

Quoting from an online publication dated December 29, 2010 written by Jennifer Maharajh who is a Long Island Early Childhood Education Examiner looking at special needs in the Caribbean:

“In 1996 a survey conducted in Trinidad and Tobago reported there were over 50,000 children in the twin island republic with special needs or some type of developmental disability.”

Fifty thousand and that, according to the professionals, is a conservative estimate.

“In 2006 a survey conducted by Families in Action (FIA) at a Port of Spain primary school led by a project team of medical psychologists, social workers, educational partners showed that 70 percent of the children”—ages—“7 to 13 years of age were characterized as academically impaired.”

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

This is one school.

“Of these children, 15 percent had medical problems that could affect learning.

Most recently, a 2009 article in Trinidad and Tobago’s *Newsday* reported that 32 percent of students are intellectually challenged due to a number of learning disabilities...”

Madam President: Sen. Richards, you have five more minutes.

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Or as:

“recognize as a special need, rather identified the child’s learning”—ability or—“disability with their incapability to grasp concepts.”

We, in Trinidad and Tobago, really have to move quickly because that statistic of 30 per cent or so is really a benchmark worldwide, we are no different. The difference is that other jurisdictions have put systems in place, primarily legislative systems that mandate the State’s support in terms of funding and in terms of remediation processes and institutions that can help students, not only with special needs, but students with learning disabilities, which include emotional and behavioural disorders.

Unfortunately, time will not permit me to go into that aspect of it as to why we are seeing such an upsurge in deviant behaviour in primarily our secondary school systems and the fact that we are not diagnosing adjustment disorders; anxiety disorders; obsessive and compulsive disorders; post-traumatic stress disorders for young learners who are in violent circumstances in their homes and their communities; attention deficit; hyperactivity disorder; oppositional defiant disorders; conduct disorders; among others that are manifesting in violent and anti-social behaviour in our nation’s schools.

We also have to consider the role of the media and there has been quite a bit of research done to support short-term and long-term effects of exposure to pop culture violence, video games. But not only that, something we take for granted very often: the news, which is replete with violence which children watch and show on social media. For example—I am really reluctant but I have to give this example.

Last week Friday, I was at a mall in Port of Spain and there were a bunch of what seemed to be primary school students in uniform arguing amongst themselves. Do you know what the choice of insult was among those students? And they repeated it over and over, and I really do not want to repeat it for

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. RICHARDS]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

gratuitous purposes but I have to, to give us a sense of what our children are learning. They are learning from what they see. And three of them continued to mouth at each other continuously, “Hush yuh stink mouth”. I wonder where they learnt that from. I wonder if we do not realize as adults that they are learning everything we do; they are mimicking our behaviours, and then we condemn them as the lost generation. Every aspect of their lives contributes to what they are learning.

Finally, Madam President, it has been articulated to me in many various quarters by several persons, members from the education fraternity, parents and colleagues, who still have children attending primary and secondary schools about the quality of text books, and I hoping the Education Minister does some sort of enquiry into that, particularly at the primary and secondary level.

Madam President, this country is a country of great promise and possibility. However, for us to attain our fullest potential as individuals and as a nation, we must rethink our concept of an education system worthy of the citizenry, and one which provides the foundation for holistic and sustainable development. We must cast away archaic notions of education confined to buildings and walls. An holistic education system encompasses homes, families, neighbourhoods, playgrounds, sporting facilities, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, mass media—printed, electronic and social—and also this very Parliament building and the other place which they are looking at and learning from.

It is a time in this country to show that every creed and race does find an equal place in Trinidad and Tobago. I really want to advocate on behalf of the special needs community in Trinidad and Tobago for legislative reform and funding. The allocation is \$3 million in this budget for special needs and \$10.5 million for the school support system which sometimes also aids families with special needs.

The national budget and the national legislative agenda must seize the opportunity to reflect from the State and private sector, a commitment to all persons, all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, no matter what their circumstances are, not only in talk and rhetoric but also in deed and mandated by law. With the billions averaging \$9 billion every year spent on education, \$70 billion since 2008, it may not, probably does not, respect the kind of support needed for those falling through the cracks.

I hope we can stimulate some thought and discussion and I am heartened by the Education Minister’s announcement that a national consultation of education will be held in 2016. I am looking forward to that. Madam President, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Thank you very much. May I congratulate Sen. Richards on his maiden contribution? Sen. Junkère.

Sen. John Junkère: Good evening, Madam President. I join with the hon. Members who went before me in congratulating you for your ascension to your designation in this House. I thank God for his blessings, I thank my family for their continuing support, and I apologize to my son for not being there to do homework with him this evening. I am sure he will forgive me this one evening and indulge me. I also thank His Excellency for the opportunity given to me to make this contribution to this House, albeit with very little notice and very little time to fully prepare. Given the late hour, I promise that my address to this honourable Chamber will be as short as I am. *[Laughter]*

Madam President, permit me, I sometimes use humour to overcome unfamiliarity and discomfort, and this august Chamber and these surroundings are unfamiliar to me. So, I respectfully ask the honourable House, through you, to indulge me as I settle myself through the use of just a little bit more humour. I assure this honourable House that its relevance will reveal itself to the very end.

Now, as I sat here today, I admired the architecture of this lovely building and as I looked at the ceiling, I looked at the excellent lighting, and I asked myself, quite facetiously I admit: how many politicians does it take to change a light bulb? I came up with several possible answers. One can say it takes two: one to change it and one to change it back when election is called. One can say it takes three: one to change it, one to deny that it needed changing at all, and one to take credit for having changed it. But, despite my very feeble attempt at humour in this late hour, it belies a very startling and very worrying issue that it is a grave reality that this nation may very well be facing an impending era of economic darkness, and the citizenry is relying on our politicians to change that increasingly dimming bulb so we can see our way through that abyss.

Now, the responsibility for changing this bulb, for illuminating a way forward, for this twin-island Republic fell on the shoulders of the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Colm Imbert, who is not here with us right now. But he accepted that Herculean task of presenting a fiscal package in a very short space of time and I echo the sentiments of those before me who have commended him for his efforts. *[Desk thumping]*

It now falls on the hon. Members of this House to examine his efforts. In keeping with the self-inflicted theme of the light bulb, I chose to conduct this exercise in the brief time that I have, having to give way to other Members, by asking: on who does the light shine and on who are dark shadows cast? I see light

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. JUNKERE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

beaming on the faces of the individual income earnings who will benefit from the increase in personal allowance from \$60,000 to \$72,000 per annum from January 01, 2016. Imagine the relief for those earning less than \$6,000 per month. For others, the additional \$250 per month windfall will be a blessing to them. It is most likely that this will encourage increased consumption, and hopefully that can spark some economic growth.

But then I see shadows of disenchantment on property owners who will return to a regime of taxation from which they thought they were finally free. It was a risky and bold step to seek to re-introduce this measure. The current administration will have to rely on the maturity of a property-owning public to accept their proportion of the obligation to contribute to the public purse.

I see a ray of hope for the future graduates who are going to benefit from the 20 per cent increase in stipends as OJT trainees as of December 01, 2015, and those who will be absorbed into the recruitment programme into the Ministries of the Government. Society ought to be judged by the manner in which they provide for those who are in their embryonic stages of development. And if these measures are properly implemented to give our graduates a start in life, their futures will certainly be brighter.

However, again, a shadow of doubt is cast on the wider population with the increase in super gasoline and diesel prices which took place with immediate effect, and the effect of this increase on our daily lives as the cost of transportation, the delivery of goods and services and other ancillary expenses, is not yet known. One thing is for sure, you give your doubles man \$5, do not wait for change. *[Laughter]*

I see a brilliant light cast, a glow on the crops of the farmers and the waters of the fisherfolk of this nation who are now going to exempt from duties and taxes relative to their various inputs into the agricultural sector and their fishing vessels and equipment. This must be a welcome relief for those who have courageously chosen to employ their time and their efforts to contributing to our nation's food basket. They deserve this.

I see long shadows of disenchantment cast over already struggling small and medium enterprises; business owners who will now face increases in the Business Levy and the Green Fund effective January 01, 2016. Now, it is easy to feel sorry for those businesses who report well, that are reporting losses or low profits; it is less easy to feel empathy for those who are less than honest in their accounting reporting.

I see a golden ray of light reflecting off the silver hairs of our nation's retirees and elderly persons as they will benefit from discounts on utilities, free passports and driver's permits. I am sure that they are also grateful for the increase in the NIS qualification cap on joint income to \$5,000 from December 01. A society is also judged on how it treats those who are in their senior years.

7.10 p.m.

I see silhouettes of unease for employers who face the increase in NIS contributions for employees and an increase in the insurable earnings class limit from 12,000 to 13,600.

And finally, to release you from this analogy, I am happy that a ray of hope is being directed at the Judiciary. I feel that way as an attorney and as a citizen. They are now one step closer to true independence by virtue of their impending financial autonomy and equally appreciative of the advent of the video conferencing facilities to assist in easing the burden on the Magistracy in the disposal of minor offences with greater efficiency.

The point of my dichotomy is dark versus light is to illustrate a very simple point; light and shadows do not exist without each other. In order for us to bask in the brilliance of a balanced budget by 2018, we must accept the shadows cast on previously unshaded territories of our socioeconomic landscape. If we want to achieve an increase in revenue collection we may have to explore ways of improving the efficiency with which we collect our revenues. If we want to enjoy a lower rate of VAT we may have to accept paying VAT on items that were previously zero-rated. I am curious as to how the Government intends to reclassify zero-rated items, since that appears to be an extremely subjective exercise. But that is for persons brighter than me.

I commend the hon. Minister of Finance, however, for incorporating delivery of election promises into his fiscal packages so early into the Government's stewardship of the public purse. I respectfully suggest that there are other worthwhile promises to which this administration will need to attend. For instance, the promise of widespread stakeholder consultation should be brought to life in tangible and productive dialogue.

I also ask that the process of engagement extends to the Opposition. If each side of the political divide is genuinely interested in a common desire to ensure the economic survival, recovery and development of this blessed nation, then our way out of the darkness requires an honest collaborative effort. To do otherwise is tantamount to kicking the stool from beneath the person attempting to change the light bulb and we will all be in darkness.

Appropriation Bill, 2015
[SEN. JUNKERE]

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Now, it is unfortunate, yet understandable, that the recently concluded budget debate in the Lower House took the combative tone it did. I say it was unfortunate because one would have expected better from elected Members, after having heard such an inspirational and unifying acceptance speech, as delivered by the then newly-elected Prime Minister on the night of the election, and from the Member before me, soon-to-be Dr. Paul Richards, the effects of those words uttered from either side redound for ages to come.

Now, one would have hoped that the standard of the discourse would have been elevated to encourage a more collaborative effort, aimed at nation building. What we got instead was less than honourable most times. I am grateful that such rancour has not affected this august House today, at least not to any great extent.

My time here is fleeting but I challenge the hon. Members of this House, who will remain, to hold themselves to a higher standard, to discharge their obligations with dignity and honour befitting these hallowed halls. And I further challenge the Members of this House, whether by their work on this floor or by their efforts in sub-committees, to be more collaborative, more inclusive. I am reminded of the words of Sen. Hafeez Ali, when he repeated our motto: “Together we Aspire, Together we Achieve”, and with that I must return to my initial question: How many politicians would it take to change a light bulb? It actually takes all of us. So without prejudice to Members of the Opposition Bench, I wish to borrow a phrase from the Government Bench. If we have a bulb to change, “Let’s do this Together.” I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, after listening to the literary prowess of our temporary Senator, Mr. Justin Junkère, it is now my distinguished honour. Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, October 21, that is tomorrow morning, at 10.00 a.m.

Madam President: Before I move the adjournment, may I congratulate Sen. Junkère for his, shall I say, very illuminating maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.16 p.m.