

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, October 11, 2016*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2016**

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 30, 2016]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.***Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, I seek your permission under Standing Order 44(4) and 44(10).**Madam Speaker:** In terms of 44(10), that is with respect to your speech—
[*Interruption*]**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Some of it I might need to.**Madam Speaker:**—leave is granted. With respect to the visual aid, Member I would have expected that I would have been shown before.**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Just a newspaper. All right.**Madam Speaker:** So that I am quite, quite certain that with your experience, you can deliver without resorting to the aid.**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** All right, thank you.

Madam Speaker, thank you. It is with great pleasure and, indeed, it is a privilege for me to stand this morning—I believe this is my 14th contribution to budget debates: five in the upper place and this will be my ninth in the Lower House. And, indeed, it is really a distinct honour and a privilege to be able to contribute in whatever little way that we can in terms of the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me begin by first congratulating the hon. Leader of the Opposition on her very passionate and ripping budget response. It was a courageous one in challenging possible collusion amongst business elites. It was potent in detail, it

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was persuasive and convincing with strong conviction taking the fight to the Government with calmness and inspiration. [*Desk thumping*] Truly and undoubtedly, a great response. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I want to say that his budget statement of 2017 had been described by many as marked by subterfuge, vagueness and betrayal of the trust of the people. Some people have described it as filled with deceit, lacking coherence and any semblance of proper planning even at an elementary level, far less for any macroeconomic visioning. [*Desk thumping*] Where is it in his budget any reflection of commitment by the Government to treat our children, young and old, senior citizens, retirees with any respect and compassion? None whatsoever, none. Just contempt and callousness.

Madam Speaker, American President Thomas Jefferson once said:

“When a man assumes a public trust he should consider himself a public property.”

He noted that:

“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.”

This does not reside in the PNM. He had especially emphasized the need for a government to:

“Educate and inform the whole mass of the people...They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

This, Dr. Keith Rowley’s Government stands accused and guilty, of systematically dismantling all working and progressive reforms, so carefully instituted by the Partnership Government for the sake of what we may consider, is it political spite and vindictiveness, we ask. [*Desk thumping*]

This budget is devoid even of any element of short-term visioning or planning, far less medium and long term. In the rare instances when you have demonstrated short-term measures designed to fix problems, they simply pop up again mere weeks after they have been addressed, as we have seen one example in the school repairs programme. The Minister of Education said that all the schools were repaired, every school opened, and within one week more than 63 schools had difficulties and were on the verge of closing. There were protests across the country for more than 10 to 12 schools. So no short-term measure and no short-

term fix will work. Any short-term thinking is the greatest enemy of any good government, and the level that has been employed by this Government is unfair, chaotic, very dangerous and harmful to our country's economic and social stability.

It is said, Madam Speaker, that some deceivers are so expert that they deceive themselves [*Desk thumping*] but to those who engage in this, I want to advise that it is always better to have no ideas than false ones, to believe nothing than to believe what is wrong .

This 2016/2017 national budget of the Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley at work, increased current VAT taxes on the 7,000 previously zero-rated items, smoking, 15 per cent; rich, 30 per cent; rum, 30 per cent; online shopping, 7 per cent; diesel, 15 per cent and property tax 3 per cent. We must not forget the taxations in 2016 on the business levy and the Green Fund, almost 300 per cent.

Introduction of tough new measures to the poor and vulnerable: removal of subsidies, repeat time-worn promises. This budget remains just promises, devoid of any ideas and plans for diversification of the economy, education cuts, no relief of the high food cost, Couva Children's Hospital now private and you have to pay. It reveals a government with no creativity, no vision or plan for sustainable revenue generation and sustainable development. It has been described as another pay-more-get-less package with many of the promises are simply lifted from last year's budget from which more than 50 announced measures were dishonoured by this PNM Government.

This budget lacked initiatives to attract local and international investments. There are no measures to assist the working poor, single mothers, the retirees, the old and socially challenged. The cost of living will rise with the third increase in fuel cost in one year; unacceptable job losses in the public sector and state enterprises, vindictive and spiteful dismissals, more CEPEP and URP workers would go home, so too would be in WASA and T&TEC, as the Government reduces financial assistance to these two essential utility companies.

Madam Speaker, the premise of oil and gas prices appears unrealistic at \$48 and \$50 per barrel for oil and \$2.25 for gas and, therefore, this Government will not be able to deposit into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund any funding if the price of gas goes up, but it will ensure that they will be able to have continued withdrawals from our children and our children children's savings in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That was craftily done to put at \$48 and \$50 and \$2.25 because knowing that the price of oil will hover somewhere below that, so that

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they will be able with the 10 per cent to go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. It is deliberate and purposeful. This country's savings in the HSF will soon disappear and squandered by this inept Government—another \$100 million for Brian Lara Stadium, now taking that cost to nearly \$800 million from the original \$200 million which it will cost.

And, Madam Speaker, this is what I was referring to, the question of what the newspaper had on it: rich 30 per cent, rum 20 per cent, smoke 15 per cent, online shopping 7 per cent, diesel, et cetera. And also, the other media houses, a paid advertisement in one of the newspapers on Saturday, October 1st: pay more, get less, taxman budget, property tax returns, diesel hiked, education cuts, 7 per cent online tax for skybox items, Couva kids hospital now private pay, security and police cuts, no relief from high food cost and the only thing not cut is taxes.

And remember, Madam Speaker, under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, People's Partnership Government, during the five years, there was absolutely not one cent increase in taxation during the five years. We were able to run this Government over the five-year period and bring prosperity to all without any increase in taxation. And do not forget in 2015 the price of oil had dropped, and we were able to still manage. The Prime Minister indicated to her Cabinet Ministers then, cut your expenditure by 30 per cent and reduce your expenditure, and we were able to bring the prices down and prosperity for all. [*Desk thumping*]

So we are laden with broken promises, Madam Speaker, 2016 budget promises: GATE cut, no laptops, no OJT dollar hike, 463 murders or now 497 since September 08, 2015; the kids' hospital close, no medicines, baby grant and food cards gone, dropped five points in the global competitive index, no sign of local government reform. What we can come up and summarize, it is another betrayal of the people, betrayal of the trust of the people. [*Desk thumping*]

All this is happening while school grant, baby grant, food card for 13,000 recipients disappeared, discontinued registration of the biometric data, back to grants which can be removed arbitrarily for pensioners. It was the PNM Government that moved pension to grants so that they could arbitrarily withdraw it. Now, they bring it back to grants again. So what is the message they are sending? Do they want to withdraw the pension at any time rather than leaving it as a pension fund? They have it as grants.

The Children's Life Fund is not easily accessible. They disbanded the inter-agency unit implementation arm of the street dwellers programme. Another Tobago tourism master plan is in the works, but under the current Tobago

administration visitor arrivals have fallen by 40 per cent. At the Couva Children's Hospital, we would now have people paying. Whoever PNM decides to privatize the hospital, which we may think might be within the upper elite 1 per cent of the country, and these investors, citizens will now have to pay for healthcare at the Couva Children's Hospital.

The last budget 2016, the Minister of Finance, he topped excuses, although he said he only had one month to prepare. But then your Government coming into office had five years while in Opposition to prepare and you did absolutely nothing during those five years [*Desk thumping*]*—*make excuse that you will hear the real budget in the midterm review. That was a total failure. You now had another year to plan, and this is basically like the Minister of Finance third budget presentation, because two budgets and one midterm review.

In my 14 years here in Parliament and parliamentary politics, in the 21 years that I have been in politics, undoubtedly this is the worst budget presentation ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 a.m.

Madam Speaker, I thought 2016 was bad, but this is the worst. When we had Minister Dookeran as Minister of Finance and then after two or three years Minister Larry Howai came in, this Minister of Finance called him an OJT Minister. Who is now the OJT Minister? Nobody wants to associate with him in terms of his policies for the country. [*Desk thumping*]

When you look at the former Ministers of Finance, starting from Dr. Eric Williams, then moving to Mr. George Chambers, then moving to Selby Wilson, to Brian Kuei Tung, to Gerald Yetming and to Winston Dookeran and to Larry Howai, people with experience in economics and finance, it is chalk and cheese. Who is the OJT Minister of Finance? The now-present Minister of Finance. He is totally out of depth with what is happening. Nobody wants to associate with him.

People are saying whatever is coming in this budget they have nothing to do with this. He is not listening to anybody. He had two former Central Bank Governors as his advisors. He had a senior public servant as an advisor, the head of the public service who was a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, and where has he gone? He has starved all his Ministers of Government of funding during the year. He made them suffer because he felt that he was the man in charge and, therefore, "What I say you all have to accept". So none of the Ministries were able to spend the money on their development programmes. In fact, over \$5.5 billion was allocated for development, they ended up spending less

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than \$3 billion, while the Ministers were begging him for money. [*Desk thumping*] That is the attitude of the Minister of Finance. Where is he going and where is he taking Trinidad and Tobago?

Can you as the PNM tell this country what you are going to do in 2020? In any case you will be removed before that in another year or two. Where are you taking this country in 2025? You have 2020 vision and 2030 vision; these visions are not there. It is blinded to the national population; people do not know what is happening to this country.

He used the most derogatory language to attack Minister Larry Howai at the time, but he cannot step into their shoes. This budget is 95 pages long; three hours of emptiness and vacuous statements by the Minister of Finance. In this third finance presentation, two budgets and one year, the country is still yet to understand where we are in terms of the economy, how much money was budgeted, how much was spent, what has been our revenue, where the revenue has come up, how much we have borrowed. We know that we have taken \$2.5 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So we now might be hearing about the real budget coming in the midterm review in 2017. So nothing has been done, but he would say that the real budget will come in 2017, he will give more details; and when 2017 mid-year budgetary review comes, nothing will be there for the people of Trinidad and Tobago again. [*Desk thumping*] He has failed.

He brought the 2016 budget at \$63 billion, knowing fully well that the price of oil and the price of gas were exceedingly low at the time, but he decided and he brought a \$63 billion budget. And what has he ended up doing? His revenue was only about \$36 billion or \$37 billion. So what he had to do was to reduce his expenditure. He tried to reduce it, he still spent something like \$58 billion or \$59 billion, and he had to find almost \$14 billion to \$16 billion. He borrowed and borrowed, and I will come to that in a minute.

He spent \$59 billion. He said he was expecting \$12 billion from VAT. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition sat in the Finance Committee, she said, "Minister, you are not going to receive \$12 billion that is pie in the sky." He ended up receiving only \$7 billion in VAT from the \$5 billion. No matter what amnesty he gave, he received only about \$2 million more; so far away from the \$12 billion he said that he was going to get. Why did that happen? Because he stalled the economy. With this administration the economy was in slumber, there was no activity. So if you do not generate any activity, how are you going to get the increase in VAT? Absolutely nothing like that; he misled Parliament.

I want to make this point; I will pause and make this point: the PNM came into office telling this country, meeting after meeting, all through the run-up to the election, the UNC stole from the Treasury, emptied the Treasury, corruption, mismanagement, malfeasance. Madam Speaker, the UNC Government left over \$110 billion in savings in this country when we left office after five years. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, US \$5.7 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and nearly US \$11 billion in the foreign reserve, equivalent to \$110 billion or more, which would be available for your Government to be able for two years to spend. How can that be leaving the Treasury empty, when we have left \$110 billion for you? [*Desk thumping*] Two years you have money available for you to spend. That is what the People's Partnership Government, led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, left for you.

When he came and said that we left the Treasury empty, another false statement, deliberate and mischievous, because he knew that he was going to receive close to \$15 billion by the end of September/October. He received that, and do you know where he got that from? Madam Speaker, TGU, Clico money. He got about \$6 billion from taxes and VAT.

Madam Speaker: Member, could you remember the "he".

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sorry, the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Member knew that he was going to receive close to \$15 billion, and he came to the House and told the House and the population with the myth and the fallacy and mischievousness and deviousness that we left the Treasury empty.

The Treasury was going to be full of money so that he could have kick-started his government expenditure as early as early October. So we never left the Treasury empty. He knew that he was going to get \$15 billion approximately at the end of September, early October, and we left \$110 billion, equivalent for this PNM Government in savings. [*Desk thumping*]

When we came in—we must not forget to tell the country that we had to deal with Clico, a \$25-billion headache; \$5 billion to contractors, HCU, wage negotiations from 2008, we settled that. We settled over 160 wage negotiations, and we had to pay back pay and arrears during our time; billions of dollars. The teachers alone got \$1.2 billion equivalent in back pay. Then we met the world GTL which was about \$2 billion to \$3 billion that Petrotrin threw away, and the Malcolm Jones era. We met Petrotrin taking a US \$2 billion bond, equivalent to TT \$12 billion. All of that we had to deal with as a government, led by our distinguished and hon. Leader of the Opposition now, and then Prime Minister.

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The hon. Prime Minister showed that we spent \$289 billion during the five years. It is this PNM Government when they were in Opposition that began to say we spent \$500 billion that is a gross untruth. [*Desk thumping*] That is a gross untruth. We spent \$289 billion, and salaries and wages alone equivalent to 15 per cent, transfers and subsidies equivalent to about 55 per cent. The PSIP, goods and services another 10 to 12 per cent; PSIP was about 10 per cent, and we had national debt repayments every year, about \$5 billion to \$6 billion for five years. That is close to 25 to 30 billion dollars.

Madam Speaker, the International Monetary Fund. The Prime Minister keeps on saying that the last thing he wants to have on his doors is the IMF coming to tell him what to do. But the IMF is already telling him what to do; he is taking advice. The IMF is dictating to this Government and they are doing exactly what the IMF is telling them. All the fiscal and even monetary measures, IMF is telling them what to do. This is why they wanted to have their own Central Bank Governor because monetary policies are dictated by the Central Bank Governor. So they have a close linkage between the fiscal policies and the monetary policies. So IMF is telling them to do that, and they are doing exactly that. So who are they trying to fool? No one but themselves, and you all are living in “cuckoo land”.

They devalued the dollar by 7 per cent, and the IMF is still telling them that the Trinidad and Tobago dollar is undervalued. They are telling them that they have to now devalue further. I want to warn this country—warn this country—that in following the IMF policies, this Government is hiding in the bushes, they will soon begin to increase the devaluation and will look to bring it to close to TT \$9 and TT \$10. Could you imagine what this will do to the poor people of this country? We are warning this country. This is what the IMF is telling them. They are listening to the IMF, so pretty shortly you may see what is going to happen here.

I want them to remember what happened to the National Alliance for Reconstruction in 1991, when NAR cut COLA and salaries by 10 per cent. That same fate will befall all of you shortly, within a year or two. People are already fed up after one year; your time on that side is limited. You are on borrowed time already even after one year.

The Minister of Finance now, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, when Moody’s downgraded Trinidad and Tobago by one point, from BAA1 to BAA2, was a hue and a cry. “We in recession. Shameful, Moody’s downgraded you all.” Now Moody’s has downgraded Trinidad and Tobago from BAA1 to BAA3, and what is happening now we are close to junk status, because the debt to GDP ratio

is close to 60.1 per cent of the debt to GDP ratio. That is junk status. You could imagine that you go to an international institution to borrow money what percentage they are going to put? So the Minister of Finance and the Member for Diego Martin North/East berated the People's Partnership Government when he was in Opposition. "Moody's downgraded you all. Your Government is not performing. The country is in recession, three quarters of negative growth". "Moody's come and downgrade dem, not a hue and a cry." Now you come to junk status, as far as the international agencies rating is concerned, not a hue and a cry.

In our five years in Mrs. Persad-Bissessar's term as Prime Minister, the—I will come to that point. [*Laughter*] We will look at the borrowing. The borrowing was only about 7 per cent more than what we had before. The borrowing has come to about 10 per cent in one year of this People's Partnership Government, debt to GDP. So in five years we moved the percentage debt to GDP from 35 to 44 per cent, and in five years that is 9 per cent increase. In one year they have moved it from 45 per cent to 60 per cent debt to GDP, Madam Speaker. Could you imagine what is happening in this country now? The lives of every child and grandchild in this country is mortgaged by this PNM Government. Madam Speaker, 60.1 per cent debt to GDP.

The hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, when he was in Opposition castigated the Member for Caroni Central who was the Minister of Planning at that time and responsible for the Central Statistical Office. He said we cannot get any information from CSO. We do not believe the CSO. CSO is no good. What are you doing? The same CSO today has come back and told this Government that you have reduced your GDP because of no economic activity. The CSO has told them that the GDP has dropped, and they believe now the CSO. They are accepting what the CSO is telling them, without having done anything more for the CSO, but they are now accepting it. What gross hypocrisy.

A year and a half ago you were berating the CSO, the same CSO is giving them the figures now, and they have to accept it. Quietly and cowardly they are accepting what the CSO is telling them—great hypocrisy. How can a person feel with such hypocrisy? Same thing in the budget presentation this year as last year, Saudi Arabia and all this thing, stimulate investment in the energy sector, another empty promise; building and gambling tax, property tax, tourism, international financial centre, five-star hotel, convention centre, maritime post, free zone. Where are all of these? Empty promises, Madam Speaker, empty promises. [*Desk thumping*]

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The IMF told them that they have to broaden the revenue base with a comprehensive VAT reform, but improve targeted social collection. So they cut school grant, baby grant and all these areas which my colleague the Minister, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla spoke about, 13,000 food cards removed, URP funding for mothers of cerebral palsy removed; Children Life Fund not easily acceptable.

IMF is telling them to have a comprehensive expenditure review, structural reforms, and energy taxation reforms. Where is the revenue authority they are speaking about? What is happening there? Addressing inefficiencies in the public service. Pretty shortly a lot of public servants will lose their jobs. He touched on it in a speech he made in Laventille where he said—he warned that public servants might lose their jobs. If they want their back pay, you might have to consider that might be losing your jobs. So we are warning the public servants, this PNM Government will probably cause a loss of jobs for this population. [*Desk thumping*] Reform the labour market—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to remind you of the provisions of Standing Order 55(1) (b).

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am guided. They talked about the national statistical institute. Where is the national statistical institute? He is accepting figures from the CSO. What have you done with the CSO? Nothing, Madam Speaker. Nothing. The IMF mission Chief Mr. Elie Canetti, he says

“the biggest problem with the government’s decision to use mainly higher taxes and lower spending to reduce aggregate demand in the economy is that it is ‘less growth friendly’ than depending on an exchange rate depreciation.”

So he is telling them what they are doing is less growth friendly, you must depreciate. Yes? Pushing further devaluation; pressure on by the IMF. That is what is happening at the moment. An IDB boss on Moody’s, the International Development Bank on Moody’s downgrade from BAA2 to BAA3 he said, the country has a negative outlook. Not a murmur and the PNM has kept it quiet. He said:

This again shows why T&T needs to act quickly to begin diversifying the economy.

Where is the diversification?

If T&T is to become competitive, it has to reform its port procedures, make it easier for businesses to be open.

And in one year we dropped five places in the Global Competitiveness Index, so where are we going? Everybody is telling them what they have to do.

I want to bring up this issue of the gas availability. In 2010 to 2015, of five years of Kamla Persad-Bissessar's People's Partnership administration, only 0.5 billion cubic feet in five years we dropped back. But in one year you have dropped the production of gas by 0.6 billion cubic feet in one year. So it has come from 3.83 down in 2015, to 3.21 billion cubic feet now in 2016, Madam Speaker.

I have so much more to say on the IMF and the issues related to that, but the question is now, we do not have any short-term plan and far less a medium and long-term plan.

Oil production figures in 2006 oil production figures was 143,000 barrels. In 2016 there is now 66,000 barrels. When we demitted office in 2015, it was 78,000 barrels. In one year, one year of the PNM Government, Dr. Keith Rowley's PNM administration, they dropped by 12,000 barrels per day, in one year.

So this budget, Madam Speaker, I spoke about the IDB boss on Moody's downgrade, opportunity for positive change. Nothing there. And the hon. Prime Minister seemed to have felt proud when he said that oil production was the lowest in 65 years. I am quoting from a Monday, September 12, 2016 article. Oil production lowest in 65 years. He seemed to have felt proud that he dropped oil production by 11,000 barrels per day in that time.

Golden opportunity for change, he is speaking about, the Prime Minister. Where is the change? Where is the golden opportunity? The people feel hopeless? They feel helpless. They are crying. Seventeen point five million to help solve crime. You know where that money is going?—to buying spy equipment to spy on all of us. Spy on all of you. Why did the Prime Minister not speak to the Minister of National Security by phone when the issue arose which everybody knows about what happened? He was afraid to talk over the phone because this phone is useless. [*Desk thumping*] He cannot talk over the phone. They have brought back the same people, the same guy who had \$5 million at his side giving money, cash at his side giving money to people to bring information to them. And he is back in the job there as second in command in the spy agency. We want answers from this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] Who have they put to spy on all of us? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: What is his qualification?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: When the former Prime Minister said that we know where you all are going. He spoke to our Leader of the Opposition then, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. He said, “we know where you all are” because he had files of spying things done. They will come and they will park the equipment 50 metres from your home, they will spy on you. They know every call you make. And that is happening to all of you. [*Desk thumping*] If you feel that you are without that, you talk to your friends and you will see what is happening to all of you. So they are not only spying on the Opposition, they are spying on the President, they are spying on the Speaker, they are spying on all of us. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member—[*Interruption*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes?

Madam Speaker:—I am giving you some leeway, but I just want you to be reminded of the Bill that is before us. Okay? So if you could, please—[*Interruption*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am speaking about the Bill, Madam Speaker, but \$17.5 million to help solve crime and buying spying—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: And therefore, that is where I want you to come back to. Okay? Thank you.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I am giving a financial statement of the expenditure by this Government over what they intend to do with the US \$17.5 million because they themselves said that they are buying some sophisticated equipment for us. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, in one year—in one year—the citizens of Trinidad became so dissatisfied and we had much more to put together, 50 undelivered manifesto promises. And I refer to the newspaper article, *Sunday Guardian* article and a *Sunday Express* as well:

Dissatisfied much from 50 undelivered manifesto promises.

Yes?—truly taxing times, Madam Speaker. *Guardian*, October 06, 2016 truly taxing times. Treat adjustment as permanent, *Business Guardian*. No adjustment has taken place. It is permanent negative growth and permanent decay of our society. I want to quote from the *Economic Bulletin*.

The real GDP fell from minus 1.8 to 2.3 per cent in 2016. The headline inflation from 1.5 as the inflation has gone to 6.5 per cent under the PNM administration. Unemployment rate has gone from 3.4 to 4.1 per cent.

And this is the *Economic Bulletin* July 2016.

Public sector debt to GDP, I have spoken about that. Current account balance per cent to GDP from minus 0.4 in 2015 to minus 11.5 per cent in 2016. That is current account balance percentage of GDP. They have brought the net official reserves from US\$411.3 billion in 2014 to now \$9.8 billion in 2016. So net official reserves in months of prospective imports of goods and services from 12.7 months of import cover to now 10.7 months. This is what the PNM is doing. Little by little this country is becoming worse and worse.

Madam Speaker, I just want to draw your attention—and we have so much to speak about in our years of the People’s Partnership administration governance. I just want to show—we have a book, the achievements of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, a book, nearly 400-plus pages of what we did in five years that Mrs. Persad-Bissessar had the pleasure and the privilege of leading her Ministers in Government to achieve more than 400 pages of achievements for Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] You will never be able to compare anything like this. You do not have anything to show for one year, far less for five years. And I will just touch on a few points.

Increase pension to \$3,500; 69,000 laptops for students; save lives with Children Life Fund; build a hospital in San Fernando that is the Chancery Lane; started the Arima; started Point Fortin; renovated over 55 health centres and 102 new schools; baby grants for kids under age one; built the Valencia bypass road; the interchange at Preysal; we completed the Aranguez interchange; we went down south to the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway extension. So many bridges built under this People’s Partnership. Children’s hospital is there and you all failing to open that and the Arima hospital starting construction.

I now want to move on to education very quickly, Madam Speaker. We have had unparalleled performance in the education sector, unparalleled achievements. And when the Minister of Education gets up and misleads the country and tells gross untruths, I think he is doing a disservice to this country. He came to Parliament here and he said—let me just find this.

Mr. Garcia: You could never find it.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I will find it. [*Laughter*] Right. [*Crosstalk*] He said the laptops were mainly used by students for playing of games and recording of fights. The truth, 70 per cent of students used the laptops to assist with general studies and homework; 1,586 persons, that is siblings, assisted students with studies and laptops; 66 per cent of students said laptops encouraged them to

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study; 8,000-plus students in their homes, laptop was the only equipment that was available, IT equipment. So laptops were used by far and large all the students.

Another gross untruth he told to this country, waste occurred over the last five years, he said. The truth, 83 per cent of teachers used the laptops to create documents using MS Word; 65 per cent of teachers directed students to source information on the Internet; 86 per cent of teachers created lesson plans, schemes of work and assessment instruments; 62 per cent of teachers created multi-media presentations.

So when he said waste occurred over the last five years, another gross untruth that the Minister of Education spoke to in his press conference, in his statement, and the response I asked a question in Parliament and it is in their budget speech now, telling the same, perpetuating the same untruths over a period of time. How can you as a Minister of Education tell such gross untruths to the national population? What is it? Why is this happening? Why?

The Minister claims under the previous Government a laptop cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000; under the new initiative it will cost \$4,135. The cost of the revamped programme will be \$62 million, as opposed to the last Government spending in excess of \$500 million.

We spent \$306 million in the five years, Madam Speaker, not \$500 million. And the unit cost of the laptop went down from in 2010 to \$4,200; 2011, \$3,300; 2012, \$3,200; 2013, \$2,800; 2014, \$2,200 and 2015, \$2,200. It went down. So \$306 million was spent and the cost of the laptop was not \$12,000 and \$15,000 as being said by the Minister of Education. How can they be like that? What is it that they are trying to do to the population? Is it deliberate? Why is there this mischievousness?

The Minister claimed there was no availability of connectivity to the Internet. The truth, 95 per cent of schools had connectivity under the People's Partnership ranging from one megabyte to 15 megabytes; 144 schools were equipped with 15 or more computers. Computer labs and connectivity: 125 secondary schools and 300 primary schools had computer labs connectivity. So another gross untruth.

He said laptops were of poor quality and nothing could be done with them. The truth is, the great value: 6,000-plus teachers trained, digital education portal, wireless connectivity, education software; Lenovo and HP are two of the brands that we bought from the Ministry of Education under the Central Tenders Board. Every one of these laptops were bought under the Central Tenders Board. And Lenovo and HP—is he saying that Lenovo and HP laptop computers are bad brands, are poor quality?

11.15 a.m.

So, if we send the Minister's statement to Lenovo and HP—you have a Minister of Education in Trinidad saying that these are of poor quality. They are rated within the first six best laptops in the world. [*Desk thumping*] So, in the satisfaction in the education—you know, Minister of Education, now you are under progressive education system, I think you mix the prefix, it is not progressive it is regressive. [*Desk thumping*] It is accelerated regression of the education system, the GATE has been slashed where discrimination against students over 50 years of age; shut down of the essential after-school study centres. We had over 400 after-school studies in this country where parents could come and pick their child up. We had them running for two and a half hours, 15 minutes after school closes in both secondary and primary schools. The best teachers were allotted to these after-school study centres. That has been closed down.

So all the students that you are talking about who were dysfunctional who are supposed to be getting some extra care and attention they no longer can go. The whittling-down of the school textbook programme, no textbooks for the students for two years and you are making the excuse that you found textbooks in schools. You all had chosen a plan where you all decided—the PNM decided—these are the textbooks we are going to provide. The teachers and the principals did not accept that these were the textbooks that were not used, and under your PNM former administration these textbooks were put into a corner.

When we came in in 2012 we had the opportunity to purchase textbooks for the first time, because we topped up in '10 and we topped up in '11. We provided nearly three million textbooks to the students in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] at a cost for less than \$200 million, for five years. And we went to the principals and the teachers, we told them you choose your textbooks, and they chose their textbooks and we distributed the textbooks for them. So, what you see around in the school premises in cellophane and so on that is because—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East, your original 45 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 10 more minutes if you intend to avail yourself of it?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Non-construction of schools. Madam Speaker, we have built over 102 new schools in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is there for everybody to see. If you say that you cannot see it, it is because you do not want to see it.

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We built over 68 early childhood education centres, 38 primary schools [*Desk thumping*] and we completed six secondary schools, and if the Minister cannot see I want to just advise him to go to Saturday, July 19, 2014, the Ministry of Education, “Achieving Excellence in Education”. We have the photographs of all the schools that we completed up to 2014. It is an eight-page document.

I want to indicate that the People’s Partnership Government built 19 ECCE schools across the East-West Corridor, [*Desk thumping*] we built 35 in central and south Trinidad; we completed eight secondary schools, and there are about another eight that we had under construction. We had primary schools completed in south, central, we have the listing of them, currently under construct, and we must not forget to say that seven primary schools were completed on the East-West Corridor, and they were in Tunapuna, Arima New Government, St. Barbara’s, Febeau Village, Rose Hill, Paramin and Point Cumana. Three Ministers of Government now had schools constructed in there, and then we had under construction another seven.

So, in the five years, we completed construction of 102 new schools [*Desk thumping*] and we had over 68 under construction, and not under 1 per cent, but some were, as you had mentioned, 80—Shiva and Parvati, no money has been allocated for Shiva and Parvati schools for the completion.

Dr. Francis: Would the Member give way?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, not at this time.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I have minimal time. [*Crosstalk*] Is there a spite that you have stopped the construction of Shiva and Parvati? Is it because of the Member of Parliament’s constituency in Siparia? [*Desk thumping*]

Why is it that the Prime Minister has decided he is not going to open the Couva hospital, but he is going to build a Sangre Grande hospital? Is there an ulterior motive? Is he telling the country something? Why he does not want to open the south university campus? Is he telling the country something? But yesterday you see that the hon. Prime Minister is opening a whole heap of things. He wants to construct a whole heap of things in the Carenage area: the Carenage jetty; the Carenage Police Station. We are not going to have any difficulty with it, but he has difficulty with what we were doing. [*Desk thumping*]

And I can go on to the scholarships and just mention one thing that the Minister of Education had said. He said he had challenges as to who should be the

recipients and beneficiaries of scholarships. What does he mean by that? He said, “we are in a challenging time at the level of the Cabinet in putting forward the names of persons whom the education Ministry recommended were qualified to receive”. It is quite clear that scholarships that were granted in the past had a certain bias that was attached to them, and we want to ensure that bias is removed and everyone—what is the bias he was speaking about? I thought scholarships were given on meritocracy and not on anything else. [*Desk thumping*] He is reversing the amount of scholarships now— we gave over 2,000 scholarships over the time. Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister then, ensured that human capital development was the sure way for sustainable development.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Minister Karim forgot to mention a number of things yesterday. We are asking, why has \$84.3 million been cut from the school feeding programme? Does it mean that they are not going to give breakfast to the students so they are cutting the meals? Are they going to do a means test to find out about the students getting the school feeding programme? Yes? Why is \$84.3 million being cut from that and over \$500 million cut from the tertiary education sector?

Mr. Karim: 569.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: 569. MIC, YTEPP, NESC. MIC \$10.6 million, YTEPP \$49 million, NESC \$27 million cut, NIHERST \$4 million, south campus cut, and so on.

Mr. Karim: OJT.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: OJT. [*Interruption*] No, is so much information I have for you: university services: \$22 million cut; Council of Legal Education: \$10 million; Eric Williams: \$15 million cut; subsidies at Mount Hope: \$19 million; NTA \$18 million; UTT: \$107; Laventille Technology and Continuing Education Centre, you cut \$10.6 million and you say that you are interested in looking after the children and the people in Laventille, you cut \$10.6 million; MIC: \$5.8 million cut; MIC craft programme \$12.7; retraining of displaced workers \$7.3 million removed; HYPE: \$21 million; MuST: \$27 million; Servol: \$6 million; MYPART: \$4 million, and so on. These are your cuts. What do you want to happen to the young boys who unfortunately did not get the school places, the five passes in the schools?

Mr. Karim: And the girls.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, and the girls. Then you remove—no textbooks. I want to go to the CAC just for a minute. This is the Eighth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries and Statutory Authorities, I want to refer both Ministers of Education to this paper on primary school education, and it shows

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where the Continuous Assessment Component is the way to go—and the Ministers who attended that included a number of Ministers of the present Government—about curriculum reform.

They speak about curriculum reform. Their manifesto is one page and the only thing they could say in that page is that they are going to have curriculum reform. We completed early childhood education curriculum reform; we completed primary school curriculum reform [*Desk thumping*] to bring about this Continuous Assessment Component, and we completed the tertiary education, the secondary education curriculum reform. How much time again do I have?

Hon. Member: Plenty minutes, you talk.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Three minutes.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in one short year the Ministry of Education with two Ministers who seem unable to understand what education is about—I understand that one was a woodworking teacher. I do not know anything about that.

But he does not understand or does not have a clue about education. Not because you were head of a union it means—so in one year they have had 20 years of regression of the education system. [*Desk thumping*] You are taking this country back as fast as possible in the education sector. The economy is at a standstill, crime is at its highest, the health sector is bad. I do not have time to deal with my 43 years of experience in medicine, I would have dealt with the Minister of Health. But, unfortunately I cannot deal with that, but another time. The Zika virus and the oncology drugs not there. The hon. Minister was in a hospital and he had to move himself out of the hospital because he did not receive the medicine.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That is not true.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this country is at its worst that it has ever been. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Standing Order 48(6); that is patently a lie. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member that is a fact, your statement? The Member is saying that it is untrue. Your time is almost up so move on, please.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the hon. Minister and Member for St. Joseph, cannot say in this Parliament, that is patently a lie. That has to be withdrawn. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: The Member said I discharged myself because of no drugs, that is patently an untruth. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, hon. Member.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I hope I have a minute injury time. [*Interruption*] So, on behalf of the citizens of this country who demand good governance, safe communities, progressive and equitable access to education, health and social systems, and a good conscience, and reason, and patriotic adherence to our democratic Constitution, this 2016/2017 budget stands condemned, and the Minister of Finance stands condemned, and Dr. Keith Rowley's Government stands condemned.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this ongoing budget debate and seek your leave in accordance with Standing Order 44(10). Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the imperative for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services during fiscal 2017 has to be "Doing more with less". For even as Trinidad and Tobago adjusts to the straitened economic circumstances the Ministry will continue to have a sacred responsibility to the poor and vulnerable. As we address the issues of social inclusion, social development, and social empowerment, we must be responsible and mindful of our economic situation. In fulfilling our mandate, therefore, four critical parameters will guide us:

- First is the duty of care to our poor and vulnerable. Those excluded by various circumstances from the mainstream of society and those fallen on hard times. We have to ensure they are given care and support within our means. We cannot do otherwise. For to do so will devalue us as a people and contribute to the deterioration of our society.
- Second is quality of care: we need to extend the best quality of care in the most humane way possible. In delivering our social services we therefore have to ensure that the human resources and systems of delivery do not add in any way to the challenges already faced by our clients and beneficiaries.
- The third is living within our means: the Government recognizes that we have to strive to do the most for those in greatest need, being ever mindful of the country's financial outlook. This, therefore, compels us to prioritize and improve efficiencies.
- The fourth is correctly determining need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is misappropriation of public funds when social care programmes are accessed by or provided to persons who neither need nor qualify for the support. It is not only wrong, it is unconscionable, and even wicked to do so. For every dollar that goes to an undeserving recipient is support denied to someone who truly needs it [*Desk thumping*] and may in some cases mean the difference between food and hunger, shelter and homelessness, and an improved sense of worth or hopelessness. [*Desk thumping*]

11.30 a.m.

It is therefore within this context that I will carry out my responsibilities and the Ministry's mandate during fiscal 2017. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my intention was, at this juncture, to give an account of the Ministry's performance in fiscal 2016 and our plans for 2017. Then the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla made her contribution. A contribution if made anywhere else I would treat with the disdain that it deserves. [*Desk thumping*] But, it was made in this honourable House and before the nation, so I am compelled to respond.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla had the unmitigated gall to stand in this honourable House and state not once, but twice that this Government is anti-people. [*Crosstalk*] When the hon. Eric Eustace Williams— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please, I need to hear what the Member is saying and I would not tolerate any crosstalk, please, while she is speaking. The Member for Couva South.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the hon. Dr. Eric Eustace Williams and his team founded our esteemed party, "People's" was a deliberate and conscious choice because the party was to be of the people, for the people and by the people and it has been so for the last 60 years. The PNM's people-first philosophy is not only evident in its name but in its founding principles, constitution, manifesto and as a government in our policies, programmes and legislative agenda. Caring for and protecting people are the reasons for our very existence.

It is not for us a label to be used for bringing together a hodgepodge of parties that vanishes from the political landscape after five years. [*Desk thumping*] We have served the people for 60 years, we overcame the economic and financial challenges of 2016 in the people's interest and with our masterpiece blueprint for— [*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva South, this is the second time within three minutes, please.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And with our masterpiece blueprint for transformation and growth will steer the people of Trinidad and Tobago through these difficult economic times to a brighter future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must now confess that I was caught by surprise when the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla admitted there had been a lot of inefficiencies and mismanagement of funds in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. The hon. Member went on to state that the PP Government's solution to these problems was the biometric card and that upon coming into government the first thing that the PNM did was to shut down the biometric card. And she cannot understand why the biometric system was shut down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, "she" please. Identify the Member accordingly, please.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Sure, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year I informed this House that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services was going to conduct a comprehensive review of the biometric system. The review was conducted first as promised and has informed our decision-making.

Now, although the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla has admitted several times that she has difficulty understanding. I will now inform the Member, this august House and the nation why action had to be taken with the biometric card. The Ministry provides several social services including senior citizen pension, disability grants, public assistance grants and food cards to approximately 170,000 recipients. The biometric system allowed for the utilization of one multiple grant card, the streamlining of service delivery and the elimination of double-dipping and leakages.

The biometric system was therefore embraced by the People's Partnership and became operational in October 2015 when the Ministry entered into a one-year contract with the INN Consortium. The system operated on two platforms and the initial basic cost for one year was \$67.4 million. The annual maintenance cost of \$29.8 million for the financial platform was based on the enrolment and support of the Ministry's 170,000 grant recipients. However, only approximately 62,000 or 35 per cent would have been enrolled on that system and it was only 3,158 recipients of the 42,947 food card recipients were transitioned to the system.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, during financial 2016 our economic situation demanded that we reduce expenditure. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services could not therefore, in good conscience, continue to expend \$2.7 million to pay \$1.7 million to 2 per cent of our grant recipients. Viable alternatives were therefore sought. The existing debit card was out because our bankers had informed the Ministry that the system was obsolete and a risk since 2014. They were therefore not prepared to continue with the system and subsequently in 2016 informed of their intention to stop issuing any new cards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it now costs the Ministry \$274,000 monthly to effect payment to approximately 134 grant recipients utilizing cheques and direct deposit. The decision to end the month-to-month arrangement with the biometric providers and the utilized cheques and direct deposit was therefore a no-brainer. The 3,158 recipients continued to be paid but at a substantially reduced cost of \$6,455 monthly, as opposed to \$2.7 million. Government expenditure has been reduced by \$2.4 million monthly and double-dipping can still be curbed with continued enrolment on the AFIS which is an identity platform which the Ministry has already paid for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is why we discontinued the use of the biometric financial platform. The hon. Members on the opposite side seem to have a strange and questionable fascination with the food card. It was not my intention to treat with the food card in any great way this morning, but I am compelled to do so. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, despite having function as Minister of the People and Social Development, appears to be clueless regarding the operations of the Ministry or she would not have opined that the people's card was the most feasible and effect way to manage the food card programme.

The PP Government replaced the food card programme with a Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. A number of irregularities were however found when the review of that programme was conducted. Mr. Deputy Speaker, policies were not always adhered to and there was an absence of written procedures to support policies. The required means test to determine eligibility was not conducted in a number of instances. The mandatory six months' review was placed on hold at one juncture. This meant that persons who may no longer have been eligible continued to receive payment. Thousands of persons who received food cards on the recommendations of NGOs, CBOs and FBOs were never reviewed and continued to be paid under this programme for up to six years. Recipients recommended for deactivations were not always removed in a timely manner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in response to our whistleblower, in the Rio Claro agent, an audit was done and it was discovered that 45 per cent of the food card recipients recommended for deactivation were still active. This resulted in an estimated cost of \$793,000, and if this was representative of the region it means that there would have been an overpayment of \$3 million in the Rio Claro region because they failed to deactivate persons recommended for deactivation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the temporary food cards which carry a PIN, we had situations where the card and PIN were in the same envelope under the control of one person. This was a recipe for fraud and that had to be discontinued. The internal auditor was prohibited, during the tenure of the People's Partnership, from conducting audits of the food card programme. I have never heard any such thing in my life. And the database administrator with responsibility for deactivation owned the food card database. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you heard me clearly. An employee of the Ministry owned the database for the food card programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to inform this august House that action has either commenced or has been taken to correct these irregularities. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry's food card data base is now under the control of the IT department, mandatory six months' reviews are to be conducted, and we are now working on a project to have those that have not been done, conducted. The issue of the temporary food cards being under the jurisdiction of one person and the PIN and the card in the same envelope, that has been changed to reduce risk and mismanagement and fraud and we have instituted a system whereby all persons recommended for deactivation are deactivated in a timely manner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the foregoing irregularities, a decision was taken to intensify biometric enrolment in March 2016. Food card recipients who had not biometrically enrolled—and there were approximately 15,641 such persons—were advised via the print and electronic media to come in and be biometrically enrolled and that failure to do so would result in their removal from the system. After the grace period of four months, 13,330 food card recipients did not come in.

Mr. Charles: Because they are afraid.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Member for Naparima, I have been ignoring the little comments you have been making earlier. Please. That was the fourth one. Go ahead hon. Member.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The food card is supposed to provide income support to the poor and indigent for the

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purchase of the most basic of needs, food. Persons who were really in need of that support would therefore have come in and the support would have continued.

The Ministry did not take back any food cards from those 13,330 recipients as the Members on the other side claimed. Those persons knew they were not eligible and therefore relinquished the undeserved support. This has resulted in savings of over \$110 million annually.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla had a field day last Thursday, and she also claimed that the Ministry had reduced staff and that this resulted in persons being unable to access pensions and grants. As with most of her statements, this is completely erroneous. [*Desk thumping*] What the hon. Member did not tell this House was that during the PP and her tenure a decision was taken and implemented in 2014 to place on hold permanent food support. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, permanent food support.

11.45 a.m.

Is that people-centred governance? Is that decision pro-people, to leave our poor and indigent hungry for the last two years? No, it is not good governance; it is not people-centred governance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this caring Government took the bold decision, aware that persons opposite would claim it was a backward move, to provide food support by cheque and direct deposit to those persons recommended for the grant of permanent food cards in 2015 and 2016.

Hon. Member: Very good. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: And I am pleased to report that payments were processed and are being issued to 4,555 individuals and families, some waiting and hoping since January 2015. I am sure those families will not be concerned about the method of payment but will be happy, knowing exactly where their next meal is coming from.

Hon. Member: Very good. Very good. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government believes that one of the main aims of social sector policy is to reduce poverty and improve social justice. In 2016, the Ministry sought to inculcate a culture of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency among poor and vulnerable groups and in communities with the aim of moving persons from a life of poverty. In this regard, we distributed 733 grants, totalling \$6.9 million under the SEED

programme, for families to start or expand small and micro businesses, and we also trained 950 clients in marketing, pricing and cash management. At the community level, seven grants totalling \$239,000 were granted to NGOs and CBOs in Princes Town, San Fernando, Tunapuna, Rio Claro and Diego Martin to implement poverty-reduction projects.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency. Research has also revealed that in Trinidad and Tobago low levels of education attainment impact poverty more than unemployment. In an effort, therefore, to improve literacy and enhance the educational levels of adults, 2,794 persons were enrolled in literacy, CXC Maths and English and NEC skills development courses.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla's statements to the contrary, a total of \$5.1 million was expended on 245 grants for house wiring, sanitary plumbing, house repairs and pipe-borne water and electricity for under-developed communities under the Ministry's National Social Development Programme. These grants would have contributed to the standard of living and quality of life of the recipients and residents of the affected communities.

Despite the adoption of several approaches to poverty reduction and an expansive range of programmes, we have not achieved the expected results. The research and our experience suggest the need for better targeting, new and improved strategies and a more holistic and coordinated approach.

During fiscal 2017, the Ministry will therefore collaborate with the UNDP to develop a national poverty-reduction strategy; improve our data collection effort; develop regional poverty profiles for the other 13 municipal regions, Arima having already been completed. These profiles describe the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of poverty and will facilitate the identification and implementation of appropriate alleviation mechanisms.

We will also utilize GIS maps that identify areas of poverty, target specific areas of poverty for grant funding, utilize NSDP to begin the elimination of outhouses from Trinidad and Tobago's landscape and provide pipe-borne water and electricity to underdeveloped communities.

We will also include food support as a poverty-reduction initiative and place emphasis on the development aspect of the food support programme. We will

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assign a case worker to every family that receives food support, to work with them to break the generational cycle of poverty and bring them to self-sufficiency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we already have positions approved. The previous administration, having had 135 positions approved to support the development aspect of the food card programme, chose to never implement it. So, clearly, their intention was never to bring persons out of poverty. [*Desk thumping*] We recognize that saving for the purpose of education, home or a small business, is key to making economic progress for many families. The Minister of Finance's proposed introduction of housing bonds and education bonds is therefore a step in the right direction, as we move towards the reduction and eventual elimination of poverty by 2030.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' core responsibility is the delivery of social services, inclusive of income support, and in so doing provides a safety net for our poor and vulnerable. There are currently 13 social services grants, including senior citizens pension, public assistance grants, medical equipment, education and funeral grants.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla took great pains to try and convince this honourable House and the population that the PNM Government has changed the senior citizens pension to a senior citizens grant. Nothing is further from the truth. The existing legislation provides for a pension and that is what we administer. The People's Partnership was able, in 2010, to fool the elderly by claiming the PNM would take away their pensions. That will never happen again. People are more aware and have greater access to information.

In addition, by increasing the income ceiling from \$4,500 to \$5,000—and yes, it is the income ceiling and not the pension that was increased—the PNM Government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to improve the well-being of our elderly. This change positively impacted over 28,000 pensioners who received increases when the schedule was changed in December 2015.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fiscal 2016 we spent \$3.4 billion on pension payments for 90,800 senior citizens, and approximately \$406 million providing income support via the public assistance grant to 25,906 families. Our suite of benefits is more than adequate and the Government's maintenance of them at existing levels, given our straitened economic circumstances is testimony to this Government's commitment to care for the needy and vulnerable. An organization may have the best products and facilities, but it is the quality and timeliness of its service that defines it and determines its success or failure.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in an effort to ensure the delivery of quality customer service, will, during fiscal 2017, implement a quality customer care programme organization-wide; enhance the competencies and knowledge of all staff that interact with the public by providing training in customer service and the Ministry's grants and services; assign customer service representatives to all regional offices; develop and implement standards of behaviours and performance and the turnaround times for all grants and services; share the Ministry's mandate, goals and objectives and that of their respective unit with staff so they will understand the direction in which the Ministry is going; and advertise and fill needed vacant contract positions approved in the Ministry's six-year plan.

We will also be introducing a hotline service so that the public can access us and have their enquiries and information needs attended to in a timely manner. We will also, most importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, implement an integrated IT system. It is beyond my comprehension that successive Ministers could have been in a leadership position in that Ministry and not taken action to have an integrated IT system implemented in this day and age. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these initiatives are expected to result in a shift to more timely and improved quality of service.

I now turn my attention to the more than 52,000 persons living in Trinidad and Tobago with a disability. In our quest to create a more inclusive society where persons with disabilities can enjoy equal opportunities and a more empowered and dignified life, the Ministry has:

- initiated action to develop a national registry of persons with disabilities;
- consulted with some of the key stakeholders, including CODO, the Centre for Persons with Disabilities, the Society for the Visually Impaired, the Blind Welfare Association and the deaf.

This sector is however represented by over 60 groups and this presented some challenges, but we will overcome those challenges. [*Desk thumping*] We have reviewed and revised the Draft National Policy on Persons with Disabilities to ensure conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The draft will be circulated to key stakeholders for comments this month.

We also met with the UNDP to discuss Government's way forward in terms of meeting the requirements imposed by the United Nations Convention. We also began identifying key requirements of the UNCRPD and developing plans and timelines for this achievement. This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will enable Trinidad and Tobago to demonstrate that though unable to meet all requirements because

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of economics constraints, we have commenced action and have identified a projected end date for implementation. We have also commenced remedial work to facilitate the operationalization of the NEC so that assessments, rehabilitative and therapeutic services will be made available to persons with disabilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the remedial works have not been completed because of issues related to the structural integrity of the building and the absence of statutory approvals. Despite this, the Ministry made a lot of headway over the last few months and has committed \$1.5 million to complete remedial works and plan to spend an additional \$4.5 million to outfit the centre. This will present a much needed opportunity for persons with disabilities. Provision was also made for the construction of ramps at each of the Ministry's offices to facilitate persons with disabilities. It is a start but the greatest of journeys begin with just a first step.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla told this House that a lot of persons had their disability grants cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. The disability grant is governed by legislation and any adjustment must be in keeping with the legislation. [*Desk thumping*] The Member, being a former social development Minister, must know this. Why then did the Member attempt to deceive this honourable House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Member: As usual.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: I can only surmise that it was intended to support her ridiculous claim of this Government being uncaring and anti-people. Shameless!

Hon. Member: Shameful.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Mr. Deputy Speaker, during fiscal 2017, 24,058 recipients received disability grants totalling approximately \$534 million.

12.00 noon

One hundred and forty-three applications were also approved at a cost of \$1.3 million for severely disabled children. It is also noted that 1,177 disabled children received payment under the Public Assistance Grant at a cost of \$16.2 million. Assistive devices were also made available to persons with disabilities to improve their quality of life. Six hundred and forty-eight persons received special beds, spectacles and wheelchairs at a cost of \$1.1 million; and 69 persons were fitted with prostheses, allowing enhanced mobility at a cost of \$1.6 million. Discussions were also held with the Public Transport Service Corporation in July 2016, with a view to improving and expanding the ELDAMO bus service. This service is critical

to the mobility of persons with disabilities and the demand is becoming greater than can be presently accommodated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry paid approximately \$35.5 million to NGOs, CBOs, FBOs and statutory boards that provide services to and are umbrella organizations for persons with disabilities. The Family Services Division of the Ministry continues to provide programmes and services aimed at strengthening families and promoting healthy family life.

During 2016, the unit provided psychosocial counselling to 2,480 persons, conducted parenting workshops in 10 communities, managed cases of individuals and families at risk, and established parent support groups to provide continued support to persons exposed to domestic violence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry is a key player in the removal, assessment, care, rehabilitation, and reintegration of socially displaced persons. The other main players are the Ministries of National Security and Health, and the respective corporations.

During 2016, four meetings were held to holistically examine the issue of street dwelling, identify the roles and responsibilities of each entity and develop integrated strategies to combat the social ill. The Ministry also partnered with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and provided accommodation and meals to 114 homeless persons at the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons at Riverside Car Park. Thirty persons were assisted at New Horizons Centre, where they are provided with a viable alternative to street dwelling and long-term care and rehabilitation. Five persons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, graduated from the programme and are now living independently. Twenty-eight persons were relocated to homes for older persons and 29 deportees were provided with temporary accommodation. The Piparo Empowerment Centre also continued to rehabilitate substance abusers and successfully integrate them into society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2017, the electrical system at Riverside Car Park will be completely overhauled at an estimated cost of \$3 million, and the building will receive a much-needed facelift. The Ministry will also initiate plans for the construction of a transitional home to facilitate the reintegration of persons who graduate from the respective programmes back into society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now address the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla's claim that we disbanded the IAU and fired all the staff. There are two divisions within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services charged with the responsibility for the socially displaced, the Social Displacement Unit that was established in 1996 and the IAU in 2014. An examination of the roles and functions of both units, however, will reveal duplication and overlap.

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The IAU also operated with 11 full-time law enforcement officers, whose services were not utilized on a regular and continuous basis. In most instances, they were utilized once per week. Our legal officer also advised that the employment of SRPs by the Ministry contravened inherent separation of powers principle and undermined the independence of the Commissioner of Police and the police force. This was an untenable arrangement, but there was no need for us to disband the IAU because its term expired in December 2015. In addition, although some staff were retained on short-term contracts beyond December 2015, the SRPs returned to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service after their short-term contracts expired.

Further, having regard to the overlap and duplication of functions, the need to improve efficiencies and reduce expenditure, and the need for a collaborative approach with external agencies, the Ministry has decided to establish one integrated unit that will partner with the Attorney General's Office, the Ministries of National Security and Health, and the respective corporations to treat with the issue of the socially displaced. This new arrangement will result in annual savings of \$1.8 million and also a more efficient and effective Social Displacement Unit.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla also stated that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services had fired over 100 persons. Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again, the Member's statement is erroneous. No one was fired. There were persons whose contracts expired and were not offered new contracts. Having regard to our current economic situation, the need to improve efficiency and do more with less, the fact that many of them did not possess the qualifications and skills required [*Desk thumping*] and they also operated in areas where there was excess capacity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could not in good conscience continue to employ persons in a situation—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. I would like to hear the Member's discourse. Proceed.

Hon. C. Crichtlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry could not in good conscience continue to employ persons in areas where there was little or no work for them to do. We had a situation in the People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit where four persons were employed and on average they dealt with 49 persons monthly. Given 20 or 22 workdays per month, this means that two people were playing golf and two persons were seeing one or two persons daily. This Government cannot afford to, and will not condone that

practice because we have a responsibility to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to maximize and ensure the proper use of public funds. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services acknowledges the significant role played by our senior citizens in the development of our country. In fiscal 2016, the Ministry provided subventions to nine homes for older persons in Mayaro, Sangre Grande, Toco, Chaguanas, Couva, San Fernando, Siparia, Point Fortin and La Brea, and to 10 senior activity centres. Additionally, to serve as a continuum of quality care, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme continues to be an agency of the Ministry, guided by the philosophy of service and caring for the elderly and incapacitated citizens. We provide this service to approximately 600 individuals monthly.

During fiscal 2016, the Ministry also presented tokens to persons 95 years and over. Forty such tokens were presented. We will continue to facilitate the well-being of our older persons and work with the Attorney General's Office to have regulatory legislation implemented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister in his December 2015 address to the nation on the state of the economy expressed his commitment to provide the necessary support to the vulnerable in society, during the period of economic downturn, through a number of organizations including the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. The Prime Minister noted that measures would be implemented to mitigate the effects of the expected downturn in economic activity on the lives of the citizens and, in particular, the vulnerable. In this regard, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has established a technical team with responsibility for developing and coordinating the implementation of a social mitigation plan to cushion the fallout of the economic downturn. The social mitigation plan is in the developmental stage following consultations with key stakeholders in June 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we expect that the report will be presented to Cabinet by November of this year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member your speaking time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost every time the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla speaks, she speaks about the baby grant and

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suggests that this Government is uncaring for stopping it. Let me put this issue to rest once and for all. The People's Partnership Government approved the Baby Care Assistance Initiative as a project for one year, from October 2014 to September 2015. The PP Government clearly had no intention for this be an ongoing programme. It was simply an election ploy. [*Desk thumping*] It is also noted that only 447 persons accessed the grant and although approval was supposed to be contingent on training, only 147 of the recipients attended workshops. This programme was simply intended to gather support for the upcoming election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now take the opportunity to speak to my constituents directly. To the people of Lopinot/Bon Air West, I extend heartfelt thanks for your continued support and patience; to the residents of Windy Hill, Edna Hill and Rohan Road, know that the Water and Sewerage Authority is working on a revised proposal for providing pipe-borne water supply to your homes. In the interim, two standpipes have been installed at the entrance to Windy Hill to bring some measure of relief; to all of those awaiting housing, work is expected to recommence on the Bon Air North Housing Development before the end of this year; Mr. Harding and the residents of Lopinot will be particularly happy that \$10 million has been allocated in the 2017 budget for the Arouca Fire Station. [*Desk thumping*] I also take this opportunity to thank the Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for his support and service to the constituency.

Ladies, gentlemen and youths of Lopinot/Bon Air West, your attendance and contributions at our MELD sessions have allowed me to gain an insight into the major issues that concern you and your communities. I have also benefited from your ideas and suggestions. I trust that we will continue to MELD, that is, Meet, Listen, and Discuss, and in so doing truly achieve the best for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the Government, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, will continue to care for and protect the poor and vulnerable, albeit in a more cost-effective and deficient manners. I also thank God for his mercy and grace, and ask the Great I AM, to continue to bless Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 12.15 p.m., we will suspend for lunch and we will resume promptly at 1.20 p.m.

12.15 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.20 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would like to resume the budget debate and I recognize the Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Prakash Ramadhar (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I indicate my gratitude to you for the privilege to address this very noble and august House. Let me begin by indicating up front that I congratulate each and every Member in this House who has spoken already and rest assured what I am about to say should not be taken as in any way a criticism for the sake of criticism alone, but with a hope, at the end of day, that we may be able to get a light on what may be wrong in the society and at the same time, be able to show a path forward.

Let me begin also by indicating that it is not my view that everything that the PNM has done in the last year has been wrong, and I want to congratulate up front the efforts of the Government in stabilizing the foreign exchange. It would have been an easy path to have taken to fall to the advice of many who said to let the dollar float freely. But when one examines more closely the consequence of such an action, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where almost all of the raw materials that we use in this nation for manufacturing, even for export, and certainly for local consumption, is imported, where there is \$5 billion in food importations, you have to ask yourself: had the dollar gone to \$10 against the US dollar, what would have been the circumstances of the average working man? So having said that, I congratulate that effort.

But at the same time, I want also to say that a budget must put a light as to how we go forward in the society. There is no doubt, there is no second guessing, that Trinidad and Tobago is facing very difficult economic challenges at this point in time and into the foreseeable future. But for a country to come together and go through difficult periods, we must have at the end of a long—well, hopefully not as long as many say it would be, but as long as there is a tunnel, there should be a light at the end of it. And I would have implored, as we did last year, the Government, that this year at least, they would have been able to show us a path into the future. Unfortunately, that has not happened. [*Desk thumping*] It is easy to resort to the old game, the old way of tax, tax, tax without growth.

My position and all of those on the Opposition I am sure, and certainly of the COP, is that we must grow the economy. Saying it is easy, doing it is far much more difficult. Because I heard last week, a PNM operative on the TV station,

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when prodded, we must look into agriculture, you know what the response was? Glibly, “Well, agriculture amounts to 0.4 per cent of the GDP and even if you double it, you get 0.8 per cent of the GDP”, missing altogether the seriousness of growth and I will start in agriculture because it has been said before and I will repeat it here, that a nation that cannot feed itself is not truly independent. In the late 2008, early 2009, maybe we have already started to forget that there was a shortage of basic food material throughout the world. Rice, dairy produce, grain were in short supply for numerous reasons and there was a fear in this country that no matter how much money we had, we may not have been able to purchase what was required.

Like every parent knows and I know you are a loving father, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to not just biological but to all in your constituency, I know how you operate. One of the first priorities of any leader in any society, and certainly in a home and in a community, is to put food security as a primary objective, but we have never seen any real effort under past administrations of the PNM and certainly not under this one. When a country is in strife, when it is under stress and when there is fear for the future, you start putting together those things that are basic and necessary for our survival.

When we heard that Matthew was coming, we were warned then it was just some blowing of winds in Trinidad but it turned out to be a deadly storm, a hurricane at category 4. The first things they tell you, secure water, secure food and a number of other things. Why are we not, when the winds of dangerous change is upon us, attempting to do the most basic of things, to secure our food production? I congratulate the People’s Partnership Government for the efforts we made under—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, is there an electronic device on?

Mr. Singh: I think that is the air-conditioning. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Go ahead.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Karim: Turn off the air-conditioning.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: It is rather hot. Yes, of the former Ministers of the People’s Partnership Government who were given a directive to ensure the growth of an agricultural sector, and you would have seen efforts being made and I want to call the name here, Joe Pires. If one is to examine what he has been able to do for agriculture, it is no longer—it should not any longer be visualized as the

ole fella with a bust-up boots, ripped-up pants, sweaty shirt, toiling in mud in the heat of the day, in the wet of the rains, and at the end of which his crops either get flooded out without insurance, his animals get stolen and at the end of which, he is poorer for his effort.

We must look to the modernizing of agricultural production as at business, agro business. And I called the name Joe Pires because in his farms, if you should ever visit them, you will see how things can be done. And I do recall being invited to one of his presentations and as I was walking to the head table—and I have repeated this and I will say it again—I saw on that table from a distance, fruits, vegetables, and I honestly believed that they were decorative and plastic because they were flawless. And as I got closer, I realized, wait a minute, this is real; these things were grown here. They can be exported to any part of the world but certainly we can achieve the quality that we see in magazines and when we travel right here in Trinidad and Tobago. So I think that there is living example here as to how we can and must do business in agriculture.

There is another gentleman by the name of Ramgopaul Roop. He is approaching 70 and he has a model farm in Carlsen Field, and I had visited when I was the candidate for Caroni Central in 2007. I was totally amazed and impressed in what this gentleman was able to have achieved on his own doing with little help from anyone else, a model farm. And you know what, I think it was yesterday, he ought to have graduated from a university in Scotland with distinctions in his Master's degree.

These are the sort of people that we must look to as exemplars of the future of how Trinidad and Tobago must respect, first of all, the earth and what it has been able to produce for us over the centuries and what it must produce for us today and into tomorrow. We cannot look at agriculture as a bastard child of the economy. It is a meaningful contributor and it really does allow us to truly appreciate what God has given us here. We have oil and gas and as a result of the wealth of it, we have neglected many other areas. But now, in this period of transition and it must be a period of transition for all the years that we spoke about transformation of the economy, change hardly ever comes unless there is necessity.

And last year, when the PNM took Government, I told our present Prime Minister, the Attorney General and several colleagues on the other side, that maybe we have a golden opportunity to change the way we in Trinidad and Tobago do business; how we are to approach our responsibilities in society and therefore, if they were serious about doing it together, if they were really honest in their intent to transform Trinidad and Tobago, it was in this term, and I am sure

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they would have got the cooperation of all of us on this side if you are genuine in your efforts, but we have seen no real possibility.

Because once again, as I move away from agriculture, I want to go to a theme and I will bring it back at the end of it all, that a society that is deficient in trust, a society that does not trust its leadership, cannot go forward. And the reason I say this up front and early in this budget debate is that no matter what we do, in terms of economic efforts and social engineering change efforts, unless each Member or at least a vast majority of the society believes that you are genuine in your effort to do the things on behalf of all of us, you will not have active participation. In fact, you will have resistance sometimes to very good things.

I give you the classic example of what I termed the FATCA fiasco. This country was put through much anxiety, stress and torture in the last several weeks and certainly, the last two months, where it was told that had we not been able to pass certain legislation, that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago will grind to a halt, our economic bonds with the outer world will evaporate, we will be a pariah amongst very few nations, and Trinidad and Tobago will never be the same again. Many believed that there was a deadline called September 30th and it was beaten into the psyche of our people, that it was the Opposition forces that would be responsible for the calamity that would have befallen us on October 1st.

But legislation was brought before this House and a responsible approach was taken by all of us and in particular, the Leader of the Opposition who says bring good law. In that law was a section that gave power to a Minister, a politician, so that he may have had access to very confidential information that no politician should have holding office as a matter of law. There was another bit—and I do not re-debate the issue but it is important for us to put this thing in context—where that Minister would also have power to do things that could affect the lives of all of us without there being any proper parliamentary oversight, and when I say parliamentary oversight, where the population would not even know that things were happening in their name but certainly not necessarily in their interest and no responsible democratic society would allow such legislation.

We asked for amendments. We were promised joint select committees and then we saw what happened. There was none. We asked for amendments here that we would debate the matter on the floor and put forward amendments when it came to committee. As things transpired, the debate was wrapped up unceremoniously, undemocratically and then blame was put on the shoulders of the Opposition. But if anyone believes that that was a true state of affairs—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I know that the FATCA Bill is mentioned in the budget, the budget that we are debating but I am trying to—you know, come to the point in terms of the information, please.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Yeah and that is why I am going to be very brief on this and I am close to the end. Where nobody in the society who looked on and truly reasoned out what had happened, believed—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like a ruling under Standing Order 51 with regard to anticipation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right, Standing Order 51(1):

“It shall be out of order to anticipate a Bill by discussion upon a motion dealing with the subject matter of that Bill.”

It is on that same point that I rose a while ago, so I would like you to bring home the point. As I said, FATCA is mentioned in the Appropriation Bill, 2017 but tie it in and come to the point.

1.35 p.m.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I am most grateful to you, but you see I am not anticipating, I am dealing with what has happened in the past and what the society has also. *[Desk thumping]* And I know it would be difficult.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We have not spoken so that is anticipating.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I cannot truly appreciate my friend’s worry about the future, when in fact she must be very concerned about the past.

But that is not all. It was tremendous doublespeak and deceit, duplicity, as we proceed. *[Desk thumping]* And there is a commonality of that ethos throughout our long history and certainly disappointingly in the recent past. *[Desk thumping]*

When on the campaign trail last year, the nation was promised that VAT will be reduced. Many say: Wow, we look forward to it. What was the reality? Food, we started off with the security, right. Every mother cares and knows that the first thing you need for your house is food and water. Clothes we could deal with but food and water. And the people voted on the basis that VAT would be reduced but it was a VAT attack because every bit of the expectation was blown apart when, indeed, VAT was put on food that never had VAT on it under the People's Partnership, 6,000-plus items, and there is more.

I am not here to denigrate the PNM. They are our Government and many will be upset when I tell you I want you to succeed. The reason I want you to succeed is until the next election, which I hope will come sooner than later, *[Desk thumping]* in a proper, healthy democracy you will be removed. But until that

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time, I think we all have a duty to help the Government to succeed, because if they succeed us as a people will benefit. But if they should fail, we all pay the price. But it is as simple an equation as that. This is not a huge continent. This is a small society. But the number of divisions in it is far greater than a lot of continents, created by a lot of political misfits, miscreants and those who have ill will to the benefit of the future of this nation [*Desk thumping*] and I am not pointing fingers at anyone. I am making a general statement of the state of the politics that has been our history to our present but certainly cannot afford a place in our future.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of trust is so important. It was a big disappointment for me, because I had grown up knowing the old saying that half a loaf is better than none for a hungry man. But the truth, half a truth is not better for a hungry man, and if one were to be uncharitable but correct in describing some of the actions of some of our colleagues on the other side, we have seen a litter of half-truths, falsehoods and innuendoes—where we rampage from time to time on political platforms—that the Opposition has stolen, has been responsible for magnificent levels of waste and corruption, and some of it may be true. But I want to make it quite clear that not everybody participated in wrongdoing. In fact, there might be a small percentage and when I heard the Minister of Health and the Member for St. Joseph speak about one area I say they are finally getting it.

When you sit in Government—and this is to all my colleagues who are new to Government, there are things that will happen in Government that you have no knowledge, no responsibility for but you will take the blame for it.

The Member for Chaguanas West, my dear friend, reminded us some time ago of the words of Patrick Moynihan who had said, and he is much quoted but this one stuck, that after the experience of government no one is innocent, but not everyone is guilty. [*Desk thumping*] So to rampage and put a brush across the nation's spirit that all who now occupy Opposition are thieves, vagabonds, culprits, of no good, do you know what they are doing? It is creating a rift in the society that will dramatically see a future that we will inherit of violence, of pursued discrimination, unfairness and inequity. It is irresponsible in the extreme to do these things. And I have spoken whilst I was a Minister in the People's Partnership Government be careful of the allegations we make unless there is substance to support it. And for those who are guilty, let the course of justice take place. Do not, as a statement of fact, with such emotion, with such persuasive power, suggest that all of one side should be rid of, because that is an attack on democracy and I will get into that as we proceed.

We are talking about budget. What is Ramadhar talking about? Budget is how we apportion resources of the nation for the benefit of all of our citizens. It was a pain last night to watch on TV, however, that one of the significant cultural events in the society—"you say light it up, dey say take off the lights." What was that about? This is something we want. The one growth industry in the nation is the services industry, tourism. We want to develop tourism, yes for Carnival. But there are many other things, Ramleela is one, local tourism and international tourism. But we have a policy decision that we are going to out the lights half hour before "de people finish". I mean that is not right. [*Desk thumping*]

I know there will be intervention because I know—I want to tell you—there are some on the other side who still have a little warmth and a softness in their hearts but do not stay too long, I want to tell you. Because the foundation upon which they sit has a wicked way of shifting and turning your spirit from good to bad. That is a truth and it happens if you stay in the politics too long. There are some fantastic people on the other side and I ask of them to ensure there is a balance to some of those who do not wish well on the society. And I am sure there are many who would not even have been aware. I know the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, good man, good family, would not have known about that. He would not have countenanced that, nor the Member for St. Ann's East or Tobago East and I could go down the line, La Brea. My friend from Arima will never countenance that. [*Interruption*] No, no, that is a good man.

I want to tell you and I was coming to the point. [*Interruption*] Listen, this is one of the best of the PNM and if you say he is not good enough, I am sorry to hear. Right? Let me tell you why I would be so generous with him today.

Mr. Lee: He put on his poncho.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: He has put on his poncho. Cover up. He spoke publicly, was it two nights ago—?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Mr. P. Ramadhar:—about something that has troubled me, many of our colleagues and the nation, where the cost of healthcare in the society has just been exploding out of the reach of most, had it not been for a Partnership Government that made it accessible to everybody. [*Desk thumping*] But there is a mafia, as he would have elegantly described it, in other words.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Not in those words.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I said he would have elegantly described it in other words. I am saying it is a mafia of those whose interest, whose business is not about health care but about profit only. But it goes beyond profit because when

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the Member spoke publicly about those who are the gatekeepers as to what drugs will come into the society, they have the authority to say yes to this and no to that and this one costing \$400 and that one costing \$2, but we will not bring this here, because it was my intent to go and see him on this because a doctor came to me recently; a doctor who deals with cancer, and he told me that there is a particular pill that is required that costs I think TT \$400 for one.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And he was able to bring it into the country for \$2.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mr. P Ramadhar: Not US dollars, you know, TT \$2. What are we doing? The parasitic oligarchy, my friend. I would not call names because we need and I ask the Prime Minister to help you, to help us to find out who these people are, unearth it and fix it finally. [*Desk thumping*] Because no matter what Government and budgetary allocation, if there is a big, deep hole without an end, a bottomless pit you could throw how much money in it, unless you fix the system you “ent” going anywhere.

But the mafia he spoke about, that he does not want to call mafia, does not exist only in healthcare. It exists throughout. Wherever there is money spread in a small society like this—and in Trinidad we have seen the history since our independence and even before then—it is like putting honey to the flies. They buzz around. They come, but do they bring anything good? They bring their diseases: Zika, Dengue, and Chikungunya. That is the physical aspect of it in one way, but wherever there is money that is being spent in a society look out for the connen, the smart men and those who are intent only on profiteering, not for the benefit of the people of the country. [*Desk thumping*]

That is why it takes effort. But there was a generational change that came to the country under the People’s Partnership called procurement legislation. No other Government, other than possibly the NAR, and they were literally shot out of office, made any effort to fix this system of corruption that was endemic in the society. Under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, we took that. [*Desk thumping*]

Of course, we have some help from our friends now. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I am sure is committed to ensuring that this legislation is properly proclaimed, together with his colleague, the very stylish Member for San Fernando West. I wish he was here. It is worthy of looking at him to see the new change, to bring forth into reality the dream of a generation past so that it will happen in our time. But until that ink “ain dry” and until the

people are not hired I wait with some level of anxiety for the procurement legislation.

I will recall for those who were not in the Cabinet and for those who were there to be reminded that under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, not once but on many occasions whenever allegations were being made and even without them, she will warn the Cabinet that anybody caught in corruption—now this is not the Aunty Kamla we are talking about; this is Kamla Persad-Bissessar the Prime Minister—will say that she will cut your throat. There will be no sympathy. There will be no exception if anyone was involved in that corruption. She did not only speak it there, we brought legislative change to make that a reality. [*Desk thumping*]

Speaking of corruption, it is not only in health. The former Minister of Works, the Member for Tabaquite, was able to have achieved so much in such a short period of time. Of course, nothing is perfect. And as we improve without the procurement legislation now we have a new paradigm as to how we approach things. But I will never forget when, in Oropune, those who do not know it, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Oropune going up to the airport, next to the Trincity Mall. You know it. You were there. Eight lanes of traffic morning and evening, Member for Arima. Old ladies, young children, fit and the unfit dodging traffic. A housing scheme was put there, no bus service, no means of transport, so they had to come onto the highway and those who have to head east or west have to deal with this traffic, either when they are going or when they come back, dodging traffic.

It is on that same point that I rose a while ago, so I would like you to bring home the point. As I said, FATCA is mentioned in the Appropriation Bill, 2017 but tie it in and come to the point.

2.05 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your 45 minutes have expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Is there more I could avail myself to?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Only 10.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, let us go then. Thank you very much, Sir. We need to analyze how this became so. Very quickly and very briefly, I know the Attorney General, we have spoken offline from since you came into Government, some of the ideas. The broken window theory is applicable to this society. When the society looks on and sees over the years, a group attacking the very

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Parliament, shooting a sitting Prime Minister, and then the process allows them to get a PBR pass, to become heroes in the society—I am fast-forwarding now—to a point where a sitting Government will hound a Chief Justice to the point that loads of police officers go to his home on a Friday to arrest a man who is the head of the Judiciary; to arrest a former Prime Minister, prosecute him before a court with a Chief Magistrate who was in the grasp of a PNM-controlled—fortunately, not this AG. This is a good man—PNM operatives, these are the things that people look on to.

To see in today's world, very recent, where the Central Bank Governor is hounded out of office. You see the two highest offices in the nation bickering. If the daddy and the mummy quarrelling, the children will go asunder, Member for Arima. If the society does not have its foundational institutions intact, if it is under challenge and attack from within, then what do we as a people respect? What do we as a people look up to? Condemn the British if you want, but they understood community societies.

When they built a building and the pomp and ceremony that they addressed to it was not just without a thought, you know. They gave a message that a building that was built was for centuries. It will not be there like a shack to be broken. The pomp and ceremony says that we are above it all, and there is a necessity for that. It might sound unpopular into this populist world today, but you do need authority figures, institutions that are bigger than anyone or any group of people, where no man is above the rule of law. But have we seen that in this country where there is one rule for some and another rule for others, [*Desk thumping*] where we have seen—and I have repeated—all these attacks on institutions populated by low men in high office?

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say this, the State must be seen as invincible, stronger than any attack that could be put upon it, be able to withstand the ages of corrosion, of corruption, of the execution of some of its members, but we have seen an Attorney General, former Attorney General, murdered without the crime being solved. Sadiq Baksh's matter has not yet been solved. So that those who wish ill say that the State is what? It is in a state of disrepair. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Emailgate.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Emailgate. Listen, I wish I had more time. They launched their 2013 local government election on emailgate where, once again, just like the FATCA, created a hysteria in the society. I want to say this before the time runs out. That the philosophy—I do not believe the real power of the PNM sits in this

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room, you know. I do not believe so. [*Desk thumping*] It has worked in other countries, it is working here, where they were able to show that old talk could beat performance any day. September 7th showed us that. But all they need to do—because I like to analyze things—and that is why the rants and raves we hear from time to time is that no matter how bad they are, they have to make us look worse. So that if we are always seen as worse, then they are always seen as better and, therefore, the only alternative. That is the psychology. But we see it a little bit further than that.

If you decimate the authority of a legitimate Opposition, then you have no Opposition, and if you have no Opposition in a country, it is an attack on the democracy, because if you have no one to stand and say, “this is wrong, we would not permit this”, well they have deluded all credibility in the Opposition, then you are left with a dictatorship, and we cannot afford that, budget or no budget. This is a danger the society faces.

I want to tell you something. I am sorry the hon. Prime Minister is not here. Could I hear how many more minutes I do have?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have five minutes to be exact.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, before, I have to go in this property tax thing. Once again, this ominous descending calamity on the society is upon us, property tax, with one line of comfort that those who cannot pay will get a—I forget the word. I call it a “bligh”, where the bill, you do not have to pay it now, but rest assured the bill is always to be paid. Many are asking me: why are you not launching an axe-the-tax campaign against this. And I say, “Buh all yuh vote for this thing”. [*Desk thumping*]

One of the biggest fears I am getting from the people is that this property tax, apart from the valuations which we will challenge whenever it goes awry, is the issue now of attaching the tax to properties of elderly who put all of their investment into their homes in the hope of leaving it for their children. It is a cultural necessity. [*Desk thumping*] But what they would be doing is not leaving their homes, but leaving their debt and if it cannot be paid the homes will be sold. AG, I want you to help please in the drafting or the redrafting to ensure that we have some protection for the people. You are a property man, you understand these things. You understand the culture that you put all that you could into your home and you have had very little disposable income otherwise, and that fear factor, food insecurity, personal insecurity and now, or God, home insecurity man! I wish you well.

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As a Government, you had my commitment to help you when you come with good law. We will talk about plea bargaining and how to fix the criminal judicial system. Plea bargaining, as we have discussed with the work we have done, introduce it now AG so that you could bring down organized crime like the Americans did with the Mafia. Put together a team to go after the three main areas of crime in the country: murder, drugs and white collar. Ramesh Maharaj did it with Dole Chadee. Put the resources of the country to show that we could take the biggest one of you, one at a time, and once you do that you scare the rest. You destabilize organized crime.

In the last few moments—I went to Jamaica with the Prime Minister; I thought it my duty when your Prime Minister calls upon you, in service of your nation. Also, selfishly, in Macoya Industrial Estate that you are very familiar with, there are many industries that export to Jamaica. They told me that Jamaicans were taking up the goods, looking, and once they saw it was from Trinidad and Tobago, they put it down. So I thought it was a noble effort and I went with him. I want to say this—and I am sorry the Prime Minister is not here—the man has control of his material. He spoke with such elegance and diplomacy that it is frightening to know that we do not get it here. [*Laughter*] He exercised a command of the subject area. I know he looks to preserve our history in terms of restoration. He admires fine art, and I am sure good spirits. He is almost a renaissance man that he was able to move a crowd in Mona to tears, but one in Mt. D’or to hate. Mr. Prime Minister, give us your best in Trinidad and Tobago. I have seen what you are capable off. The country deserves better than we are getting now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One more minute.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: There is so much hate, anger, distress and division in the society, and I do not wish to add to it, but I feel envious, Members on the other side, when I hear you congratulate your Ministers about things you were able to get in your constituencies. All I have is patience to wait, all I have is patience to wait so that I too will congratulate you for things that you were able to so profusely distribute amongst your constituencies, congratulations.

So, let me just say as I take my seat that the good old Winston Dookeran would say, having regard to what is happening in the society where the institutions are falling apart, where those office holders do not take responsibility to give care, love and succour to the nation, where we do not believe that the future will be better than we had it in the past, we need to change and fix that, and at the centre it is not holding. And if the centre is not holding, then we could all

go into disarray. The good news is that for every question and every difficulty there is an answer, but you have to clear your heart and your spirit so that the answers would come to you that will uplift all of us and not just for petty political efforts. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Adrian Leonce (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Laventille East.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Laventille East/Morvant, sorry.

Mr. A. Leonce: That is all right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today with giving thanks, thanks to be able to share in this honourable House a contribution representing Laventille East/Morvant, representing young Trinidad and Tobago. One thing that I feel we are missing in our deliberation in the budget, and it was written in bold, the second to last statement by the hon. Finance Minister, that was, all hands on deck, all hands on deck, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And before I go further, I would like to congratulate the hon. Member, Miss—I nearly say her name—our planning Minister, our dear planning Minister [*Desk thumping*] and I would like to congratulate also our finance Minister [*Desk thumping*] because in this budget presentation everything suggests that not everything is okay. For some strange reason, I am getting a feeling that we are presenting an argument as though things were the way it was before. [*Desk thumping*]

If a family, a mother and a father and a child, has a usual income where the mother and father work, there are certain things that this family will enjoy. If for some reason, an unfortunate reason, the revenues of that family is reduced, the mother or the father is no longer employed, there must be adjustments. [*Desk thumping*] Something is missing with that communication. There must be adjustments.

I listened to all the contributions of the Members so far, both on this side and the other side. Some of the contributions on the other side, I listened and there were some pertinent points, I must say. However, there is a general sense of disregard for the reality and facts. [*Desk thumping*]

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all hands on deck. Forty-one of us are here in this House representing different areas of Trinidad and Tobago. That should mean something to each and every individual in this House. Representation for the people that voted for you should mean something in this House, and it is a serious, serious

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job. It is not a job to come and mislead the House or try to slander someone's name. It is a job where the people that voted for you expect that there is proper representation for them. Laventille East/Morvant hands are on deck. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to the Member for St. Augustine and he said he is waiting for the benefits that we on this side enjoy. It seems as though only we on this side enjoy. For me the things that I enjoy, the deliveries that I am able to give to the constituents of Laventille East/Morvant, most of it comes from external input, people that really want to help, and this is real.

I would like to call a few names, if you permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We in Laventille East/Morvant understand the importance of organization, bringing people together for the same common objective. I have to applaud my village council presidents, Mr. Khalid Rahaman, Mr. Jessie Daniel, Mr. Glendon Watley, Akeel Wharf and Edoo David. The village council is playing a critical role in bringing organization within the constituency. I also have to acknowledge my councillors: Jody Johnson, Frans Lamkin, Adanna Griffith Gordon, Kwesi Antoine and Sherwin Jones. They too play an integral part in bringing organization in the constituency.

All community-based organizations, all faith-based organizations, all non-governmental organizations, guess what we understand? All hands on deck. All hands on deck is something that we should all sit and think about before the next contribution. Let us understand that we are doing this thing together, not for Laventille East/Morvant or for Caroni Central, but for the entire Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for St. Augustine left. I was going to explain to him how we get certain things done, without sitting and waiting. There are a number of state agencies, private agencies and just citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that you can bring together to achieve one common objective. So that there is not a single burden on one state agency. For example, food cards.

Food cards became a problem when there was a transition in the process. Laventille East/Morvant did not throw their hands up in the air and cry; we started to bring people together. People started to buy groceries. FEEL donated peas and different items and we started to make hampers and distribute, and the value of those hampers far exceeded what that food card would have given. All hands on deck.

Identifying problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and creating solutions is what the people are looking for in their representatives. They are looking for someone that

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can bring a solution to them, that they are experiencing problems. The young children are listening to us. They are seeing how we communicate with each other, and they are building their own interpretation of what politicians are. It is a very serious thing because children are the future of this nation, and we have to stand here and set an example in the way we carry ourselves, in the way we communicate amongst ourselves and more than ever in the leadership as Members of Parliament.

I will give some examples of some collaborations that I have initiated over the past year. I met with the Export Centre Company—and Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, I see that they got an increase, so I will visit them even more. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, an NGO, CSP and Hearts and Minds, we all met in the same room. I requested everyone to come and spare us a half an hour. And we sat and discussed a problem.

The problem was persons within the constituency being employable or being able to develop their level of employability. So we were able to come up with running some programmes for woodworking, some programmes for making clothes and some programmes for food. In these programmes the persons participating will develop the skill and certified skill for building furniture. They would develop certified skill for clothing, sewing clothes and for culinary. Guess what? There is a problem also that this activity can solve. There is a lack of furniture in some schools. Guess who will be building those furniture? There are children without money to buy uniforms. Guess who would sewing those clothes?

Mr. Karim: The children?

Mr. A. Leonce: I will come to that. I will tell you what another initiative is. There are students when they leave school—we care for the children—breakfast and lunch in school. Sometimes when they come home, they do not have food to eat, so that same programme will distribute food in homework centres. Well, we do not have homework centres, we have created spaces where persons would have given their homes, community spaces to create homework centres. We are not waiting for the Government to build a homework centre; we are doing what we can. All hands on deck, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are seeing what the problems are and we are solving them with collaboration. There is not complete funding from the Government. There are some NGOs that come together and they are sponsoring some of the materials. So that is a solution.

Last year around this time, myself and the Member for Laventille West did something in the Laventille Technology Centre, and it was coined “Maximize

your Potential”. Taking each and every individual from where they are, at whatever level you are, skilled, unskilled, you have O levels, you do not have O levels, you have a first degree, you want to move forward or you have a skill but you are not certified. Taking you from wherever you are and guiding you as to how to maximize your potential.

Not one agency alone might have the resources to facilitate all the persons. So we had a collaborative effort with a number of different agencies. From that, 734 students have enrolled in different programmes and are now on their way to maximizing their potential. That journey is not handed and left alone; that journey is a follow-through. We have taken the information on each and every one and we are following up to ensure and encourage young people to maximize their potential. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all hands on deck.

Transforming spaces—but before I go into transforming spaces, the Member for Chaguanas East said “the children”, and there is an initiative that I started with an NGO called “Sustain T&T”, they are getting funding from, I think, the UNDP. What we started, and we are going to do, is bring back what we would call “kitchen gardens” in our homes. When I was growing up we did not have fancy paved yards and stuff.

Dr. Moonilal: We still do not have fancy paved yards.

Mr. A. Leonce: That is true, we still do not have fancy paved yards. Everyone had some seasoning, some tomatoes, they had food in their yards. Every one of us growing up could tell a story about going in the backyard and cooking or doing something that would essentially give you a meal. What we are trying to do is not just bring that culture of understanding how food is, because guess what? There is a new phrase or term they call “organic food” and it is a most expensive thing right now, but that is exactly what we had in our backyards. The project that we are initiating is bringing this back through the primary schools. Giving the children of the schools, of the community, projects, funding them so that they can encourage their parents, their neighbours in growing organic food within the surroundings of their homes.

Out of this there are some high-rise apartments in my area. We have also gotten some welders, some skilled guys in the area to do some grow boxes. So this is something that is already happening, and we are going to maximize it in that everyone can start developing or redeveloping the culture that we had and we enjoyed while we were growing up. [*Desk thumping*]

The other problem that we have identified in our community is the look. There

are certain places in our community—I will be quite honest with you—I do not like how they look. They are gloomy, dreary and depressing. We made a decision that we are going to transform the spaces of our community, creating an environment that is uplifting, where you can feel proud of.

2.35 p.m.

And the hands that we have on deck are businessmen within the community that own heavy equipment. The hands that we have on deck are people that just have a passion for planting. The hands that we have on deck are also some state agencies: the East Port of Spain Development Company, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, and T&TEC. I already made a request of two spaces, already to be lit. [*Crosstalk*] And wherever we get help, wherever we get help we will take it. We will embrace it. Where we do not get help, we would improvise, but at the end of the day the spaces that we made a decision to change will be changed. We as a community [*Desk thumping*] would continually make transformation.

I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, growing up and on a Saturday we would get up on a Saturday and we will take our cutlasses and we would go out to the front and we will weed and we will cut the grass and cut the bush. There was no CEPEP. There was no agency to clean the drains or to cut the bush, we did it ourselves. And if we have to transform the spaces—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: A brushing cutlass and a crook stick.

Mr. A. Leonce:—that is correct. If we have to transform the spaces, we have to first take pride. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. I am sure your turn will come before the evening is out.

Dr. Moonilal: That was not meant for your ears.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But still I heard it. I am paying attention.

Mr. A. Leonce: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence, but what just happened there reminds me of an old African proverb “lions do not turn to small dogs barking”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

As I continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have also made a synergy and I must compliment Digicel Foundation. They have been supportive in some of my accomplishments in delivering to the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant. Currently, we are working on a project, a play park project and we have that foundation, the URP, the corporation and T&TEC and everyone is giving some portion of funding to achieve this grand output. And that space, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, is going to be a beautiful space, all hands on deck.

There is also a company called Laing Group from south. I am not sure which one of the constituencies it is from. [*Crosstalk*] That is yours? He is also assisting me in refurbishment of some old play park equipment. That same play park equipment would be moved to a space that never had a recreational facility.

So all of what I am saying is basically and—it is basically stimulated from the Member for St. Augustine when he said, he is waiting. Laventille East/Morvant is not waiting. Now, do not get me wrong. I understand that there are certain things that the Government needs to do and there are certain deliveries that the people are expecting and waiting for. However, all hands on deck has to be set in the minds of Trinidad and Tobago, the constituents, I too have an important role to play, and we in this House must set that example because I too have an important role to play.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, T&TEC, again, the corporation have also formed a synergy because sport is a critical area in the development, in the social development in my community. And what we are embarking on is transformation of all sporting areas. And it is not just lighting the fields or repairing the fields or building a pavilion, it is more than just that. It is actually creating a culture. It is creating a sense of experience. We are also bringing in the businesses to sponsor when we have games and events, so that they can display their businesses around the field as you see it on other fields, encouraging and stimulating economic activity within the constituency and encouraging the businessmen within the community to also put their hands on deck and give back to the community. [*Desk thumping*]

And I have been hearing so much about the school repair programme that the Prime Minister has launched. Now, this is an initiative that I applaud and this is an initiative that I do not think is a secret or that it is local to Laventille alone. It is a pilot initiative—right?—creating and changing the issues, the environment of the schools in an effort to address some of the problems that we have socially and economically. And this is a pilot project that I think all 41 Members of this House should support because we all know where the issues are. And Member for Chaguanas East, I heard you speak about Enterprise and some of the solutions that we are creating within my constituency will also work in your constituency. So I think what we should do is basically come together and make sure that that project succeeds. [*Desk thumping*]

I have initiated meetings with the TTUTA representatives, members from the

Ministry of Education, members of the church. There is a church organization called Operation Salvation, where it is a group of churches that come together to do assistance work whether it be social or physical help within the community. So they are on board, the churches are on board and the community village councils are on board, the councillors are on board. And what we are going to do after this budget debate is up, we are going to meet together and we are going to strategize and pick out wherever we feel there are some deficiencies and strengthen it to ensure success with the project. And then that would refine the model to carry, to be replicated in other communities elsewhere.

The CSP and the Hearts and Minds Programme have also come to our assistance with addressing some of the issues where children are unable to get to school. There are some challenges in terms of transportation in getting to school and getting from school back to home. CSP has procured a bus. Hearts and Minds, which you know is a programme from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, they are assisting us in eliminating that problem.

All the principals of our primary schools, secondary schools, ECCE schools, we are forming a group where we can meet and discuss some of the issues and filing the reports to the Minister of Education and seeing how best we can solve some of the issues. Some of the issues that we physically would not be able to address within the fiscal year, we can see how best we can manipulate and make some small changes and prioritize to make sure we all see some benefit. And what that does, it brings inclusion. It allows every person to know that they are part of the solution and they are important in making decisions and they are also important in prioritizing.

So it is no longer about, I am upset because this did not happen in my school. It is understanding that this did not happen in my school because there is a greater need in their school, and based on the resources that we have, this is the process. All hands on deck, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, we all have different personalities and characters. I stand here as the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant. I also stand here as a man; I stand here as a husband; I stand here as a teacher; I stand here as an engineer; I stand here as a businessman. Correct. I stand here as a barber. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah. A barber.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a barber there was also an initiative that we created before school opened which was teaming up with a professional barbering school—just now—Mr. Donald Mclean. Yeah? He owns the school. He teamed up with me. Yes. He teamed up with me and what we were able to do was cut the

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children of Laventille East's hair and prepare them for school, so that when they go to school they "look sharp". [*Desk thumping*]

It also gave the opportunity for the young ones to experience what we grew up in. How we knew cutting hair as young children was always going by someone, you know, it was never a fancy shop, you know. It was very personable and the children were able to have that experience and it is something that we are going to continue doing.

2.50 p.m.

And I must applaud Mr. Donald Mc Clean because he has also spoken about giving scholarships for persons who would like to learn to cut hair. And I am glad the Member for Oropouche East indicated that I am a businessman, because at the age of 12 I started earning my own money cutting hair for \$5, walking around with my tools, and earning my own money. [*Desk thumping*] And I would go further to say that the house that I live in right now was purchased from barbering. [*Desk thumping*] And having that spirit with me, of business and understanding business, I registered a company in 2005. That company is called Leonce's Innovations Company Limited.

Dr. Moonilal: I have a record of it.

Mr. A. Leonce: I know you do have a record of it, and I will tell you something, I am very proud of that company [*Desk thumping*] because that company was able to employ the companies of—

Mr. Indarsingh: You did well under HDC.

Mr. A. Leonce: I did well under the Member for Oropouche East when he was Minister of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please address the Chair. Still address the Chair.

Mr. A. Leonce: Yes, I am getting excited, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Laughter*] It is this excitement. I am listening to my comments and I keep forgetting the barks. I am sorry. [*Laughter*]

I remember my little sister whilst she was growing up—I hope she does not feel anyway when I say this—I remember changing her diapers and taking care of her. Not pampers, eh. Diapers.

Hon. Member: The real thing.

Mr. A. Leonce: Yes, and now that little sister who now has a Masters and stuff is now holding employment in that same company Leonce Innovations, and I

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am very proud that the company is used to employ the youths of the area, and not just my area, but throughout the whole of East Port of Spain. We have been doing this for the last 11 years, and I have done work in the HDC under Noel Garcia, under Jearlean John, and I am still doing work to this day. [*Desk thumping*] I am very proud of that.

Hon. Member: You are the talent one?

Mr. A. Leonce: Talented. Now, there is also another part of me besides a barber and a businessman. The part of me that really—it becomes such a passion for the last area that the Minister of Finance addressed, and it was the incentive for innovation.

Now, let me tell you why that is a passion for me. I have always liked being innovative. The name of my company is Innovation. I have always liked being innovative and I am a student of innovation. I am an ambassador of innovation, and let me tell you this. That initiative presented by the Minister of Finance, once we all take it very seriously, all 41 of us, we can transform what we know as Trinidad and Tobago and we can really encourage diversification within this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

We can develop a start-up ecosystem where we have our own Silicon Valley. And I am saying this and I am being very serious. I remember being in a group of young professionals and we were choosing different projects, and my eye caught upon a particular project, and all of my colleagues said “are you crazy, there is no way you can achieve that, it is too difficult”. And I do not know if it is because of where I grew up or the beautiful nation in my blood, but I took that challenge. And I took that challenge, and let me tell you the name of the project. The project was “Creating a Wheeled Mobile Robot for Planetary Explorations”, and in my submission I was able to present a wheeled mobile robot for planetary explorations. [*Desk thumping*]

That robot we can punch in coordinates and we can have it at anywhere in the building, it can climb steps, it will identify objects, and a young man from Laventille/Morvant, small-dot Trinidad and Tobago, created that.

Dr. Francis: That robot sounding like the Member for Couva South.

Hon. Member: You patent it?

Mr. A. Leonce: No, it was owned by the university. But what that did for me is open up my eyes that we must listen to the young people of this nation with their ideas and guide them as to how they can achieve it. And that initiative once we use it wisely can be a seed that can encourage that kind of growth. [*Desk*

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thumping]

Dr. Tewarie: What was your idea on the vision programme that we ran for four years?

Mr. A. Leonce: Yes, when the Member for Caroni Central had his programme and he launched it in the Hyatt I attended that. That was before I got into this. Because this is my passion, and our company was an attendee at that function.

Just before I entered into this realm I made a proposal to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to create a portable weapons detection device using ultrasonic waves. Well, now I am here. [*Laughter*] But, the point I am raising is that with this initiative I think each and every one of us can charge our young persons within our community and our constituencies to take charge of that and challenge the Government in being one of the five to get funding to produce and promote innovation in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And this is made possible with mentorship. We cannot just sit down and expect it to happen. There are some energetic young persons that will listen to it and be inspired, and would do. But sometimes persons need a little guidance, a little encouragement. So, let us challenge our young persons, let us all challenge our young persons in developing and coming up with ideas that can diversify this economy and bring us to a state where when we read a budget it is not hinged upon the price of oil or gas, but is hinged upon an initiative that you encouraged, and there is some diversification that you had a part to play with. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to the rest of the contributions of this House, and I look forward to us sitting together and making Trinidad understand—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, seeing that you have paused, your 45 minutes have expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

Mr. A. Leonce: Yes. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Leonce: I was just reminded by my colleague here that Laventille East/Morvant, the young children of Laventille East/Morvant would soon be able to enjoy jumping in water, swimming and training in their own pool. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Francis: Tomorrow.

Mr. A. Leonce: So, tomorrow morning—where is the Leader of the House?—if I come a bit late is because we will be exciting them.

Now, with the mentorship, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is also other areas that we have to develop. There is culture. We have two pan groups within the community; we have the Ebonites and we have B Minor, and we are going to come together to develop this so that the young children within the area can have a place close by where they can learn and develop one of the very initiatives that came out of our community. We also have to dream. We have to dream a bit to have a better vision, and within dreaming comes ideas, and within these ideas come objectives, and within these objectives comes task. And by accomplishing each and every one of these tasks, we go back up the line until our dream is realized.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the time to make this contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I join this, my 16th budget debate in the national Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join this debate with a heavy heart as our nation faces economic uncertainty, social tensions and political strain within the highest institutions of our State. Admittedly, this is not the first occasion in our history when we have faced such challenges as a nation. However, I do believe it is first time we have confronted such turbulence, but amid a growing sense of hopelessness in the Government of the day which appears rudderless, clueless, hapless, hopeless, and just less of a Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, their lack of vision, lack of plan, lack of programme, and lack of policy focus means that the prevailing sentiment is everybody fend for themselves. In all fairness when former Prime Ministers like ANR Robinson, the first Patrick Manning administration, Mr. Basdeo Panday, the Member for Siparia—when former Prime Ministers faced similar economic climates abroad and home that impacted on the economy, at least it was felt that we had the human resources and the competence in government to sustain the lifestyles of Trinidad and Tobago, to sustain economic development, and to endure, because persons had hope in their Government and the competence of their Government.

3.05 p.m.

Today, this Rowley administration has neither rhyme nor reason. [*Desk thumping*] For one year, they gallery, they lime, they play themselves, as we would say, and have nothing to show for it. They assess their performance by the conduct of the Opposition. Remarkably, they blame us for their failure to deliver and perform, one year after. Their shortcomings were vividly exposed by the Leader of the Opposition who dissected the budget with a surgical precision,

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[*Desk thumping*] and left this country firmly with the view that the Appropriation (Financial Year, 2017) Bill, 2016 would help no one and would not help to develop Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, this budget is a betrayal of the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after hearing the Member for Siparia, there are many of us who felt we should have declared the innings. [*Desk thumping*] Even in a 20/20 match. It was enough runs on the board. The Member for Moruga/Tableland followed; all I would say, it was unfair to ask him to follow. [*Laughter*] It was terribly unfair for his Leader of Government Business to do him that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish, [*Crosstalk*] I will get to you later. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will address a few issues raised by my colleagues on the other side before I get into my contribution dealing with security, housing, land and governance. Yesterday we heard from the, until then, silent Minister of Health. And the Minister of Health in his contribution took umbrage with the former administration and criticized the former administration for what he believed was sidestepping the Minister of Health, the Member for Barataria/San Juan by appointing a health committee. And he was very clear in calling all the names of the members of this committee who sidestepped the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

I want to ask him if he has the same problem in his current administration where there is a tourism committee that is not led by the Minister of Tourism. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, recently, when Members of the Government met with Sandals in Tobago, it was the Minister of everything who spoke, who met, who accounted, not the Minister of Tourism. It was the Minister of everything who spoke to the press and it was not the Minister of Tourism.

So the Member for St. Joseph should tell us if he also have a problem with that tourism committee as he does with the health committee. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for St. Joseph, again, berated Members of the Opposition, berated Members of the Opposition—we paid money when we were in Government, now we are in Opposition, we are not paying in the Children's Life Fund—forgetting that as the Member for St. Joseph, he paid money neither in Opposition nor in Government; he just paid nothing.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to recall and alert the Member that Cabinet Minute No. 1 of 2010, under the Partnership administration, established the Children's Life Fund and further enunciated policy where the Prime Minister would pay 10 per cent of her salary and the Ministers of Government paid 5 per cent. Now, unless this Government rescinded that decision, that is Cabinet policy.

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So which means in one year they have violated the policy of Cabinet by not paying. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to tell you, pay up your arrears to the Children's Life Fund. Pay up your arrears, otherwise rescind the Cabinet decision because you have just breached Cabinet policy. But they will not put a cent in the Children's Life Fund, but ask us, who making 1/10 of their salary, to continue funding the Children's Life Fund. That is the hypocrisy we talk about today. That is the hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: The deception.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—the deception. The Minister of Health, following the Minister of Finance, spoke about how private institutions do not accommodate the public and when you go as a member of the public to private institutions they turn you back with contempt and so on. You all remember that?

Hon. Members: Yes, yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But then they are supporting the privatization of the Couva Children's Hospital. So you condemn the private sector but you want to privatize the Couva Children's Hospital. That is the hypocrisy.

I made a prediction before the last general election, the Member for Caroni Central would remember well. I said that if it is, God forbid, that the PNM gets into power, that Couva Children's Hospital would have caraille vine running on it, would have snake inside that building before the children of Trinidad and Tobago could be admitted as patients. [*Desk thumping*] And we will wait to see the caraille vine run in the Couva Children's Hospital. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Like how all yuh leave the Brian Lara Stadium.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will come to the Brian Lara later. My friend, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, there is nothing much for me, but I really do admire your catch lines, “all hands on deck. Children are our future”. And I was, of course, taken aback with your mobile robot for planetary exploration. I mean, “I cyah beat that”, so I will leave that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of the day that affects persons, and let me say that today, this society is unrecognizable from the society we left in September 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Unrecognizable. Today we have gone back to the pre-2010 frightening sense of insecurity, the joblessness, the hopelessness, and the social tensions. I appeal to my colleague, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, you are still in charge of T&TEC as of now. Please, generate a call and let T&TEC

put one extra hour for the people doing the Ramleela in Pierre Road, [*Desk thumping*] Caroni Central, one hour. Ramleela is a tourist attraction. Hundreds of people come to the villages throughout—thousands to visit. It is a street theatre at its best. It was proclaimed, I think it was a famous writer, Derek Walcott. Derek Walcott wrote about Ramleela, the impact on the village, the impact on the small economy. Do you know at Ramleela celebrations in the night you attract the food vendors, the micro-enterprise business man and woman, families come out for clean enjoyment and you will tell me a Government in 2016 cannot put on the electricity for one hour more for 10 days.

The Hindu people will tell you, Lord Rama was in the forest for 14 years. Surely you could light a ground for 10 days. [*Desk thumping*] Come on. [*Crosstalk*] So the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara use your Ministerial office before it is removed and talk to T&TEC, please. [*Crosstalk*] Override the regional corporation. Call T&TEC and tell them this is an important national event, a festival and one hour more. Do that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened with great attention to the Member for Point Fortin. The Member for Point Fortin spoke last week on national security, as he is wont to do. It is a Member for Point Fortin told us about what they intend to do to fight crime. When he was speaking there was a shootout at a barbershop. Not the barbershop of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. But there was a shootout at a barbershop where a person died I think today or yesterday. Hassan Ali. We extend condolences to his family because Mr. Ali would have gone for a haircut, for a trim. He went for a trim and ended up dead, in a barbershop. This was during the presentation of the Minister of National Security to the Parliament. That is the country we live in today.

Today they pick up bodies as if it is carcasses of dogs around the country, floating here. Somebody killed himself—you open an oil tank, you cannot find oil, you find a dead body. That is Trinidad and Tobago today. Four hundred and ninety-seven, I believe, murders took place since they came into office. And the Attorney General, I will come to that Attorney General momentarily. The new style Attorney General stood yesterday and you would never believe that since he took his oath to now, 497 people have been murdered in this country.

The Minister of Finance waited two hours before he mentioned crime in his budget. Where in the world you would ever see that, number one problem facing the country, crime. Two hours into a national budget we heard about crime. That is a shame. That is a shame. What is the meaning of statistics and arithmetic, data and revenue and expenditure, if 500 people died? What is the meaning of that?

And this is the Minister of National Security speaking last week telling us about what we did before. And you know what struck me, when the Minister of Finance rose here, last Friday, he started at 1.33 p.m. I will never forget that, 1.33 p.m.

At 1.34 p.m. he blamed the former Government. It took him 60 seconds. Why so long, I do not know, to blame the last Government. And that has been the description of the speakers opposite. The country is fed up. Tell us what you are doing. Do not tell us what the Partnership had done. [*Desk thumping*] That would work for a few months, it cannot work now. Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are distracting the national community from the serious problem of crime and health.

The Minister of Health spoke. In San Fernando, I have a constituent who went last night around nine o'clock, this is 3.16 p.m., he is still on a chair. I have a picture, he is still on a chair sitting down in that hospital waiting for a bed. Do you know constituents of mine have to take their blankets to the hospital? Loved ones have to take water. Look where we reach again, so quick in one year. And we would not get that feeling when the Minister speaks. Minister, I know you are passionate about yourself when people criticize you, but you must be passionate about health, not yourself.

A few months ago the Minister of Health, speaking about the shortage of drugs for cancer patients and so on, he said, they have to wait as if it is a toothache you are waiting on. You have to have the empathy if you are in Government and the Minister of National Security with the greatest of respect does not show that empathy. A kidnap victim in my constituency, I doubt by now if the Minister of National Security has reached out to the family. I am almost certain he never visited, but I doubt whether they reached out to assure a family, a loved one has gone missing, I think for two weeks now.

Hon. Member: Three weeks.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Three weeks, no trace.

Hon. Member: He said "do not blame me".

Dr. R. Moonilal: He said do not blame me. Do not blame me. This is what we get from them. But the Attorney General, who I will now come to, spoke yesterday in the House, told us that every time they speak they "buff up" somebody. There is a tendency in the Government, from the Prime Minister come down. They buff up the public servant, bouff up the people at Commissioner of State Lands office, a next one buff up the Statutory Authority, a next one buff up

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the public officer somewhere else. The Minister of Health buff up the RHA. Well, the police officers are always to blame now for everything.

The Attorney General and the second attorney general, the Young and the Restless, anytime they speak now they threaten, they come to Parliament one year now talking about ghost workers, you did not hear anything about that for one year, eh.

Now, when they talk asset forfeiture, we going after, we chasing the money, we will be following the money. Who you following the money, by yourself? You are following it with laws passed here. You have the majority to pass anything? No. We have to work together, but they will stand up—they come to the Parliament every week and pelt stones. And every time they pelt stones they run.

You know they remind me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we were in UWI and let me go quickly. We were in UWI, we stayed at Rapsey Street, and we had a colleague there. He would go outside of the house and pelt one stone and run back inside. When the stone crash on the galvanize he will come and say, who do that? That is how they are. They pelt stones and when you look to reply they run. And when they accuse us in the Parliament, they cannot go on a platform and say that, they cannot. They know what they are doing.

So they speak about terrorism. I want to get to terrorism. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am the first person, well I am one of them who came to the Parliament and raised this issue of the ISIS and terrorism. I actually came into the Parliament with pictures in hand warning the Government that the biggest single threat we face, this generation would face is from ISIS, is from terrorism and those involved.

3.20 p.m.

I asked the Government to consider policy initiatives and share with the Opposition to work together. Nothing has happened. The Prime Minister announced in our crime talks with the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader, that they were changing the chairman of the National Security subcommittee. I do not know if that happened yet. I do not know. Nothing has happened but they speak about terrorism, financing terrorism and tracing the money and so on.

Yesterday, the Attorney General spoke about six terrorists identified and, you know, “we are working to deal with them. We have deemed six persons, I believe.” Today, I want to ask him, you know, to tell us a little more about these terrorist threats, and particularly children involved. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I came some time ago—and I am just looking through my own file here that I had, and I came here with about 113 names and pictures of adults and children

involved in terrorist training. The Attorney General said nothing; did nothing.

When I warned a few months ago of children involved—and I can see it in my hand now. When you have children with their date of birth in 2005, they are off to Syria and these war-torn areas for training. Another child with a date of birth in 2002; another one with a date of birth in '96. These are young people—113 young people involved and the Government says nothing. The Government does nothing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is worse is that we have also received other information. Before I get to that I wanted to also indicate—

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

Madam Speaker, I wanted to indicate that the Attorney General, whose responsibility it is to fight crime has almost abdicated that responsibility. The Ministry of the Attorney General today is a Ministry where the confidence level is so low by the national community. [*Desk thumping*] They promised us a legislative agenda. In 12 months they brought four pieces of legislation which they could not proclaim to date. I mean, the saddest part of this operation was when the Attorney General took his dear time for an interpretation of “exceptional circumstances”, and a child subsequently died, waiting.

The Attorney General’s office promised us whistleblowing legislation and transparency and so on, only to be told by the Chief Parliamentary Counsel that that law would be unconstitutional. The Ministry of the Attorney General brought to us, Order for the Commissioner of Police appointment. We warned in the Parliament, the Government, that this was unconstitutional. You know what happened? They continued. Might is right. They pass. It was left to the Supreme Court to strike it down and indicate that the Leader of the Opposition was correct. [*Desk thumping*]

The Bail Bills, frightening the population about that. And one thing after another. But, Madam Speaker, it was shocking to me to receive photographs of young children in this country with weapons—high-powered weapons, as I said before—training somewhere. I am told the weapon is UMP 9 mm calibre. What is frightening is the children—and I have the pictures here—using these weapons, and these weapons have been weapons that have been issued—are common to the Defence Force of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Indarsingh: ACP.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Children with weapons. Madam Speaker, what is even more frightening—and I say this with trepidation—is that I am told that these children bear a striking resemblance to the children of a senior Cabinet Minister.

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Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Indarsingh: Toco/Sangre Grande.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A senior Cabinet Minister—and I am asking that the children bearing these arms—because I want to come back to Laventille East/Morvant. He said it is the children that we are here to protect.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Standing Order?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Standing Order 48(6) please, imputing improper motives regarding children of Cabinet Ministers.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I would not allow that. It is more than an innuendo. It is a really pointed reference and therefore—you know, if you have something, you then bring it in a particular way. So I would not allow that. I would just ask you to withdraw it. With your experience—I think your 16 years' experience—you have a way that you can put—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your guidance. Madam Speaker, I would not say Cabinet Ministers then, I would say they are children with a striking resemblance to senior Government officials—[*Desk thumping*] and I would today—I would now ask the Attorney General of this country—I will pass this to him now and ask the Attorney General if he recognizes the children in this picture.

Madam Speaker—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Toting gun.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They are children toting guns. I will ask the Attorney General whether he recognizes these children, because, you see, the Attorney General speaks about chasing the money. Today, I am asking him, what about chasing the guns? [*Desk thumping*] Why are children in this country with UMP 9 mm calibre machine guns posing for pictures? I am also informed, Madam Speaker, and I stand corrected, that these children posed with these pictures in and around October 2015 in the western part of Trinidad and Tobago, and these are weapons that belong to the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force that children were playing with, brandishing and taking pictures.

Hon. Member: Defence Force?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Because they were “gallerying”. And I ask the Attorney General to cast his eyes on these pictures. [*Desk thumping*] I understand, Madam Speaker, these photographs which came to me are now on a Facebook page aptly

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named “Kick out the PNM”.

Mr. Indarsingh: What?

Dr. R. Moonilal: So you can see it yourself.

Mr. Indarsingh: The Chief of Defence Staff—Toco/Sangre Grande—

Dr. R. Moonilal: And I call upon the Defence Force now—

Mr. Indarsingh:—you know anything about that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Defence Force—because quite recently the Prime Minister made a statement at the Prime Minister’s office—press conference—where he raised concerns about police officers—Special Branch officers, who he claimed receiving “house” because they were investigating matters of the former administration. The Prime Minister raised that issue.

Today, I want to ask the Defence Force if they are aware that children of high Government officials have been playing with machine guns—toting guns. It is wrong to tell the children of Laventille, Beetham, Enterprise, Penal, Debe, Barrackpore, Chaguanas, to tell the children that you should not take up guns, but then we have our own children taking up guns. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: The Chief of Defence Staff must clear the air.

Madam Speaker: The “children of senior Government officials bearing guns”, or “children bearing the resemblance”.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Children bearing resemblance—

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—to senior Government officials’ children. So we are very clear on that.

Madam Speaker, I brought this to the attention of the House because if what I am saying is correct, it speaks to recklessness, it speaks to the breach of the criminal law—[*Desk thumping*], it speaks to an abuse of office, it speaks to an unfitness to hold public office, [*Desk thumping*] and if anyone is deemed to be responsible for these children, they ought to demit public office today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: Resign now.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—I intend to send these photographs as well to the hon.

Prime Minister—

Hon. Member: Yes, man. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—because I want to indicate, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: Repeat the website.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The website, Madam Speaker, is a Facebook.com: “Kick out the PNM”—the website.

Hon. Member: You will remember that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You will remember that, I think, easily.

Mr. Indarsingh: Easy to remember.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And these pictures are posted there and I ask the Attorney General to look at that and tell us if he can recognize those in the photograph.

I want to move from this now to a matter involving housing. When we demitted office, we demitted office amid, what I call the golden age of housing. We were giving 100 homes per week. We have had two Ministers of Housing since then—one year. We have had two Ministers of Housing. We have had the appointment of a new man on the job at the HDC. We have had the appointment of several persons at the HDC, but we also had the firing of nine senior managers at the HDC.

Madam Speaker, I will not spend all my time reciting achievements, and so on. You can put on a sunglasses and drive around the country, you will see houses in Union Hall, you will see houses in Chaguanas, [*Desk thumping*] Princes Town. We repaired thousands of houses left by the Member for Diego Martin West—thousands of houses we repaired.

The Member for Diego Martin West, speaking at a forum, I think a couple days ago—constituency forum—spoke about what?—Vieux Fort in St. James. He was happy. Vieux Fort? That they were what? Going to continue it and finish it. The Member for San Fernando East—poor fellow—may not know the history of that project. You know? You do not. That is a project that the Member for Diego Martin West started in 2006.

At that time they built without statutory approvals, without consultation with the community. Do you know when the HDC started to build that, a lady down there took the HDC to court, and said that they were blocking her view and blocking the light? [*Interruption*] When we won it? You did not win “nothing”. But when we won it—2014 the HDC won that matter. So you are now free to

complete the project.

But the Prime Minister talking as if the Partnership Government held it up. It was held up in court because you did not build consensus with the community, so people take you to court. [*Interruption*] I think the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West "feeling left out" so we will have to get to him soon.

So when I looked at the expenditure—

Mr. Singh: "Leave de fireman to me."

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, only somebody with water could deal with a fireman. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, when we demitted office, we had started that programme to deal with St. James, to deal with other sick projects in Endeavour, Chaguanas. The Prime Minister makes a comment about Victoria Keys. I do not know why he is talking about this. When we got in there, Victoria Keys' building had rooms where, if you had to put a bed inside, you had to wrap it around a post. They had small, little apartment rooms, like ghetto styling over there in Victoria Keys.

We had to redo, re-engineer, Victoria Keys, so much so that when the work started the Member for Diego Martin West, I understand, he was soliciting a penthouse at Victoria Keys. Yes, he wanted a Penthouse. I had no difficulty. I am sure he could afford it.

So, Madam Speaker, Victoria Keys is another sick project of the PNM that we inherited. But one of the biggest is not Las Alturas, although we all know of Las Alturas, it is Harmony Hall in Gasparillo. We have the big report here—"Report on the Structural Retrofitting..."—

Madam Speaker: Member, if you are going to display something, you should have sought leave before.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will describe what I am seeing. On the front page, "Report of the Structural Retrofitting at Harmony Hall." Madam Speaker, it speaks of the need for works on three buildings because of problems with foundation, ground floor, superstructure, design. The Minister of Housing will have access to this. And you know the award for this contract—I have it in my hand here—October 14, 2015, signed by one Noel Garcia.

Mr. Indarsingh: "Dat man again?"

Dr. R. Moonilal: The award for the contract, October 14, 2015 to Atlas

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Engineering, signed by Noel Garcia—2005, sorry; October 14, 2005.

Noel Garcia again strikes. That is a man with a “minus touch”. Anything he touches “fall dong.” [*Laughter and desk thumping*] He has a minus touch, not a Midas touch. We had to relocate. I have the list of people here. We had to relocate 23 residents of Harmony Hall because of the problems at that building. My friend from Diego Martin Central talks about the Brian Lara. I am waiting to see what game they playing there, eh, figuratively and literally.

3.35 p.m.

But I come to this HDC again. You see, when we left, they immediately fired summarily, nine managers at HDC. I have some emails in my hand here. Madam Speaker, it is frightening. It speaks about some serious matters here. It also involves the Chairman of the Housing Development Corporation, the Managing Director, and I ask the Minister to investigate, to look into this. How can, in a context where 160,000 people want housing—you yourself, Minister, I felt your frustration when you bolted out a steups I think in San Fernando. I felt his frustration. I did not do it in five years. I did not do that in five years, but I felt his frustration because he is also a new man on the job. I felt the frustration. I understand. One hundred and sixty thousand people every day attacking you for a house. Correct? All the people. But you have an assistant at the HDC to the Managing Director and the Chairman, and the assistant’s salary was increased from \$13,000 a month to \$18,000 a month to facilitate the purchase of an HDC house in Chaguanas. What is that? An assistant to the chairman? What you assisting the chairman doing?

Hon. Member: Who is the chairman?

Dr. R. Moonilal: The chairman is a new man on the job. What you assisting the Chairman doing? Madam Speaker, I am as concerned with this as you are. You see the salary was increased from \$13,000 to \$18,000, and to make matters worse, I am told that the HDC invested \$100,000 in refurbishing that house for the assistant. [*Desk thumping*] The assistant. When you look through an email record which I have in my hand, Madam Speaker, they speak about employees writing the Managing Director and so on, and matters which are most dirty for me to discuss. Matters about missing you and not missing you, and you do not take my calls, and I do not take your call, and you never have time for me and so on. This is not my business. I do not get into these kinds of things. And then you have—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Who approved the salary increase?

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Dr. R. Moonilal: The salary increase would have been approved by the board and the Chairman.

Mr. Indarsingh: And who approved the housing renovations?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, remember the rule with respect to silence please, and I want to remind you when you were on your legs, you had full command of this Chamber. Continue please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So it is very critical that we investigate the allocation policy, and this overfamiliarity around the Chairman and the Managing Director that permits those sort of things to happen. It cannot be fair that people begging and crying, “I want ah house”. And an assistant at the Chairman’s office gets a house by increasing salary from \$13,000 to \$18,000 and refurbished the house too. HDC does not refurbish house for people, let me tell you that. Courts does that, not the HDC. Standards and Courts and thing will do that, not the HDC. You go by them and you take a loan and buy furniture. HDC does not put furniture in house that way. Mr. Minister, I leave that for your attention.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on to another matter, a matter raised by the Member for Siparia in her contribution last week, a very, very serious matter. And that matter has to do with serious concerns about insider trading, serious concerns about the concentration of ownership of state assets in the hands of a few. You see when the Member for Siparia raised that matter, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, Minister of Finance, and the Attorney General, when 4.30 p.m. come they did not go for tea at all. They dived to the press gallery to answer the defence. They were concerned with answering the defence, they forget tea, their forget coffee.

They were concerned when the Opposition Leader raised a matter dealing with public participation into the purchase of public assets. Because the Minister of Finance spoke in his budget, page 89 and 90, about an ownership structure that could emerge when you sell shares to existing shareholders in what he called, but I am sure it is not an initial public offering. That is what he was talking about, selling the same people who have more. When we checked the record, it was a concentration of ownership [*Desk thumping*] and let me say it does not matter whether Mr. Brooks resigned before the election or after the election. It does not matter. He has been for many years an agent of a conglomerate. [*Desk thumping*] He is an agent for many years. It does not matter whether it is five or three,

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although we verily believe it is five shareholders. [*Desk thumping*] It matters the concentration of ownership in a few. And, Madam Speaker, for those persons opposite who would not have been here—they would not have been here. We were here—this is déjà vu. History is repeating itself repeatedly.

In 2007, we had a scandal called the Stone Street Capital scandal. This is where the then Chairman of HDC, worked with the then Chairman of UDeCOTT, Calder Hart, and they were purchasing Clico Investment Bank's 44 per cent of the Home Mortgage Bank [*Desk thumping*] and the Chairman of HDC approved \$100 million from HDC to go into the CIB so that he could purchase that as sole capital. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know today UDeCOTT lost \$100 million in Stone Street Capital, never to be recovered? One hundred million dollars gone when the Clico crashed. It was not CIB. So Stone Street Capital has returned in the form of this ANSA insidious, incestuous financial transaction, where they are going to concentrate ownership again in the hands of a few. And it reminded me—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Who headed Stone Street?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Stone Street was Andre Monteil, the former Treasurer I believe of the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] former Chairman of the HDC, and he worked with Calder Hart. Imagine Calder Hart and HDC put money into CIB for them to buy the CIB shares and sell it to a private company owned by Mr. Monteil and his wife.

The late Patrick Manning, your predecessor, Member for San Fernando East, came to the Parliament almost crying blood. Patrick Manning in a statement, Friday, August 17, 2007, spoke to this and he agreed. He said it is wrong. While the report says that no laws have been broken, it defies and is contrary to stated government policy on corporate governance. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Manning said that it defied his own policy and he was going to pass law. I advise you that we will amend the law to prevent this from happening—well we never amended nothing. But Mr. Manning condemned this. I ask you now: are you going to sit now and allow a few to go away with the asset base of the TTMGL? [*Desk thumping*]

The same thing is happening again under another PNM, and it reminded me of rent-seekers. I wanted to alert my colleagues, those of you who had an exposure to EC 101 and so on, that there is a theory of rent-seeking activity. It is part of public choice theory developed by an economist Gordon Tullock and Anne Krueger. I think she was the IMF Managing Director. They developed public choice theory that spoke of rent-seeking activity, and rent-seeking activity is not

renting One Alexandra Place. It is not that. It is different. It is, Madam Speaker, attempts to capture regulatory agencies to gain a cohesive monopoly that can result in advantages to rent-seekers in the market. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is. To capture state agencies, regulatory agencies to concentrate ownership without wealth creation, and the classic example people would know is really the feudal landlord who puts a chain across the river and charge every boatman to come in. He is not creating wealth, he is taking wealth. He is a rent-seeker. You are not creating.

So this description of the rent-seeking activity, today I warn Trinidad and Tobago that a traditional elite rent-seeking class has taken control of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and they are doing this to concentrate power and authority in themselves, a small clique. They are happy to work with you because you will allow this so that they will have control, they will earn wealth without generating economic activity. That is the hallmark. So it is not profit seeking, it is wealth seeking. Those persons know themselves, and the Minister has spelt out a policy to create another ultra-elite rent-seeking class. [*Desk thumping*] There are serious consequences for that in terms of the ability to outcompete genuine competitors in the marketplace. That is a consequence. There are public policy consequences of that activity, and today they stand here and they must answer guilty as charged to selling out the assets of Trinidad and Tobago to a small elite in this country, and that is the point that we raised. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Guilty.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They are guilty as charged, and when we were there we introduced an IPO. Well they wanted to slam us from pillar to post. It was for the ordinary citizens, it was for workers, public ownership. It was oversubscribed, three times I believe.

Mr. Indarsingh: Three.

Dr. R. Moonilal: By three. Today, they are going to this—they promised to do this and to concentrate ownership into a few.

I ask the Minister to turn around. Jump on your boat and turn around. Give us a policy U-turn on this matter and allow the public to participate fully [*Desk thumping*] in any second-round IPO. Surely you can do that before another boating excursion.

Madam Speaker, on the matter of housing, I wanted to raise a critical matter for us on this side as well on that. The housing matter is linked to land because I am moving from rent-seeking now, and rent-seeking involves the enormous real

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estate and it is a real estate driven activity. When we were in office we introduced the most novel policy initiatives in land governance of a generation. It was called the Land for the Landless Programme. It was to allow ordinary men and women, low wage workers to get a plot of land and build their house because we recognized that not everybody could afford an HDC house. Not everybody wanted an HDC housing unit. Land for the Landless. What did they do in one year? Absolutely nothing! Do you know there were 1,400 lots ready to distribute? Not one has been distributed by that administration in one year to persons. We did draw, a public draw, with an accounting firm and so on—an accounting firm that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West knows very well—an accounting firm supervised a public draw and that accounting firm—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, your 45 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes. You may proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, an accounting firm presided over that draw and the accounting firm supervised 400 successful applicants. Not one applicant has received a plot of land under this administration, and when you pass where the lands are, it is overrun in bush. Bush, reptiles, you name it. That is what they prefer, to have the land in bush than to give ordinary hardworking citizens a plot of land to call their own. [*Desk thumping*] Land for the Landless.

Madam Speaker, we left them—as the Member for Couva South said, when we left the Government Campus—you know I hear the Minister and others talking about the Government Campus. Every single contract there had to be reissued, work had to be reissued. The Government Campus was the subject of a commission of enquiry, the Uff Commission. A company called Sunway got a contract for \$300 million without tendering. Calder Hart said he did not know that was his Sarobi—that was his brother-in-law?

Mr. Indarsingh: Sarobi.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sarobi. That was his, Sarobi's, place, well, brother-in-law, I think. You could say that. He did not know that. We had to redo that.

We gave all the contracts out. Almost a billion dollars we had to raise to outfit that. Today all you have to do is buy eight feet of ribbon and go and cut, cut one after the other. Open it. They are boasting about police stations. We built eight and the three that are outstanding started under the Partnership administration. [*Desk thumping*] St. Joseph on the bus route, St. Joseph/Maracas and one more somewhere.

Mr. Mitchell: Besson Street.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Besson Street that will finish as well. You just buy ribbon and cut, cut, cut, cut as you go along. You do not have to build, but all I will tell you is take your time, you know you are known for speeding.

3.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker, so the Government Campus is there. We also made headway, the Minister of Planning, at that time, with Invaders Bay. Well, “they quarrel, they fight”, they used all types of bad language to describe Invaders Bay. Do you know that Invaders Bay, if properly developed, could add 10 per cent to our GDP? [*Desk thumping*] And they talk about diversification, 10 per cent to our GDP. I appeal to the Government, get your act together and deal with Invaders Bay. It is an asset ready to explore at a time when you claim you are cash-strapped. And you know, the Prime Minister all the time, he comes, every time he talks, “we doh have money, we doh have money”. But half a million dollars to go to fix the Prime Minister’s house in Tobago.

I was in charge of UDeCOTT, I toured that Prime Minister’s house in Tobago, and you are not doing nothing with \$500,000 there. That will be \$2 million when they are finished. That is \$2 million to fix that. When I went to the Cabinet and proposed that we fix the Prime Minister’s house in Tobago, they chased me out. They say we do not have money to waste on the Prime Minister’s house. Today, they are going to start with a half of a million dollars to fix that house in Tobago. That is a Sandals scandal again, fixing the Prime Minister’s house in Tobago. The Prime Minister has property in Tobago. When he goes for the one to two days, he could stay in his house, he could stay in Magdalena, Coco Reef, wherever. You are going to spend taxpayers’ money at a time like this fixing the Prime Minister’s house in Tobago. What is that?

Then, Madam Speaker, they say they do not have money. They brought Cazabon paintings so now the good people of Penal could go to see the Cazabon paintings because that is what we were waiting for all these years. You see— [*Interruption*] we can go to see the paintings. They waste and squander the money at a time when you do not have.

But the one that really shocked me is Saturday, October 8th. Now, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government puts an ad in the newspaper, three ads to highlight that they paved three roads, and one of the roads look like a bicycle path. I do not know if anybody saw this: \$45,000 in ads to show three roads and one looked like it is for walking. That is the Ministry of

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Rural Development and Local Government and you claim that you do not have money. You have nothing to show. You are picking up bicycle path to advertise. Madam Speaker, they are wasting money. The population today, I appeal to you, do not feel that the Government does not have money. They have and they have money to spend on their own priorities, their own priorities.

But as I end, they do not have money to spend on the real priorities facing the country which is the social safety net, which is the human capital formation. Even in crime, do you need \$119 million in spy equipment? To “macco” who? To watch who? You Ministers? That is what you want to see? \$119 million going for that? When you could have invested that in a social programme, you could invested that and expand GATE to the persons 50 years and over. You are asking workers who are older to retrain themselves for the modern workplace and you have just cut out the ability to fund their education. What policy contradiction is that? Who could think of that? Only the Member for Diego Martin North/East could come up with that.

Madam Speaker, in terms of policing and I want to end as I began with crime, we have to get our priorities right. This is a country where you cannot find a murderer, you cannot find a kidnapper, you cannot return a kidnapped victim, but if someone two kilometres over on the highway, police in the bush waiting to track them down. “They tracking down anybody.” In fact, if the kidnappers were speeding, they would be caught eh. Yeah, if the kidnappers were speeding, they would be caught. Well, if they have a drink, they would have been caught twice. You have to get your priorities right. You cannot prioritize policing by expending so much energy on one thing. It is fine, we have to stop accidents and so on but you need the resources, the technology, into fighting crime and you need to take the guns off the hands of children. [*Desk thumping*] You have to take the guns away from the hands of children.

And the Attorney General has not showed up in the House yet. He has not showed up because I was eagerly awaiting him to identify the children with the guns. He has not showed up. I am hoping that he could do so before the day is done, because I will send them the picture and it is wrong, it is wrong, it is wrong. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot build a society where we encourage children to take up guns. We cannot build a society where we encourage children to use 9 mm calibre weapons as if it is a game and toy. That is what we have reached to. We cannot build a society by transmitting those messages.

I want to make a point that I cannot make here at all. In fact, I do not know how to soften this point. There are Members opposite who inadvertently, because

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they cannot be doing it deliberately, by their utterances could be encouraging crime, they cannot be doing that deliberately. When you stand up and you call people “tief”, and this one “tief”, and that one “tief”, and anybody—the former Ministers and the former this, you know what you are telegraphing to the society and the criminal elite? It is okay to steal, to rob, because you see “dem fellas” in jacket and tie and business suit that is how they get there. That is the message you are sending, that the person in jacket and tie and business suit, they got there by stealing, so it is okay, you could take “piece ah de action” too. You are sending a wrong message.

If you have evidence of wrongdoing of anyone, take it to the right authority, take it to the Integrity Commission, write the Integrity Commission. I challenge you, write the Integrity Commission and say “who have land, who have house, who have shopping mall”. Man, write anybody you want, write the mall. *[Laughter]* But do not—*[Interruption]* Yeah, a former Minister to clear his name. It took him about three years. But do not raise allegations like this. You are telegraphing to that community of criminals that it is okay to steal and to rob and particularly rob people who look like you, eh, rob people who look like you. That is what you are telegraphing. So when you have information, do not come in Parliament and gallery yourself with it and thing, write the relevant authority. Call for investigations, you have information. But this tendency of the Government frontline speakers is promoting the criminal elements in Trinidad and Tobago. They are doing that.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I want to remind the national community that there will be no change in the next year. We do not expect anything to happen and certainly nothing good. The budget has spelt out no new initiatives, no fresh and novel policy considerations for this country. It is the “same ole, same ole”. It is tax, tax, tax and spend, spend, spend, and blame, blame, blame. It is for one year. There is no creativity. The Minister of Finance, who spent his earlier years in works and transport and so on, has brought a budget that really nothing will work and the online tax is a classic example. Today, more and more people are speaking about that tax.

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

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank you for the opportunity to join this debate at this time to address the citizens of this nation, through you, once again and I would like your

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leave on section 44(10) of the Standing Orders as I would need to refer to my notes at some time.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me start by thanking, first and foremost, God for keeping us through this year. I call him Mr. Large and in Charge Himself, King of all Kings, Ruler of all Things. If it were not for Him, we would not be. I want to thank the people of Tobago and more specifically, the people of my constituency, Tobago West, who, last year, came out and came out resoundingly and supported the People's National Movement.

Now, Madam Speaker, after five years of the most irresponsible, inconsiderate, wicked, worthless, despicable and deplorable governance that this nation have ever seen, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are cognizant that the road to recovery is unavoidably painstaking, lengthy and even a turbulent one. We know that there are no quick fixes, we know that there are no magic portions. But we are comforted—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, please. Members, I would like to remind you all of the Standing Order with respect to silence. Member for Princes Town, there is a particular way with respect to which one makes an interruption.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We know that the road to recovery would not be an easy one but we are thankful that finally we have sober and sane leadership to restore us back to a good place once again in this nation.

Our friends on other side came here with their crooked and cooked stories in the most self-righteous and hubristic manner hoping that the people of this country really have a nine-day memory and that they did not remember but I call it an insult to our intelligence. And all of sudden, Members of the side opposite are champions for Tobago. If the Member of Parliament for Siparia, Member of Parliament for Couva South and all the other Members of Parliament who stood here and spoke glowingly about Tobago have amnesia or anaemia or dementia, let it be known that the people of Tobago remain true to form and we stand behind this Government because we remember. [*Desk thumping*]

We, the people of Tobago, remember not getting a cent for URP from them when they were in Government. We remember not being able to send THA representatives to state boards under their leadership. We remember the then Prime Minister refusing to meet with the Chief Secretary. There are so many things that they hope we have forgotten, but, Madam Speaker, we remember. So

they could turn their stories all they want now that they are on a different side and a different seat and in different positions, but Madam Speaker, we the people of Tobago, we remember.

I sat in this House on the opposite side for five years in Opposition, sitting on the Opposition Bench, and I observed them when they were in Government. Madam Speaker, five years ago, when we observed them when they were in Government, they told us “that is why we are here and you are there”. It was not arrogance then but it is arrogance today. They told us that they do not need to consult the Opposition, all they needed were two or three votes from the Independent Bench. We remember those things. It was not arrogance then but it is arrogance now.

Madam Speaker, I remember Members of that side stating to the nation that we are in charge. It was not arrogance then but it is arrogance now because I reflect and I looked back on the *Hansard* and I could come up with numerous times when Members of that side said to the nation, “we are in charge”.

Hon. Member: I remember that.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Yes, I remember it and I could remember even, Madam Speaker, October 01, 2010, around 3.10 p.m., the Member who is in the Caroni East seat now, he said “we are in charge and we are going to do...”, you know. But it was not arrogance then but it is arrogance now.

Madam Speaker, I sat there and I remember. Where I am from, they say “Gopaul luck, not Seepaul luck”. Today I say Gopeesingh luck, not Cudjoe luck. [*Desk thumping*] As some may say, UNC luck, not PNM luck or some may say Trinidad luck, not Tobago luck, but I sat there and for all of them who want to play they do not remember, or people who write their stories for 30 pieces of silver, they want to play that they do not remember, I remember, Madam Speaker, and the people of Tobago West remember and as long as they remember, that is all that really matters to me, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, you see, our business is to restore. Our business is to rescue. Our business is to resuscitate and to restore this nation back to good health and that we will.

4.05 p.m.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for his inspiring and intelligent leadership, for his forthrightness, for his fearlessness and for his focus on presenting a new sense of hope for the people of this nation for a brighter future.

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I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his presentation on a most reasonable budget to suit the times with the current resources that are on hand. I know that his job is difficult but we have to make the hard decision and take the necessary action to restore this country's economic fortunes once again. Contrary to popular belief, Madam Speaker, there are no quick fixes and the solutions are few and far between, but we are committed to this nation and doing what is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, Madam Speaker, our current situation calls for a total restructuring and expansion of your economy, and that speaks to this administration's effort to implement alternative strategies for growth and development, and we have identified tourism as an area to drive our sector and our diversification and expansion agenda.

Madam Speaker, I crave at this time to report on the workings of the Ministry of Tourism. I would also touch on the current state of affairs in the sector and some of the challenges, Madam Speaker.

Now, an alarming number of countries worldwide have turned to tourism as a way of expanding their economic fortunes and diversifying their economic agenda. Tourism has been the fastest growing among economic sectors and has moved from 25 million visitors in 1950 to 1,186 million in 2015, and the same could be said for revenues from tourism, going from \$2 billion in 1950 to \$1,260 billion in 2015.

In 2015, Madam Speaker, the Caribbean outperformed the rest of the region, setting new arrival records and new expenditure records, 28.7 million visitors and an estimated spend of US \$30 billion. The Caribbean's growth was 7 per cent and that was pretty much attributed to 18 per cent growth in Cuba, 14 per cent in Aruba, and smaller growths in the Bahamas and Jamaica in 3 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. The year 2015 was the second year in a row that the region performed and the region has performed better than the rest of the world and the sixth consecutive year of growth for tourism in the Caribbean region.

Now, Madam Speaker, last year Trinidad and Tobago welcomed 519,330 visitors. The total number of air and cruise passenger arrivals increased by 14.1 per cent. This was primarily attributed to a significant increase in cruise ship arrivals.

Madam Speaker, over the 2015 period, our major source market remained the United States, coming in at 53.5 per cent. Then you have the Caribbean, 18.3 per cent and Europe, primarily from the United Kingdom, 8.4 per cent. Now, 38.1 per

cent of our visitors were visiting friends and relatives. There were 21.6 per cent who visited for leisure and beach vacation, and for business and conventions, 14.7 per cent.

Now, the sector has contributed to 27,702 jobs in 2015. Now, that is a far cry from the 32,900 jobs that it created in the year 2008. The travel and tourism economic impact 2015 for Trinidad and Tobago states that the tourism contribution to the Gross Domestic Product was \$4,882 million, which represents 3.2 per cent of our GDP. Now, with that said, Madam Speaker, you would recognize that tourism is a promising sector indeed.

Now, Trinidad and Tobago's current market share of over 7 per cent is not what we desire it to be and it does not represent the full potential of the industry. So we have to admit that over the years we could have done better. When compared to the rest of our Caribbean counterparts we have so much more to offer, two for the price of one. But clearly, while enjoying the comforts of the energy sector, we had been sleeping on the tourism industry.

Now, I perused the comments on the promises of the previous Ministers of Government, especially those under the former People's Partnership. In 2010, Rupert Griffith, who was the tourism Minister at that time, he promised a 3 per cent increase bringing us to 10 per cent market share in the Caribbean for the year 2015. That did not happen. He also promised us to bring tourism arrivals up to 617,000 visitors by 2015. That did not happen. And then in 2012, they appointed a new tourism Minister, Minister Cadiz. He said that for the first time he would strengthen the network and bring the airport, the airlines, the hotels and everybody together to enhance the tourism product. Then in 2013, they changed the Minister of Tourism again and they gave us Chandresh Sharma. But when you check all the records of Chandresh Sharma's contribution, as it relates to tourism, he did not even worry to talk about tourism. He talked about other things that he found to be important.

In 2014, they changed the Minister of Tourism on us again and they gave us Minister Gerald Hadeed. He told us that he would refurbish the Crown Point Airport, but for the time of his leadership and the stewardship of this People's Partnership, they put a barricade around the Crown Point Airport and gave the impression that work was happening there but what was happening there was absolutely nothing.

Mr. Smith: How many Ministers?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Four different Ministers in five years. No wonder, Madam

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Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Princes Town refers to the Ministry of Tourism as the Ministry of nothing because that is how they saw tourism as a Ministry of nothing. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, this is the stage that was set for me by my predecessors five years, four different Ministers, a lot of talk and no substantial action, absolutely nothing. But I find it interesting, Madam Speaker, that everybody now seems that they want to reap the rewards of tourism or reap the fruits of tourism. Reap fruits of seeds that you had never sown.

So while I welcome the numerous calls for the—where is the Minister of Tourism? You check in the newspapers and you check everybody writing: Dear Minister Cudjoe, Dear Shamfa, and when I looked at what was happening in the tourism sector over the past five years I am looking for a letter that says: Dear Minister Griffith, Dear Minister Sharma, Dear Minister Cadiz; not one, Madam Speaker. But for the People's National Movement a higher standard is always set for us and that we welcome, and deliver we will.

The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that tourism contributions are expected to rise by 2.1 per cent per year until 2025. Now, if we are to achieve these accomplishments or reach these goals, Madam Speaker, then we cannot continue to address tourism in a “*vaille que vaille*” or ad hoc manner.

Further, over the years in every sector we have developed a practice of just throwing money at the sector or throwing money at different things that we find not to be performing properly. That cannot be the same for tourism. I crave your indulgence once again, Madam Speaker. Let me say, on reporting on the workings of my Ministry, for the sake of clarity, that the Ministry is responsible for tourism policy development, public awareness, encouraging growth in the tourism sector, promoting stakeholder participation, monitoring trends in the tourism industry.

Now, the Tourism Development Company is the state enterprise or special purpose company that was mandated as an implementation arm of the Ministry primarily to market the destination and to develop products. Now, I want to say this very clearly, tourism development in Tobago is the responsibility of the Division of Tourism and Transport of the Tobago House of Assembly, just like education, just like agriculture, just like works and all other Fifth Schedule matters. Tourism development in Tobago falls under the remit of the Tobago House of Assembly. The THA is responsible for the formulation of specific policy and plans for Tobago tourism sector, marketing activities, product development, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, one of the first things we did is the establishment of a Tourism Standing Committee. The Tourism Standing Committee for Trinidad—and I want the Members of the Opposition to listen clearly. You know what, Madam Speaker? They know the facts, you know. They know the facts, but they go out there and they try to paint a different picture, trying to mislead people who they think do not read and mislead people who they think are not following. So I am just—I am not even talking to them. I am talking to the nation through you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, one of the first things that I did was to establish a Standing Committee on Tourism for sustainable development of tourism in Trinidad.

Mr. Indarsingh: Who is in charge of that committee?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: That committee is being chaired by Dr. Acolla Cameron, who is a lecturer at UWI in Tourism Management, because we took the opportunity to utilize what is available in the University of the West Indies. We invited on board also the Trinidad and Tobago tourism technical institute, where you have the teachers and the different people there who are responsible for driving the sector, as it relates to education.

So let me get back to that and I would not be distracted by the Member for Couva South. So Tobago has its own standing committee and we would have followed in that fashion and we have a standing committee here in Trinidad for the sustainable development of tourism.

I had intended to go on to that other point later but I am going to bring it now for clarity. Now, there is a National Tourism Standing Committee. That is a third standing committee, with a specific focus on Tobago. And this is nothing new, Madam Speaker, because this was developed in 2006. And at the time it was headed by Prime Minister Patrick Manning to specifically focus on tourism development in Tobago, at that point in time when Tobago was having difficulties with its arrival figures and development in tourism.

Now, that was done keeping in mind that the THA is responsible for tourism development in Tobago. A Minister in Trinidad, contrary to what they believe, cannot instruct a secretary in Tobago, cannot instruct the Chief Secretary. Only the Prime Minister could do that.

So this Standing Committee, just like it was done in 2006 by Mr. Patrick Manning, brings together the Airports Authority, brings together the different key stakeholders that are relevant to providing necessary services to Tobago's tourism, to get instructions and directions, straight from the Prime Minister, and the second in command is the Chief Secretary. That has been going on since 2006.

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So it is a shame that Members on the opposite side who claim to love Tobago so much and want to be champion for Tobago tourism, do not have a clue on what happens in Tobago's development and even what happens in the Tobago House of Assembly Act. It is just a total shame, Madam Speaker.

I want to speak to the Trinidad Standing Committee, that has been meeting since January and they have been doing significant work in getting together stakeholders and the academics in the sector to develop a policy for the tourism sector. Over that time, we have looked at the master plan.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, it is very close to tea, so I realize you may need a little opportunity to vent, and you are invited, if you wish, to take that opportunity now, but please abide by the Standing Orders.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. They have been working with the stakeholders to develop a clear road map and they are very close to finalizing that document and I expect that in a couple of weeks.

4.20 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to move on now to the stakeholders' forum. I have also re-established the stakeholders—reconvened the stakeholders' forum, which has not been operating for over the past two years. So we have reconvened the stakeholders' forum, which brings together the key stakeholders of the industry to interact with the TDC and the Ministry of Tourism. So we could speak to policy, speak to action plans, report and develop our strategy together.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk a little bit on research, because if we ought to develop policy, it has to be done by findings and not by feelings. As I said earlier, we cannot address this tourism matter in an ad hoc or "vaille-que-vaille" manner. So the Ministry of Tourism has instituted or is conducting a baseline survey. The baseline survey seeks to collect and analyze data, international visitor expenditure and activity in tourism business. We are now in our second phase. The first phase we would have conducted the survey with international passengers, and now we are doing so with the local tourism businesses.

There are a number of other research activities and surveys that we would have done in fiscal 2015, and they include: the yachting visitor survey; the visitor exit survey report; the 2016 survey of departing visitors; the 2015/2016 cruise passenger survey; the 2015 domestic tourism survey; the site and attractions survey, and the pilot study entitled: The Evaluation of Domestic Tourism Activity, Special Events on Festivals in Tobago.

I want to move now, Madam Speaker, to public awareness. I want to start with a public education and awareness programme, through the Junior Minister of Tourism. My first tourism conference was in Curaçao last year October. I went to CTO, Caribbean Tourism Organization meeting for the very first time. I saw there that they had a Caribbean Tourism Youth Congress, where they have Junior Ministers of Tourism. Trinidad and Tobago has been a member of CTO for a mighty long time.

This Junior Minister of Tourism Youth Congress has been in operation for over five years, and had never sent a Minister of Tourism to represent the country on the CTO Youth Congress. I came back to Trinidad and Tobago and worked diligently with the Ministry and the TDC to train young people. We had a competition and Mr. La Quan Pearie of Manzanilla Secondary, he came out first in the competition here in Trinidad and Tobago, and he is now our Junior Minister of Tourism. [*Desk thumping*] He went on to Barbados this year and got second place in the Regional Junior Minister of Tourism Competition. He is a young man who I am very proud of. He is a youth ambassador for tourism, and he is responsible for sensitizing his peers, for educating his community about tourism, and for executing tourism projects to enlighten and educate young people.

The Roving School Caravan: this is an education and public awareness programme that is done in the schools by the TDC. This year we were able to visit over 35 schools and engage over 5,000 students. Some of the schools we engaged north, south, east, west, even Tobago, from Belmont Boys' RC Primary, to Siparia Hindu Primary and my alma mater in Tobago, Signal Hill Secondary.

We have also worked on an increased social media presence, through Facebook, Instagram. We have also had a new corporate website for the TDC and the Ministry, and we also have a new destination website. And for the very first time, the Trinidad and Tobago destination website you can use from your smartphones. We are also working on a smartphone application. You probably would have seen the request for proposals in the newspaper, and by January or February of next year, we are going to have a tourism smart app for your phone. [*Desk thumping*] So when visitors land in Trinidad and Tobago, you could get on your phones, see where to go, what to do in Trinidad and Tobago; unprecedented.

Now, Madam Speaker, we have launched programmes like the tourism corner in the newspapers. On assuming my duties as Minister of Tourism, I launched a nationwide exercise to visit the different hotels and to visit the different accommodations facilities, and the different sites and attractions to get a first-hand experience as to what is happening at these establishments, to interact with

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the stakeholders, with the movers and the shakers of the industry. The stakeholders have said that this has never been done by any Tourism Minister in the history of this nation, going from hotel to hotel. That is what they said. If I lied, I lied after them. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, the first phase of this programme focused on hotels, and I have done some hotels in Trinidad and some in Tobago. I must say that the findings have raised much concern, especially as it relates to basic standards regarding health, safety, labour, infrastructure, customer service and training. What is very interesting is when the public learned about this exercise, many hotel owners were pleased, and some of their workers sent emails and messages, asking me to visit. You will be amazed, Madam Speaker, as to how many of the establishments in the hospitality industry do not have proper programmes for training staff or employee recognition programmes. No programmes to promote long service or upward mobility in the company.

Madam Speaker, extraordinary customer service is the lifeblood of the hospitality industry, and no matter how cheap your hotel, or how extensive your marketing strategy, nothing beats good old customer service and training of employees. To this end, there are two priority projects that are dear to the Ministry. One is the STAR Programme and next is the STEP Programme. The National Tourism Quality Service Improvement Programme, better known as STAR, was created in 2007, but over the years, there has been challenges hindering the implementation of the programme, and it had, therefore, been in limbo. Now STAR was created to strengthen, facilitate and support a culture of service excellence, within the local tourism sector and assist in the development and training of both professionals and the organization.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are training programmes under STAR, like promises that are CVQ accredited for workers in the establishment, and then there are programmes like foundations and the management of service quality, for—which is pretty much training of the trainers or training of the managers. Over this fiscal year, we would have trained over 308 service providers, and they would have hailed from Crews Inn Hotel, the yachting club, Cara Suites, Point Fortin Regional Corporation, Siparia Regional Corporation, Princes Town Regional Corporation, the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project, Airport Authority, the different taxi corporations, and the list goes on and on and on. Now 121 candidates would have written the assessment for the CVQ, and we would have instituted a mystery shopper programme that would have engaged over 60 establishments.

Now, the STEP Programme, Madam Speaker, is about encouraging entrepreneurship in the sector. Now, this is another programme that was established in 2007, and this year we would have trained 25 operators in financial management, 102 tourism transport operators in Tobago. We would have conducted training in association management for stakeholders. We did the art of networking training for stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, a new project that came on this year that I am particularly excited about is the interior decorating initiative, where we would have brought on an interior decorator to work with the different stakeholders or the hotels in Trinidad and Tobago to help them to bring their rooms up to standard. We intend in this fiscal year to add that programme to the room upgrade programme.

Now Madam Speaker, I want to turn now to a new project, one that has never been done in the region or in Trinidad and Tobago, which is the CARPHA-IDB Project on health and safety standards. Now, the Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world and, therefore, the health of our countries affects the health of our tourism industry. So we are susceptible to diseases or outbreaks like, diarrhoea, food and waterborne diseases. And one outbreak could tarnish the reputation of your business, tarnish the reputation of the entire sector and your entire destination. So the Ministry of Tourism is working hand in hand with CARPHA in implementing this project.

I want to thank—it sets standards and it trains the stakeholders from the food vendor at the side of the road, to people in the hotels.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Tobago West. Members, it is now 4.30. We will take the suspension now and resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: May I ask the Whip and the Leader of the House to please help constitute a quorum? Member for Tobago West, you have 30 more minutes and 50 seconds left. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker that is 13 minutes?

Madam Speaker: Thirty minutes and 50 seconds of your original speaking time.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before we left for the tea break, I was speaking about the health and safety project that we are doing

with CARPHA, and I just want to thank Dr. Lisa Indar of CARPHA, who has been working diligently in getting this project off the ground. She has been collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC. I want to specially thank her because she would have answered immediately, my request to have as many stakeholders in Trinidad benefit from this programme, and she also would have taken my recommendations to have the project done in Tobago also. We have established the link between CARPHA and the Tobago House of Assembly. I am pleased to say that the project has been launched in Tobago also, [*Desk thumping*] making it truly regional, and giving the Tobago House of Assembly the opportunity to benefit what we are also getting here in Trinidad.

I want to speak a little bit about physical upgrades. We have been working with the communities and different community groups, in doing refurbishment works and beautification works, especially also to the sites that are under the remit of the TDC. We have done physical refurbishment works in Fondes Amandes, repair works to the building, the kitchen, and the bathrooms. We have done repair works at the Lopinot Heritage Site. This year we did works at the Maracas Beach Community Tourism Initiative, where we have done work on the Maracas Beach jetty, the gazebo, the car park, upgrade the walkover bridge, landscaping, emergency sewer repairs.

At the Las Cuevas Beach Enhancement Project, we would have done work by establishing a saline resistance fence, and we refurbished and upgraded the restaurant, the parking lot and the public washroom. I want to place on record that the Las Cuevas Beach is the only Blue Flag accredited beach in the southern hemisphere. [*Desk thumping*] It got Blue Flag accreditation this year for the third time. We have also been liaising—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: What does Blue Flag mean?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Blue Flag certification is an international quality standard for water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, safety and other services. So you have to conduct different tests on the water throughout the year, to make sure that it is not contaminated, and we are keeping best practices. The Europeans—they like this kind of environmental sustainable projects, and Las Cuevas is the only one. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Well done Minister, well done Minister.

5.05 p.m.

We have gotten the United Nations group to liaise with the Tobago House of

Assembly, and that link has been set up and they are now working with the Tobago House of Assembly looking at three beaches. So, during this fiscal year they will be working with THA to get three beaches. I think Englishman's Bay is one of the beaches that would be seeking Blue Flag accreditation.

Now, the Manzanilla Beach Facility, same thing: upgrade works on the parking lot, upgrade works on the restaurant and installation of seating. The Vessigny Beach: car park refurbishment, upgrade of the restaurant, installation of perimeter fencing and, basically, the upgrade and maintenance of these sites that are under our remit.

The La Brea Pitch Lake, you would have seen on International Tourism Day, we would have opened the newly refurbished La Brea Pitch Lake, improving the visitor experience for the people of La Brea, and those visiting the largest pitch lake in the world. We did landscaping works, painting of the building, we did a ramp to allow the differently-abled and the aged to access that visitor centre.

Now, the Maracas Beach Project: as you are well aware, and the people of this nation are well aware that in April the Cabinet would have taken the decision to cease works under the previous—that we would have done some investigation and decided to cease works under the previous contractor. Over this fiscal year, we would have done remedial works as it relates to road works, drainage and the sewer system so that the people of Maracas could continue to enjoy the facility.

In this new fiscal year, the project would be done with the guidance, with the project management services of NIDCO, and it has been broken up into three projects: road works and the upgrade of drainage and park facilities that would be done through PURE. The second package is building construction, and that would be done through NIDCO. That is for the construction of the vending booths and the boardwalk.

Do you know what? As I mention the boardwalk, Madam Speaker, do you know under the previous dispensation of the project, these visitor booths were built, at least two feet above the ground level, and that was done with the intention of doing a boardwalk, but the boardwalk was not a part of the previous contract. So after the previous contractor had completed the Maracas booths at the Maracas project, in the previous dispensation, how would people access the building if there was no boardwalk?

Hon. Member: Another contract.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Another contract, exactly. So, Madam Speaker, we are

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moving speedily ahead with this to bring some relief to the visiting public.

The Sugar Heritage Museum is another project, an IDF project that was placed under my remit in the previous fiscal year. Now, we got an allocation of \$7 million, but that was based on a PWC, a PricewaterhouseCoopers recommendation that we execute this project under several Ministries for 15 years at \$539 million. Now, Madam Speaker, at the time when that decision was made, our financial and economic situation was different, and to date our situation has changed. So we have decided to go ahead with the museum which is going to be under the remit of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and that is what is going to be done at this time. We cannot implement that project in the current configuration because our economic situation just does not allow us to.

I want to turn now to some niche areas. Business tourism: we hold 14.7 per cent of the people that visit Trinidad and Tobago come for the purpose of business meeting, conventions. We are most favoured in the English-speaking Caribbean for hosting these conferences, and we would have done, at least, seven major conferences during the previous fiscal year.

Domestic tourism: as you are well aware, Madam Speaker, business in the domestic tourism area keeps our local tourism industry alive and well when international arrivals are low. Our 2015 survey tells us that 150,387 households in Trinidad and Tobago took about two trips in the year of 2015, and that generated over \$862 million. So it goes a long way in keeping our local tourism industry alive and well.

Our Stay to Get Away programme, which is like a staycation programme encouraging locals to vacation at home. That was executed this year and launched in July 2016. That programme had not been done since the year 2011. It was very successful. We would have exceeded our targets. We would have targeted for 5,200 participants and we got 5,900 people participating. We partnered with many communities, organizations, the Natural Trust and even the PTSC to get locals around to enjoy all that Trinidad and Tobago has to offer.

Now, Tobago would have launched its own staycation programme called Endless Vacation and that is running throughout the entire year. I want to place on the record my concern still as it relates to inter-island transport. I consider inter-island transport, especially for the people of Tobago, as an essential service. I know that the Ministry of Works and Transport that is responsible for the Port Authority and the Ministry of Finance that is responsible for Caribbean Airlines, they are working diligently on bringing some relief as it relates to these matters,

and the Ministry of Tourism serves on that committee to treat with that.

Now, Carnival 2016: as a Minister of Tourism and also as a masquerader, Madam Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I mention niche areas and not mention Carnival, because Carnival alone brings over 9 per cent of our total arrivals for the year, and they spend about 13 to 14 days. The average tourist spends \$154 more than the other tourists who come for other reasons other than Carnival. So, Madam Speaker, I think that this year Carnival alone would have generated \$354 million, and each tourist would have spent about \$9,597. So, Carnival goes a long way for us. This is a testimony of what the development of our cultural expression can do for our economy. So we welcome the sustainable development of all cultural celebrations: the Ramleelas, the Divali and all that Trinidad and Tobago has to offer.

Madam Speaker, we did well also in cruise tourism and this is the first year that we got a 68 per cent increase in tourism arrivals [*Desk thumping*] 100,791 cruise passengers. That is roughly 30,000 for Trinidad and 79,000 for Tobago. So, Tobago would have performed very well in cruise tourism this year, and not just in terms of arrival but in terms of spending. In Trinidad, Trinidad would have earned \$7.38 million and Tobago would have earned \$29.5 million based on spending from the 85 per cent of the passengers who would have come off the ship to enjoy what we have to offer.

Now, airlift: preliminary data show that so far for the year air passenger arrivals are down roughly by 5 per cent, and that is attributed to a decline in airline services. You have reduced airlift from UK and the Scandinavian market. Also, there had been a drop in fares from the US. In many of the other destinations, there has been an 18 per cent to 28 per cent drop in airfares for the other destinations, whilst in Trinidad and Tobago the prices fell by only 11 per cent.

In Tobago, the situation is direr, because Novair that would have flown last year is not flying anymore, and the same could be said for I think Monarch. But I am happy to announce that based on consultations with Condor—I remember last year the THA was firming up their negotiations and this winter Tobago is going to welcome two new Condor flights from Manchester and from Germany. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, investments: there are two main investment programmes that we would have done this year, and that is customs and excise duty exemptions. We had 49 stakeholders benefiting from this and that is two accommodation facilities. I think one is Paria Suites in Trinidad and Mt. Irvine—

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and not “Mt Irvine”—Hotel in Tobago, and we would have given concessions for over 35 drivers in Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago West, your original 45 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish to avail yourself of it.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You may continue.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: So, occupancy rate: I was surprised to see on the Internet and in the newspaper reports that occupancy rates are 10 per cent and 7 per cent. I had the benefit of being a part of a stakeholder’s forum in Tobago. I was invited by the Secretary of Tourism. The occupancy rate for Trinidad is 60 per cent and for Tobago is still 40 per cent, [*Desk thumping*] like it has been for the past four years. What was interesting is when the Secretary asked the stakeholder: so why it is that you guys are telling people that it is 10 per cent and lower? No answer, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, TTIC is a standards programme to ensure that standards are kept and maintained. Now, we are the only destination in the Caribbean where standards in the tourism sector are not regulated and not compulsory. It is voluntary, and that is not good for us if we intend to take the sector to the next level. We talk about all that we want to gain and obtain from tourism, but we have to do what is necessary to remain on par with the rest of the nation. So a new project in this year would be geared towards establishing a regulatory system for the tourism sector.

Now, Madam Speaker, as it relates to marketing and sponsorship, we would have sponsored events like Soca Monarch, Chutney Monarch, and Kiddies Carnival. We would have sponsored the culinary team with a sponsorship of \$100,000 and the culinary team was very successful. They won for the sixth consecutive year in the case of the Caribbean competition.

As it relates to marketing, many new marketing initiatives have been undertaken. I am running out of time so I would get the chance to expand on these matters in the Finance Bill, but we are really looking at our marketing strategy to ensure that the stakeholders are engaged.

I remember one year Trinidad and Tobago would have gone to WTM and did the trade show and our theme was something related to incredible India. Now, when Trinidad and Tobago does an incredible India theme, what you leave for India to do? A terrific Trinidad and Tobago? Madam Speaker, so we really have to look at our marketing strategy.

I think that in marketing there needs to be transparency and accountability, and marketing representatives ought to be judged or are to be assessed on their performance. So, we are reviewing the overseas marketing reps, and we are going out once again and giving the stakeholders the opportunity to have their input. We are also making better use of electronic media and technology in marketing the destination. Since most of our major markets in the USA use online facilities in order to make their bookings. We are training travel agents through electronic media and so on.

We have also done a review of the—before I go on to that, as it relates to trade shows, what is interesting is we would have done some work in trying to streamline spending and cutting waste and mismanagement. As it relates to trade shows, over the years 2011 to 2014, we have been spending at least \$2 million in airline tickets and per diem for people to go to trade shows. Madam Speaker, I want to say that the days of junkets and fun trips and so on are over. We have to get to a place of attending only the trade shows that would bring significant benefits to us. So we have moved from \$2 million in airline tickets and per diems to roughly \$400,000 this year. [*Desk thumping*]

5.20 p.m.

Madam Speaker, a former Tourism Development Company Chairman told me the kind of cuts and the kinds of things that you are doing as it relates to—we are trying to streamline the spending and so on—they said people are not going to like you, but I want to say I did not come here for likes. I came here to protect the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to advance the sector to where it needs to be. Anything else relating to tourism I will take that up in the Finance Bill. How much time do I have left, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You have five minutes.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you. I want to return to Tobago. We would have done a review of the TDC, so we will be making some of the necessary changes to retool and re-engineer the TDC to better serve our tourism interests.

As I said before, tourism in Tobago is under the remit of the Tobago House of Assembly, and we here, the Ministry of Tourism and the Cabinet, are going to do all within our power to assist the Tobago House of Assembly and the people in Tobago in attaining their goals as it relates to tourism. To that end, I want to say that we are doing things like the power plant at Cove, to give more electricity services to Tobago; the desalination plant, to relieve water shortages. And this is not done because of Sandals, this is done because these are activities that we have

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been talking about and promising Tobago for years. But this is a Government that remains true and committed to investing in Tobago, and providing a better quality of life for the people of Tobago.

We understand that we are in challenging economic times and the entire nation faces these challenges and these cuts. Nobody is immune from these cuts, so we understand the role that we have to play. What I am comforted by is even though our allocation was cut, we got 4.45 per cent this year, and under the People's Partnership we would have gotten exactly 4.03 per cent to the cent. Sometimes if they could cut a penny in half, they would cut a penny and give it to us. That is to tell you, it was exactly 4.03 per cent. I am thankful for the consideration of this Government, and we understand that we have to share the burden of going through these economic times.

I am also thankful for the gesture and the love shown in respecting Tobago's autonomy. Now we have more Members from the Tobago House of Assembly on boards, and that collaborative spirit of getting things done in Tobago, developing the marina and a number of other new projects. Even the Roman Catholic project where poor Member of Parliament for Couva North would have said gone. She clearly does not understand how to read the Tobago House of Assembly expenditure, because we have the flexibility to move things around. I was at the sod-turning event for the RC school project. I was there. For the first time EFCL is going to partner with the Tobago House of Assembly to get that school done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, even as she spoke about 19 per cent of education, but you cannot look at 19 per cent of tertiary education in isolation. To understand where we are right now, you have to understand where we came from. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Teach her, teach her!

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Madam Speaker, when we came into power in the year 2000/2001, we were in single digits; I am talking about 4 per cent, 5 per cent. People could not afford tertiary education. When I graduated from school in 1998 there was no GATE, there was no avenue for tertiary education but thanks to the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] things are different now, from the number of secondary schools, the number of basketball courts. But this is a new day for the people of Tobago. No matter what you say I want to let you know, we remember, and when we go to the polls next year we will continue to remember. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, with that said, I want to thank you.

Madam Speaker: It appears that the tea was very fulling. I would like Members to please control their sugar levels.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased to join this debate at this time, and I would like to congratulate my colleagues who have already spoken and who I think have done the People's National Movement and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proud, [*Desk thumping*] and also the 23 constituencies that they represent. Those who have already spoken, I think they have done their constituents proud. So I pay tribute to my colleagues.

I am really extremely humbled and privileged to speak in this House in this debate and to speak in my capacity as the Minister of Planning and Development, and as Member of Parliament for Arouca/Maloney. I take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the members of his Ministry, who worked assiduously in making sure that we have these budget documents and budget figures before us today. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Planning and Development, the members of staff who made it possible for us to have the PSIP document for Trinidad and Tobago, and the specific PSIP for Tobago. I pay homage to them for the long nights that they spent working on these documents and I congratulate them for this.

Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by reaffirming my faith in the people of Trinidad and Tobago and in my fellow countrymen and countrywomen who I know will come together as my colleague, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said, all hands on deck to make sure that we surmount these challenges in which we find ourselves at this time; and to make the sacrifices that are necessary to build a stronger Trinidad and Tobago, a better country, a country of which we can all be proud.

Madam Speaker, I would like at this point to crave your indulgence and ask you to allow me to read quite a bit of the information that I have here, and I ask this under Standing Order 44(10).

Madam Speaker: Leave is granted, and just for the guidance of all Members, Standing Order 44(10) is being relaxed because of the peculiarity of the budget debate.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I stood here and listened in utter amazement during the three-hour contribution of the Member for Siparia. What I thought was even more amazing was the almost

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complete homage and obeisance that the Member for Princes Town, the Member for Couva South and other Members of those opposite to us, paid to the Member for Siparia for her contribution in this debate. At one point I was saying that Pope Francis seemed to have made a mistake that it is not St. Teresa of Calcutta, but really St. Kamla of Siparia, because the obeisance that was paid was amazing to me. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am sorry that my colleague, the Member for Princes Town, is not here, because he and I share quite a lot in common. [*Interruption*] We do, because like him I was one of the youngest when I came to the Parliament initially. I was one of the youngest here, and like him I have a great love and passion for the men and for the women of Trinidad and Tobago. I have a passion for the boys and the girls of Trinidad and Tobago, and really want to serve the men and women of Trinidad and Tobago. I really want to warn him, in particular, because he is a young Member of Parliament, even though he may reside on that side of the House, that truth and loyalty can reside in the same house—truth and loyalty.

Too often we stand here in this Parliament or we sit here in this Parliament, and we on this side are loyal to our political leader and Prime Minister and we respect the fact that he is a man who upholds the values of truth in particular. I am so sorry that I cannot necessarily say the same thing about the leader on the other side.

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(4), she cannot say the same thing about the leader on this side, on our side, with respect to truth.

Madam Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney, just be careful with respect to where you are going. I do not think she has said anything offensive as yet.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for that.

I am not saying this lightly. You would recall that during the debate, the Member for Siparia created an entire story about Gerry Brooks, about ANSA McAl and about other persons in society. Madam Speaker, with your leave I would like to read from the *Guardian* of Saturday, October 08, 2016 at page A18. It says:

“A stain that is difficult to rub out

This is not the first occasion when something of this nature has taken place—the abuse of freedom by politicians to serve their own ends. There were the allegations against Dr. Rowley...In the circumstances of the last couple days,

there were private people and corporations offended, with them not having the right of reply in the same venue and with the same privilege. This indeed, is a stain that is difficult to rub out.

We refer to the allegations made by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar of some underhanded, corrupt collaboration between named individuals, the ANSA McAl Corporation and government officials. The allegations are in reference to shareholding in the T&T NGL and supposed connections to company officials.

At the core of the allegations is the claim that there is collaboration between officials of the company with certain shareholders in the TTNGL and the government, the intention being to sell shares in the company in the planned share sale announced by Finance Minister Colm Imbert in his budget presentation.

At best, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar based her conclusion on mere conjecture. No substantial facts, or anything approaching such hard evidence could be reasonably deduced from her statement.

Also quite obvious is Mrs. Persad-Bissessar's manipulation of the date of Mr. Gerry Brooks' retirement date from the ANSA McAL group to suit her purposes.

Fortunately for the reputation of those involved"—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South this is the last time I am warning you with respect to observing the rule for Members not speaking. Please continue, Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

"Fortunately for the reputation of those involved and as a means of conveying correct information to the national community..."

And I repeat:

"...correct information to the national community, Finance Minister Imbert told reporters the reality of the situation."

Madam Speaker, I continue. *Sunday Guardian*, October 02, page 19. It says in an article of that date:

"Typical of the governing style of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as displayed during her five years and three months in office, she takes responsibility for

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little.”

5.35 p.m.

And, Madam Speaker, just to continue my point, I quote again and it is the Editor’s Note of October 8th:

“The statement by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar that five of the top shareholders of TTNGL are associated with the ANSA McAl Group is plainly incorrect.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar is also incorrect that Mr. Brooks retired as the chief operating officer and manufacturing sector head at ANSA McAl after last year’s general election. According to the T&T Stock Exchange filing of April 2, 2015, Mr. Brooks retired from the group effective April 30, 2015, more than four months before the election.”

And, Madam Speaker, I just want to use this opportunity to say that how can you base almost your entire budget contribution on a fabricated story? Madam Speaker, I repeat, truth and loyalty can reside in the same house. There is nothing wrong with speaking the truth on occasion, but, that seems to be impossible with those on the other side.

Madam Speaker, I just want to take the opportunity before I go into my full contribution to remind those on the other side that it was when the Member for Oropouche East talks about caraille growing on the Couva hospital, it was only in September that that location stopped being a construction site. And I want to remind them of the pumpkin that was growing in the hole that should have been in the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago under their tenure. [*Desk thumping*] Several years ago, as was said then, they said that we did not need a national library in Port of Spain.

And I want to remind them also, strangely enough, when the Member for Oropouche East talks about, as he put it, those on this side saying, giving carte blanche to criminals by saying that people in jacket and tie also commit crimes. I want to remind them of their long tirade over years of saying that O’Halloran and Prevatt were criminals in this country. I have no brief for either, but I will make the point that at that time, as my colleague from Tobago West said, it is good for you to say that, but when we say it, it is a problem. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, that is not how we intend to run this country. Let me also make the point with regard to the Prime Minister’s residence in Tobago. That is the level of disrespect that those on the other side have for even the office of

Prime Minister. That they would find that putting aside money to repair the residence is a problem. The Member for Oropouche East even made the point that when he came to the Cabinet to ask for funding, they almost ran him out of the Cabinet for that reason.

But that is the same feeling that allowed the Member for Siparia to spend months in Gopaul's residence whilst there was a Prime Minister's residence there. [*Desk thumping*] That is the same feeling of disrespect for the office of Prime Minister that allowed the Member for Siparia to stay at her own private residence whilst allegedly her sister was staying in the official residence of the Prime Minister. It is a total disrespect for the [*Desk thumping*] office of Prime Minister.

And, Madam Speaker, that is also the level of disrespect that they paid to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago when they allowed the previous Member for Tobago East to stand in this Parliament and denigrate our then Leader of the Opposition and raise an entire untruth about his parents and about the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West. But that is how they feel about the institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, that brings me to the fact that as a Government we have certain imperatives to restore what were debased over the last five years. And our first imperative as a Government must be for adjustment and stabilization. When this Government came into office a year ago our first imperative was to stabilize and to effect an adjustment to the reality of lower oil and gas prices and lower production levels. The adjustment had to be immediate and it had to be systematic.

So, Madam Speaker, when those on the other side said we made cuts and some are saying that the cuts should be deeper, Madam Speaker, we had to make adjustments. And I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for ensuring that the adjustments were made and made in such a way that not one person within the public service lost their job. [*Desk thumping*] Not one person. I want to congratulate those on this side who ensured that they held their Ministries together in circumstances where there was so much debt, so much debt subsisting in every Ministry, so many bills left to be paid that it is a wonder that we did not find ourselves in a destabilized position. I congratulate my colleagues on ensuring that that did not happen. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, our second imperative as we take this country forward is to ensure that there is diversification. And for years governments, including previous PNM Governments, have spoken about diversifying our economy. And diversification is not the easiest road to take, but in these circumstances it must be

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done. And our past approaches to diversification clearly have been flawed. But, Madam Speaker, I want to make the point that one approach we made to diversification has been very successful and that approach has been using our same oil and gas resources to diversify along the value chain, so that petrochemicals was our first foray into diversification and we did it successfully.

And let me say, Madam Speaker, that it was under a PNM administration that petrochemicals became the first major diversification in this economy. [*Desk thumping*] And also, years ago when we were telling our manufacturers they needed to re-examine their production capacity, to re-examine their labour force, re-examine how they produced. We were also—we were vilified. That redounded to better economic circumstances for our manufacturers and today they are called titans of manufacturing within the Caribbean region because [*Desk thumping*] we insisted that they operated in a certain way. And it is in the same way that under this administration we will work assiduously to ensure that there is diversification.

Madam Speaker, the desired outcomes of the diversification effort will be to increase export earnings from the non-hydrocarbon sector, to ensure savings in foreign exchange utilization especially for imported consumption goods, and to enhance the country's essential hard and soft infrastructure such as ports, airports, roads, highways, bridges, ICT, education, health and wellness.

Our third imperative must be transformation. And this transformation must be social transformation and we of the PNM have long championed the crafting of a social sector that in all its parts would benefit all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In area of education, curriculum reform is a priority particularly in terms of establishing an overarching ICT in education policy that will enable advances such as ICT-infused lesson plans for students.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the health sector, we are close to determining the most appropriate health insurance model for citizens whilst continuing the construction of the Arima and Point Fortin hospitals, and we will, as my colleague said, be starting the Sangre Grande hospital and the Couva hospital and training facility will be operationalized via a public/private partnership.

Going forward, effectiveness and efficiency of social assistance cash programmes must be achieved and this will involve improving targeting mechanisms, establishing and implementing independent, scientific monitoring evaluation procedures and ensuring more rigid means of testing. It must be, Madam Speaker, that the social impact studies and audits of key social

programmes must be put in place during this time.

Madam Speaker, I would you like to remind those on the other side of the harsh reality of what we met when we came into governance. They keep boasting that they did not raise a single tax and that might be true. But the harsh reality is that whilst they did not a raise a single tax, they did not create any new revenue streams either. They did not diversify the economy and they spent money like it was going out of style. [*Desk thumping*]

This situation has had a tremendous negative impact on our fiscal space as revenues from the oil and gas sector fell an estimated 80 per cent from approximately US \$20 billion in 2014 to almost \$2 billion in 2016. And the impact of this fall was exacerbated by the fact that the previous Government had incurred five budget deficits from 2011 to 2014 and presided over a ballooning of expenditures from \$47 billion in 2010 to \$63 billion in 2014.

But, Madam Speaker, let me make another point. We have sat here and we have been told that food prices have gone up under us, that inflation has gone up under us. But, you know, I am hearing the Member for Naparima saying murders. And, you know, they keep saying that when we are in Government, murders increase. But have they ever noticed, when they are in Opposition, murders increase. When you are in Opposition, murders increase. [*Desk thumping*] And that is very significant, very, very curious. Very curious.

Whenever you are in Opposition—[*Continuous crosstalk*]

5.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker: It must be something in the southern side of the room. Please continue Member for Arouca Maloney.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, they always say when you are in Government murders increase. But we noticed when you are in Opposition murders increase, and we wonder about that. [*Desk thumping*] We wonder about that.

Mr. Charles: We killing people?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Well, we killing, eh, Member for Naparima?

Hon. Member: You say it.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: That means that we are killing people? Eh, okay.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, he admit it. [*Laughter*]

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Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West—[*Laughter*] Member for Laventille West, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Hinds: I am looking for the Standing Order here. Admit it! [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, thank you so much for the very light moment. Please continue, Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Madam Speaker, we wonder about that. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Could I have some order please! Member for Arouca/Maloney, continue.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I said, we wonder about that. But, I would like to point out that data emanating from the CSO's Retail Prices Index indicates that from January 2014 to August 2016—and I am looking at that entire period—the inflation rate was at its highest during the months of October and November 2014. October and November 2014, and the inflation rate at that time stood at 9 per cent.

In fact, during the period January 2014 to August 2016, the inflation rate was most volatile in mid-2014 when the rate increased by some 6 percentage points from June to October of that year. And, Madam Speaker, may I go on to point out that the period September 2015 to November 2015 saw a notable decrease in the inflation rate. In fact, the inflation rate for November of 2015 was 1.4 per cent. The lowest recorded in the period 2014 to August 2016. They always sit across there and say, inflation high, food prices high, but the evidence shows otherwise. And when we said that by reducing VAT—once the merchants actually reduce the VAT—the inflation rate went down and food prices also went down. So, do not let them fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I would like to also remind what was said about millionaires being made by this administration. I just want to ask them if they remember LifeSport, I want to ask them if they remember the \$34-million man who is now telling us that that is a jingle in a piggy bank. I want to ask them if they remember the hundreds of millions paid to attorneys under their administration.

And, Madam Speaker, I just find it amazing that they sit there whilst they had cannibalized the resources of the Central Bank during their administration. Remember, Madam Speaker, when we came into office the overdraft for the first time since we know ourselves had reached its limit under their administration. They had pledged the Green Fund in order to secure the overdraft. Never before

in the history of Trinidad and Tobago had we reached the point where any government had reached the overdraft limit in the Central Bank. And you know, in a few years' time I am sure that when you ask students of economics, how do you bankrupt a country? The answer would be, give it to the UNC to run. [*Desk thumping*] That is how you bankrupt a country, or give it to the Member for Siparia to run.

Madam Speaker, as we continue to make sure that we do not have social meltdown in this country, as we continue to ensure that we hold the line in this economy, that we ensure that whilst we hold the line we move the country forward. We on this side have done certain things to ensure that development can in fact take place. Madam Speaker, in the line of development, I want to speak specifically about the Town and Country Planning Division, which is an essential part of the development paradigm in Trinidad and Tobago. And, I would like to make the point that there are clear examples in the Town and Country Planning Division during the period 2011 to 2015 where land-use policy changes were undertaken under the direct supervision of the then chairman of the Advisory Town Planning panel and were ratified at the time by the Cabinet. Now, Madam Speaker, I would like to point out certain things that occurred during the currency of the Member for Caroni Central, particularly within the Town and Country Planning Division.

There are two cases that were recently decided on by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago. And what was said by the judges in those two cases is instructive as it really tells us what this administration was doing as it relates to Town and Country Planning. The first matter, and this involved the residents of Orange Grove and surrounding areas, and the restricted use of the Eddie Hart Savannah, and the second matter involves the construction of a cement batching plant in Cunupia. And, I would like to indicate that with regard to the one involving the residents who used the Eddie Hart savannah, it was *Ulric "Buggy" Haynes Coaching School and others v the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development*. And what is instructive is that Madam Justice said, and I quote that:

There was no consultation with the affected community, and further that sufficient information was not supplied to the residents in order for them to make a proper proposal with regard to the information that they had before them.

Madam Speaker, you know, those on the other side talk about consultation all the time, and the Member for Caroni Central you will recall was one of the architects of the so-called principles of fairness. And I wonder why he did not

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think the residents that used the Eddie Hart Savannah should have been treated fairly and had consultation before they tried to erect buildings on that savannah without consulting the users of the savannah. [*Interruption*] And my colleague is reminding me that the project itself was subsequently found to be illegal. No consultation and the architect of principles of fairness was found to have been acting illegally.

Madam Speaker, I want to also point out another matter, the *Concerned Residents of Cunupia and Pundit Rameshwar v the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development*. And, in that matter the judgment indicated that the interested party had no statutory right to have the Minister review his own decision. The Minister wanted to review a decision that he had already made. They said it would be contrary to the rules of good administration for the Minister to be continually changing his own decision without good reason. And, also, that there had been no changes in the circumstances to warrant a change.

But, Madam Speaker, you know what is even more disturbing is that during the currency of the Member for Caroni Central, when I assumed office there were 175 review matters that were pending and awaiting the Minister's attention and consideration. These matters were from the period 2010 to 2015. They were on the Minister's desk waiting to be approved by the Minister. Absolutely nothing. A hundred and seventy-five applications. And, you know what is even more interesting is that our country is experiencing an eruption in the erection of an establishment of unauthorized development and uses of land, and so there is an enforcement unit in the Town and Country Planning Division. Between 2014, 2015 and 2016 there are now over 2,000 enforcement matters that were awaiting attention. Two thousand matters that the Minister failed to deal with that I am now dealing with. Two thousand matters.

And, Madam Speaker, as a consequence of these, this maladministration, the Town and Country Planning Division has been mandated to implement the review of published policies and site development standards to ensure accurate and consistent application of policies, so that no Minister can willy-nilly just give anybody approval, and no member of staff could do that either. They have also been mandated to review local area plans and conduct major policy review based on ministerial direction, and we have established a complex facilitation committee where we bring together not only members of the Town and Country Planning, but members from the Ministry of Works and Transport, members from local government, so that we can facilitate development at a faster pace than ever before.

Madam Speaker, I would like to report that under the last administration, when I came into office there were reports from the public which suggest that some officers of the Town and Country Planning were not exercising correct procedures regarding the processing of applications. It seems as though there may have been some underhandedness over the last five years, and there is a suggestion that there may have been some corrupt practices, and what we have done is establish an internal investigation and we are addressing this issue through this investigation, and also through training and mentorship at the division. So this kind of corruption that took place under the last five years will be completely eliminated. [*Desk thumping*]

6.05 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I will like to turn very quickly to the CSO. Over the last five years the CSO was allowed to languish. You will recall that on more than one occasion we were told that the CSO, members of staff of the CSO had no home, and for quite some time they had been working from home. But, Madam Speaker, I will admit, that just before I became the Minister of Planning and Development they were properly housed in a building on Frederick Street and they have another location in Port of Spain. But I would like to make the point that what we have done since coming into office is to set up a team of persons from the University of West Indies, from the private sector, from the Central Bank and from the CSO to work on establishing the National Statistical Institute. [*Desk thumping*]

This is an institute that will be an independent body and will not be exposed to the vagaries of manipulation in any way. But I would like to also indicate that since coming into office the CSO has moved assiduously to get its standards back up to a certain level. So now the normal information that the CSO gives out, retail prices, the labour force information and so on, is up to international standards and we are now getting data up to September, which is a far cry from what occurred under the last administration. [*Desk thumping*] The CSO—and we are giving an undertaking that by the first quarter of 2017 we will bring the legislation here to make the national statistical institute an independent institute in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make the point, however, that upon coming into office we also had some issues with staff at the CSO, and we found out that our internal systems indicated that over a period of time some officers at the CSO had been falsifying data related to the Continuous Sample Survey of Population, labour force data in particular. And robust quality checks at the CSO revealed that data was incorrect over a period of time.

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Hon. Members: “Woooo”.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: But we have found this out and, Madam Speaker, the persons involved, as far as I understand it, there are four officers. They have been suspended, an internal investigation is taking place [*Desk thumping*] and the officers have been removed from fieldwork.

It is to be noted, Madam Speaker, that this is a breach of the Statistics Act and the DPP has been advised and asked to, the police has been asked to investigate. Madam Speaker, we are returning this country to good governance. [*Desk thumping*] Let me talk about the situation involving the CDA.

Madam Speaker, over several weeks we have heard concerns raised about leases at the CDA and the like. May I say that a review of the financial position of the organization, that up to September 30, 2015 the authority had incurred financial losses, under the Member for Caroni Central, of \$45.8 million. In 2014, losses were \$28.4 million. There was a total drop in total income from \$40.2 million in 2014 to \$36.3 million in 2015. And additionally, Madam Speaker, the actual amount spent by the authority on their development projects was \$53,811,000—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you intend to avail yourself.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, one of the projects that the Member for Caroni Central saw as a flagship project of the CDA was the boardwalk. And on that project the amount of \$36,410,238 million was spent on the boardwalk, Phase two. Despite that exorbitant price tag, the CDA has, over the last financial year requested the sum of \$1,603,206 to carry out infrastructural works and repairs on that same boardwalk that they spent over \$36 million to construct.

The work was shoddy, the work was substandard and there was a lack of oversight. Madam Speaker, we also have the situation of leases being granted outside of the development plan that is approved for the CDA and interestingly several of those leases were granted in September 2015. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, in September 2015, 15 leases were granted between September 02 and the September 06, 2015. You know when was the election? September 07,

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2015. So whilst we were out campaigning they were out giving leases down at Chaguaramas. We are going to return Chaguaramas to what it is supposed to be, the national park for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we will work assiduously to ensure that employees who this previous Government tried to dismiss, and that is the daily paid employees, the board which was headed by Sen. Danny Solomon and the CEO, Miss Joycelin Hargreaves who has been dismissed, they had made the decision to get rid of all the daily paid employees. Thankfully, there was election, and that is 105 daily paid workers and we have retained the jobs of those 105 daily paid workers. [*Desk thumping*] And may I make the point that the expenditure at CDA has gone down considerably. Advertising has gone from \$1,353,752 to \$148,917—an 89 per cent change.

May I indicate that Ross Advertising was one of the main persons used for advertising. As a matter of fact, we had to pay Ross Advertising over \$3 million for work that they had done for advertising under the profligacy of the Member for Caroni Central. Consultancy and contract services, \$3,937,050, now down to \$1,557,000. Maintenance expenses \$3,053,990 now down to \$1 million. Overtime salaries and salary related cost, overtime has moved from \$4 million to \$1 million. As I said, Madam Speaker, we are going to make sure that this country gets value for money. My time is short, but let me make one point that needs to be made as the Minister of Planning and Development.

Madam Speaker, as you know we have said in our manifesto that we will bring to this country an extension of Vision 2020, what we are calling vision 2030. And the SEPP department of the Ministry of Planning and Development, the NTU, the PPRD, various aspects of the Ministry have come together and they have written the draft, the vision document. This document, there has been consultation among stakeholders and also within Ministries on the draft vision document which, I have told the Member for Fyzabad, will be laid in Parliament for debate. But in keeping with what he had said regarding a vision that all of us can coalesce around.

Madam Speaker, may I indicate that with regard to this vision document there are few salient aspects that I must highlight and these are that we must respond to the global climate change and the implications for us as Small Island Developing States. As you know, we have signed the Paris Agreement. Secondly, we must respond to the projected decline in fossil fuels and move to a mix of renewables and fossil fuels. Thirdly, the pace of technological change continues unabated and we must respond to that. Robotics—and my colleague, the Member for

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Laventille/East Morvant spoke about that. Biomedical innovations, healthcare delivery, education, transportation—every aspect of life, there have been technological developments.

We have to respond to a population that is ageing. We have to put things in place to ensure that we give proper healthcare. And we must respond to whatever domestic challenges there are. Dependence on oil and gas and also the crime situation, food security and sustainability, and low productivity. Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate that the Economic Development Advisory Board, and NTAC, the tripartite team we have all been working on ensuring that we get the best document for Trinidad and Tobago. And I commend the work that has been done thus far.

But the point I would like to make further, Madam Speaker, is that all of this, this document that we will be bringing has been done for free. It has been done using staff from the Ministry and staff from other Ministries within the public service. Interestingly, the last Government was in the process of preparing a new national development plan, policy framework called Action 21. Action 21 was intended to be the next medium-term framework for the period 2016 to 2021 and the plan was a joint collaboration between the same SEPP and the Applied Policy Research Unit and various consultancies.

The consultants were required to prepare specific chapters for inclusion in the document. And under the Member for Caroni Central, this is what occurred: Madam Speaker, Dr. Mukesh Basdeo, lecturer at UWI prepared a chapter on governance and he charged the Government \$128,000 for preparing that chapter. A chapter. Dr. Roger Hosein—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: The same fella.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The same Roger Hosein who is always giving advice, prepared a chapter on “Manpower Assessment” at a cost of \$154,000. Dr. Roger Hosein, again, prepared a chapter on “Resource Allocation” at a cost of \$128,000. Madam Speaker, may I point out that this document never became a reality because the staff at the Ministry found the work was substandard.

Mr. Imbert: And they get all that money?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: And they got all that money. And let me say there were others and the total amount paid, including a foreign consultant, was \$1,102,000 for no work, nothing that could have been used.

6.20 p.m.

And, Madam Speaker, let me also indicate that we are working closely with

the IDB, with the UN, with the European Union, to ensure that we make Trinidad and Tobago the kind of country that can survive these challenges and ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago get value for money, get—their tax dollars are, in fact, worth what they put in, in this country. We have decided that we will do that and we will do that whether you come along with us or whether we have to do it on our own. [*Desk thumping*] But it is imperative that it must be done.

Madam Speaker, this Government has a plan for the development of our country. All we ask of our communities—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney, your speaking time has expired.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, thank you very kindly for this opportunity to contribute to this debate. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Hon. Member: Tell dem! Tell dem! [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, we will give way to the Member if he wishes.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: No, tomorrow—

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House. [*Interruption*] Can we just suspend for three minutes? Hon. Members, can you be seated?

6.22 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.25 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am always prepared at any time. It might have taken seven months but I am always prepared. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to just state that I saw the Member for Caroni Central was just about to stand up, that is why I did not stand up, you know, when I should have. But that is all right, save your fire for tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to join in this debate here this evening, and from the onset let me state that I have sat here and I have listened to my colleagues on the other said of the House and it never ceases to amaze me that some of them are seasoned politicians. I have been here nine years. Some of them have been here longer than I have been, and to listen to some of the vacuous statements made—

Hon. Members: Ohhh!

Miss M. Mc Donald:—to listen to some of the allegations made against this

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Government, after five years, from 2010 to 2015, and the amount of advice we would have given from the other side of the House, I sat through five years of horror. I sat through five years of mismanagement, and then to listen today, over the last week, at what passes for a debate in this House—a budgetary debate—I am so disheartened. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Government’s theme for 2017 is “Shaping a Brighter Future - a Blueprint for Transformation and Growth.” And let me state that I could support this budgetary theme because, no doubt, the Minister of Finance would have crafted proposals in order for us to realize some form of transformation and growth, maybe not in the short term but over a medium to long-term period. What the Minister of Finance is basically doing here is seeking to lay the foundation in this difficult time in the shaping of a sound economy. And I listened to my colleague from Arouca/Maloney, and she has put it in such a nutshell; she has explained to this House and to the wider citizenry in this country what we met when we came in 2015.

But we must move on. We cannot just sit down and think about the past. We must move on; we must push forward. But in pushing forward we have to understand what we met; we have to understand the difficult times, and it will take time. It will take effort. It will take courage for us to get ahead with the people’s business. [*Desk thumping*]

The Opposition—you have attacked this theme, but, Madam Speaker, I sat here and I listened to their budgetary themes from 2011. 2011: “Facing the Issues - Turning Around the Economy.” They did nothing. 2012: “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation.” What did you steady? What economic transformation took place? What was the economic transformation that took place? 2013: “Stimulating Growth - Generating Prosperity.” Is that true?

Hon. Member: Old talk.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Is that true? 2014: “Sustaining Growth - Securing Prosperity.”

Hon. Member: “Fuh deyself.”

Miss M. Mc Donald: What is that? Baseless, vacuous statements. 2015: “Empowering our People through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity.” Madam Speaker, the end result of all of this falsehood was that they spent over \$400 million—billion dollars in this country.

Hon. Member: Billion. Billion.

Miss M. Mc Donald: That is what they have done. So all of those budgetary themes and all the accompanying proposals, I think that is what has put us in the position we are in today. I remember sitting across there as Opposition Chief Whip for five years and I lamented every single budgetary debate. No new income streams were created to support the unprecedented increases in expenditure—none. Absolutely no attempts were made at any form of diversification of this economy—none.

And what was even worse, Madam Speaker, is the nature of the expenditure. Their expenditure was basically one of a recurrent nature, and not the capital expenditure. We spoke to them about that. In order to fund projects, what did they do? The deficit was made up by borrowing, whether that borrowing was internal or whether it was external. That is what you all did. The net public sector debt at the end of 2010 when we demitted office stood at 32 per cent of Gross Domestic Product—of GDP. But with the explosion in Government borrowing over the five-year period, this ratio increased to 46.3 per cent of GDP by September, 2015.

Hon. Member: What year?

Miss M. Mc Donald: I am accounting for your period. I want to remind this House that for the past five years while I sat on the other side, I spoke about the persistent budget deficits, whilst I acknowledged back then—and I will acknowledge now—nothing is wrong with budget deficit financing. It is a mechanism that is used across countries, across the globe in order to grow your economies, to rejuvenate your economies. But I always say to them: what is your exit strategy? You cannot continue to remain in that position.

Every year your expenditure is increasing, no income stream to support it. So the difference between your income and your expenditure, that deficit figure must be funded from somewhere. So that is why I said, there must be an exit strategy to wean the Government away from this position. So I am appalled to listen, I heard when the Member for—[*Interruption*] Please, Member for Couva South, I did not interfere with you when you spoke. [*Desk thumping*] When you gave your sermon here, I did not interfere.

Member for Tabaquite, I was appalled to hear you. You are so concerned about deficit and debt to GDP ratio and all of that. Since when you care? Since when? You are one who sat here for the five years—five years—and saw your Government with those persistent deficit budgets every single year, and I sat here

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for that period of time and what did you do? You said nothing. You were part of that clique and you said nothing.

Hon. Member: “Is cabal. Is cabal.”

Miss M. Mc Donald: All of a sudden now, you are very disingenuous, Member for Tabaquite—very disingenuous.

Madam Speaker, internationally, oil and gas prices have been on the decrease throughout fiscal 2015. As a matter of fact, Trinidad and Tobago has lost something like \$20 billion in annual revenue since 2014. But despite this situation, the former Government took virtually no action to stabilize the public finances. You all did nothing to stabilize the public finances. I will give you an example. In 2015, while Government’s revenue from oil fell by \$8 billion, you only reduced your expenditure by some \$3 billion. So as a consequence, the fiscal deficit ballooned to \$7 billion or roughly 4.2 per cent of your GDP.

Madam Speaker, I want to say this evening, the situation before us is clear. We cannot spend what we do not have. We cannot spend what we do not have. And as the Prime Minister will say, you cannot get more from less. If our revenues have been reduced, then we have to reduce and adjust our expenditure. In other words, Madam Speaker, we must bring our revenues in line with our expenditure. If we do not do this as a responsible Government, we run the risk of mortgaging away the future of our country. That is what we are doing, mortgaging away the future of our country, and it will be on the backs of our children and grandchildren to pay this debt that we have created now.

6.35 p.m.

So this is the time that we need to take corrective action. This is the time when we need to become fiscally mature. This is the time. [*Desk thumping*] The time is now, Madam Speaker.

I will tell you something further. It is better, Madam Speaker, that we as the Government, adjust our programme for ourselves. We must not leave it to an external agency like the IMF to come in to do it for us. You see, I can assure you that if we allow an agency like the IMF to come in to restructure our finances, I can assure you that the first expenditure they are going to cut is recurrent expenditure because recurrent expenditure does not result in the creation or the acquisition of fixed assets. It covers expenses like personnel expenditure, like salaries and wages, it covers like purchases of goods and services, transfers and subsidies, debt servicing. That is your recurrent expenditure.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago does not operate in a vacuum. We can be characterized, the Trinidad and Tobago economy can be characterized as an open dependent economy. We are price-takers. So whatever happens in the international global market, whatever happens there, because we are price-takers, we would be subject to all the fluctuations and whatnot, if prices go up, if prices go down, simply because as I said, we are price-takers.

Madam Speaker, the issue for us now, as a Government is—*[Interruption]*—how do we manage—you are correct—our economy in the face of decreasing and unstable oil prices? But there is a bigger challenge for this Government, and that challenge is the expectations of the citizens of this country. Madam Speaker, as a Trinidadian, I want to believe that my fellow Trinidadians are intelligent people. They can understand, and they could more than understand the predicament that we have found ourselves.

Trinidad and Tobago is not singular in what is happening to our economy. Adjustments need to be made. *[Desk thumping]* What I can tell you, I could tell you what we need to do is just communicate more with the public, allowing them to know at every stage what is happening. Whether our revenues are increasing, whether our revenues are decreasing, what is happening to expenditure, but the corrective measure must be taken now and communicated to the citizens of this country.

Madam Speaker, permit me at this point to explain to you what is happening in other countries, to demonstrate that countries similar to Trinidad and Tobago, what they are experiencing, to show that we do not operate in a vacuum, that we are not singular, we are not on our own. Let us look at Saudi Arabia. We are going to look at four countries. Let us look at Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia possesses 18 per cent of the world's proven petroleum reserves and it ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum. The oil and gas sector accounts for about 50 per cent of GDP and about 85 per cent of export earnings. But over the past two years, Madam Speaker, Saudi Arabia had to cut subsidies, slash spending and started to look for new ways to raise revenue. That is the diversification process that they are going through. And only on September 26th, the Saudi Arabian Cabinet introduced for the first time public sector wage cuts.

Saudi Arabia also saw their credit rating downgraded earlier this year by Moody's because of the collapse of oil prices. In terms of economic growth, Saudi Arabia in 2011, their economic growth, they grew by 10 per cent; by 2015 they were down to just 3.4 per cent. They are predicting that oil prices for Saudi Arabia will remain at low levels for the foreseeable future and the Government

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will have to implement more austerity measures to curb its budget deficit.

Let us take a look at the Nigeria. Madam Speaker, Nigeria is considered a middle-income emerging market and it is the largest economy in Africa. The oil and gas sector accounts for about 35 per cent of GDP and petroleum exports revenue represents over 90 per cent of total exports revenue, but because of low oil prices it has greatly affected the Nigerian economy. The country is officially in a recession. They are contracting by 2.2 per cent annually for the first time in 20 years. Falling oil prices had mainly caused this slump in Nigeria. In terms of economic growth, in 2011 that economy grew by 4.9 per cent; by 2015, they are down to 2.7 per cent.

Let us look at Norway. [*Interruption*] Falling oil prices.

Hon. Member: Blame the UNC.

Miss M. Mc Donald: You may not understand that. Norway. Norway's share of GDP from the petroleum sector peaked at 25 per cent in 2008, and was at 22 per cent in 2012. However, with the decline in oil and gas prices, the contribution to Norway's GDP from the petroleum sector has slipped to 15 per cent in 2015. Again, low prices, falling production.

In the last couple of years, Norwegian energy giant Statoil, along with others in the industry, axed thousands of jobs and scaled back a lot of contracts with their suppliers. Economic growth has slowed down and this has led to an unemployment rate of now over 4 per cent in Norway. Investment levels have fallen too by about one-third since oil prices have collapsed. Household debts in Norway have reached more than 200 per cent of annual disposal income, making Norwegians one of the most indebted people in Europe. That is Norway.

I am going to bring it closer to home and we are going to look at Venezuela, just next door. Venezuela may have the world's largest proven oil reserves, but plunging crude prices have helped push the economy over the precipice. The economy is languishing at the bottom, Madam Speaker, of many important economic indicators, and Venezuela is fearing the worst. They are doing worse than Ukraine, worse than Argentina, worse than Greece. It is also one of the world's least competitive countries.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, while the Member for Port of Spain South has not sought my protection, I can hear you and I would like to hear the Member's contribution without any disturbance. Continue please, Member for Port of Spain South.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And in the Global

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Competitiveness Report which was just released earlier this year, Venezuela has been placed 132nd out of 140 countries. That is where they are ranked, 132nd. Trinidad and Tobago is ranked at number 89. So the combination of depressed prices and record low oil production have had a negative effect on the economic growth in Venezuela. In 2011, Venezuela's economic growth was at 4.2 per cent; by 2015 they had negative 5.7 per cent; negative 5.7 per cent. And so, Venezuela's economy has been contracting since 2014 and will not return to growth anytime soon. It is being forecasted that the economy would shrink by some 9.7 per cent for fiscal 2016.

Madam Speaker, this is the environment within which Trinidad and Tobago operates. We do not operate in a vacuum. What the Minister of Finance has done in this budget, the Minister of Finance laid the foundation for macroeconomic stability [*Desk thumping*] and, in fact, the Minister of Finance was clear that growth in the economy will not come overnight. He said, "I will project by 2020". We will be able to even it off, we will be able to balance the budget. He did not say we are going to make a surplus you know. He is prudent. He is fiscally prudent. He said by 2020 we will be able to balance it. So to bring revenues in line with expenditure that is what we are about. As my colleague said, it is about good governance. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Madam Speaker, it will take time, it will take a lot of will, it will take strength, but at the end of the day we as a people, we as Trinidadians and Tobagonians, we will see the light. Tough times do not last, but tough people do. [*Desk thumping*] We are resilient people and we can persevere, and I am telling you that Trinidad and Tobago, we will persevere to the end. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let me take some time out because, again, I am appalled that they are criticizing the Minister of Finance and his budgetary proposals, but let me share with this House, and share with the national community, what the UNC offered us by way of budgets during their last five years in office. In 2011, the expenditure was \$49 billion, their revenue was \$41.3 billion, their budget deficit was \$7.7 billion and they had an oil price of \$75. In 2012, the expenditure was \$54.6 billion, their revenue was \$47 billion, their budget deficit was \$7.6 billion with an oil price of \$75. In 2013, the expenditure was \$58.4 billion, their revenue was \$50.7 billion, the budget deficit was \$7.7 billion, the oil price of \$75. These are their figures, you know. I am just quoting them. In 2014, the expenditure was \$61.2 billion, their revenue was \$55 billion, their budget deficit was \$6.4 billion, the oil price was \$80. In 2015, their expenditure was \$64.7 billion, revenue at \$60.4, the budget deficit at \$4.4 billion and the oil price at \$80.

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Notice, Madam Speaker, that each time the projected revenue increased, what did they do? They spent more and more and more. So they have demonstrated over the last five years and they have the gall and the temerity to come here to criticize the Minister of Finance's budgetary proposals. They have demonstrated complete and total irresponsibility over the last five years. They acted as though a budget was only about expenditure and, you know what, they saved nothing for the rainy day. And I will tell you what, now that the rain is pouring they want us to believe that the sun is shining and we must continue to spend. "Doh cut this, doh cut that, doh do this, don't do that. Ah want meh road, Ah want meh house, Ah want meh school", but they do not understand the stringent times that we are operating under. They are not understanding that.

6.50 p.m.

What the Minister of Finance is doing is bringing back a measure of sanity and responsibility into fiscal affairs. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is happening. They on the other side, they took no hard decisions, they implemented no significant revenue-generating measures over the last five years. Even something as non-oppressive as the property tax, they have not even implemented it. Almost a billion dollars by now they have lost in revenue and you want to come to tell us about prudence. You cannot do that! You all should be ashamed of what you all have done. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] And furthermore, you see all of you all who were here, who sat, whether you sat in the other place or you sat here, all of you should atone for your sins that you have committed against this country. [*Desk thumping*]

As the Minister of Finance noted, energy revenue has fallen from \$19 billion to about \$2 billion over the last two years. I will tell you what. The energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago contributes something like 34.9 per cent to the GDP and 40 per cent to Government's revenue. It plays a major role. So this alone highlights the extremely difficult situation that we have found ourselves in. But as I pointed out, we are not singular in this—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: We are plural.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Yes, we are. We live in a global society. We are price-takers, Member for Chaguanas East. But you all want us to continue this irresponsible attitude as though money will fall from the sky. It will not happen.

I have taken a look at the Minister of Finance's budgetary measures and all the measures on the energy sector, manufacturing, agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, and I am telling you, as he said, you are not going to see it overnight, it is

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going to come and it is going to creep up on us. It will be step by step by step but we are going to do it and we are going to get it done whether you support us or not. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the rantings of the Member for Siparia when she spoke, she made a statement on education which really piqued my interest and I pulled her *Hansard* to see it, page 11 of the *Hansard* and she said and I am quoting:

“...the hon. Prime Minister...”

And that she referring to when our leader was in Opposition.

“...the hon. Prime Minister had complained about the number of schools...” being built.

She went on:

“...a policy...which placed Trinidad and Tobago to be among the first countries in the world to achieve...early childhood education.”

She continued. The Member questioned the fact:

“...that it was the PNM who had made a major contribution to education...” in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I could not let that statement pass because it is fraught with deception. One of the critical objectives for those on the other side, and even new ones who do not know, one of the critical objectives of Vision 2020 under Mr. Manning was developing an innovative people. There were five pillars of development [*Interruption*] and one of them was developing an innovative people to achieve this objective and to achieve this objective—[*Continuous interruption*] Madam Speaker, please, please, “protect meh, protect meh”. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, seeing that the Member has asked for protection, maybe you would like to take a little walk and come back in. Okay? It is late in the evening and really could Members, please, observe and I am not going to ask again. Okay? So Member for Couva South, maybe a little walk might help. Continue, please, Member for Port of Spain South.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would like to claim back my five minutes, eh. [*Interruption and laughter*] Yes, I was stating that one of the pillars that I am referring to is developing an innovative people under the Vision 2020 plan and to achieve this objective, PNM’s policy sought to grant universal access to early childhood care and education to all pre-schoolers. It was the PNM that made access to primary and secondary school available to all its

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citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I could remember my grandparents recalling those days when parents had to pay for their children to go to secondary schools. Let me take you back in time and remind this House and the national community about the many tertiary education spaces which were opened up. You would recall we just had UWI but under the PNM, we increased tertiary spaces—UTT, COSTAATT and the University of the Southern Caribbean. All these were opened up under the PNM and to support the influx of students, PNM introduced HELP, PNM introduced GATE Programme to assist those students. You will speak—Member for Caroni Central, you know, I sat here—you made us make a faux pas. I sat here because I thought you were going to speak, so whilst I am on my feet, you save yours for tomorrow and do not interfere with me. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, our mantra was from nursery to tertiary education free. [*Desk thumping*] From nursery to tertiary, free education.

Let me share with you some of the school assets in this country when we demitted office in 2010. Member for Caroni East, this is for you: 126 secondary schools, 444 primary schools, 161 Early Childhood Care Centres, 49 Government Assisted Schools. Member for Caroni East, I understand that the Ministry is still looking for the 100 schools built, still looking for the 100 schools. But let me remind this House and let me remind the national community what you, UNC, had to offer in terms of tertiary education. You offered dollar for dollar. So if your tertiary education is for a year, you had to pay \$50,000. If you did not have that \$25,000, you could not get tertiary education. You could not get it. I am saying, again, that none of you could claim the legacy of education in this country. The legacy for free education in this country is the domain of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

And I will tell you what—I am sorry some of them are not here, because the Member for Chaguanas West, he did law with me. We were in class together. Member for St Augustine did law with me. Member for Siparia did law with me. All of them subject to a good PNM education free of charge. [*Desk thumping*] I thought that, Madam Speaker, this is something that I really had to debunk.

I turn my attention to some constituency issues and this is something that the Member for Siparia, when she spoke, she said that we claim that nothing was done for Port of Spain and for east Port of Spain. And I want to remind her that, again, I took five years, telling this House, telling the then Government and the national community that nothing was done in Port of Spain. You all allowed Port of Spain to deteriorate over the last five years.

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I recall this statement, this Budget Statement 2011 where the then Government announced that they will be opening new economic spaces— Member for Caroni East, you will remember this. And to this end, they developed five poles for expansion in the medium term. Five growth poles. The one that is of interest to Laventille and east Port of Spain is the third growth pole and I want to read it to this House to remind this House and the national community what we are dealing with.

“The third growth pole will be the East Port of Spain Area. The intervention here will also rely heavily on the creation of business incubators, initially targeting the arts, culture and entertainment. We also propose to restore East Port of Spain into a ‘heritage city’ like Old Havana in Cuba or Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. These measures are expected to reduce the impact of poverty and steadily contribute to the economic health of these communities by optimizing existing entrepreneurial resources. We will establish a special task force, including civil society, UTT and UWI to develop a creative plan for a new entrepreneurship in small business development, particularly in East Port of Spain.”

Madam Speaker, five years after, \$400 billion after, nothing for Port of Spain, nothing for east Port of Spain, nothing for Laventille. You know what they did in 2012 or 2013, early 2013? They invited all the youths from the area, Laventille and east Port of Spain, to come to a training session, some skills training session out in the Savannah one Sunday. After they spent \$5 million in music and eats and drink, nothing came out of it.

Hon. Member: How much they spend?

Miss M. Mc Donald: Five million dollars on eats and drinks for over 100 persons attended, right? Over 100 persons attended and nothing happened. Nothing happened in east Port of Spain \$400 billion after and—*[Interruption]* Listen to me, Member for Naparima, do not shout at me across the room. Do not shout at me.

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(4), threatening.

Miss M. Mc Donald: And I am not giving way. I am not giving way.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, it is precisely for that reason I have been asking Members to listen in silence. There is something in law called equity, he who comes to equity must come with clean hands. Continue, please, Member for Port of Spain South.

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Miss M. Mc Donald: Thank you. So when the Member for Siparia said that they did things in Port of Spain, I am telling you, as the MP for Port of Spain South, nothing has happened and I sat here for five years and I spoke about it, and if you all are truthful, you all would know what I am saying is the truth.

I want to look at housing. Madam Speaker, for the five years, I cajoled, pleaded and begged for 31 decanting centres, wooden houses, along the Plaisance Road in John John, and the former Government, absolutely nothing was done. I am pleased to announce that when I came into office four months, I was able to remove 28 people, reallocated them to different parts of the country. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Housing has assured me that where those decanting centres are located, what we will do, as we break down, as we demolish, we will construct new houses in the east Port of Spain area.

With respect to roads, the Minister of Works and Transport has given me the undertaking—we have submitted the listing for roads—that it will begin soon, refurbishment and construction will begin soon.

7.05 p.m.

With respect to schools, there are two schools that, to me are burning issues to me. They are the South East Port of Spain Secondary School and the Piccadilly Government Primary School. I understand that the Piccadilly Government Primary School is actually in the accounts in the budget this year, the rebuilding of the Piccadilly School, for the 2017 fiscal. I could only hope that we could do some major renovations to the South East Port of Spain Secondary School.

Madam Speaker, I did not intend to take this long but I felt that I needed to clear up quite a few things and I want to say I thank my constituents, even during my difficult times my constituents stood with me, from St. James to Woodbrook to east Port of Spain. I thank you. Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I beg your indulgence to have a suspension for five minutes while I confer with the substantive Leader of the House.

Madam Speaker: Members, this House is now suspended to 7.15 p.m.

7.06 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

7.14 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to 10.30 a.m., Wednesday, October 12, 2016, at which time we will continue the debate.

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question, I wish to address a matter of a particular post on social media depicting the posture of a Member while in the Chamber during yesterday's sitting.

A Member in his contribution earlier today advised us about the care which we should give to words used in this Chamber. That care should also be paid to our conduct while in the Chamber. I wish to remind Members of the Speaker's Procedural Bulletin No. 1, dated November 27, 2015, dealing with the use of electronic devices in the Chamber, and I wish to particularly draw to the attention of Members item 3(b) to (d), which deals specifically with the taking of photographs and recordings in the Chamber for the purpose of ridicule and satire.

I am to advise Members that I shall request the Clerk of the House to investigate this matter and to report accordingly and any Member who has been found to have offended the Standing Orders will be dealt with in accordance with the Standing Orders.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.17 p.m.