

Leave of Absence

Friday, November 18, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 18, 2016

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, leave of absence: Dr. Lackram Bodoie MP, Member for Fyzabad; Mr. Rushton Paray MP, Member for Mayaro; and Miss Marlene Mc Donald MP, Member for Port of Spain South, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2007. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
 2. Second Report of Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 3. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 4. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
- Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
5. Supreme Court of Judicature (Variation of Rate of Interest on Judgment Debt) Order, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 6. Petty Civil Courts (Variation of Rate of Interest on Judgment Debt) Order, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

7. Ministerial Response to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities with Specific Focus on Access to Services and Employment. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
8. Ministerial Response to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Support Programmes and Services for Children whose Parent or Guardian was the Perpetrator or Victim of a Violent Offence. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia)*]
9. Ministerial Response to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities with Special Focus on Access to Services and Employment. [*Hon. A. Garcia*]
10. Ministerial Response to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Support Programmes and Services for Children whose Parent or Guardian was the Perpetrator or Victim of a Violent Offence. [*The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn)*]
11. Response to the Private Motion approved in the House of Representatives on April 22, 2016 on the Ministry of Education's Programme for children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

**Mitsubishi Plant Project
(Renegotiated Terms and Conditions)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister indicate when a statement would be made with regard to the renegotiated terms and conditions of the Mitsubishi Plant Project in light of the assurances given on March 18, 2016, June 17, 2016 and September 14, 2016 that the Government would report to the country when an agreement is finalized?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can give the House the assurance now that that statement, a comprehensive one, would be laid at the next sitting of Parliament.

**Airlift to Tobago
(Details of)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister indicate the arrangements entered into by the Ministry of Tourism and various international airlines to provide airlift to Tobago, and can the Prime Minister give an undertaking to provide the cost of this arrangement?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these questions come with very little lead time. This particular question asked for some specific cost data which we have to consult the Tobago House of Assembly. The question as written, if provided in another forum under a different Standing Order, can and will elicit a detailed answer with respect to the arrangements and the cost since these arrangements are largely guided by the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Singh: Supplemental. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The second part of the question, recognizing the limitations in terms of time, hon. Prime Minister, asks whether you can give an undertaking to provide the necessary cost arrangements.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is what I just did. Obviously I was not successful. Yes, I am giving that undertaking, but I am saying if you file the question under another Standing Order, which you are very familiar with, on different circumstances, we can respond to your specific question. However, if it makes you happier I can undertake now to give you an answer to this in writing after today.

Mr. Singh: Thank you.

**Ambassador Eden Charles
(Reasons for Revoked Appointment)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you very much. Could the Prime Minister indicate the reasons for the decision to revoke the appointment of Ambassador Eden Charles, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, in keeping with the Civil Service (External Affairs) Regulations, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs maintains, as far as is practicable, a schedule of rotation of staff between headquarters and missions, and between missions. In this

context, the officer was overdue for a rotation to headquarters having served for 11 years undisturbed in the same post. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: So, hon. Prime Minister, the principle then in terms of foreign affairs is that when I say come you cometh, when I say go you goeth?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am sure that is a better principle than if I am say come you go elsewhere and you “doh” come. [*Desk thumping*]

**Economic Development Advisory Board
(Recommendation for Stimulation of Growth)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister state whether the Economic Development Advisory Board, chaired by Dr. Terrence Farrell, has delivered any recommendation for stimulation of growth of the Trinidad and Tobago economy?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thus far, the Economic Development Advisory Board has delivered—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: This is not a budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva South, please, if you have any mutterings, you know the procedure to proceed. So please do not interrupt. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, as of today the Economic Development Advisory Board has delivered at least seven Advisory Notes which come to the Office of the Prime Minister, and if I just identify them for you. There was an Advisory Note responding to the declining revenue scenario—that was the first Advisory Note that came from that Board; then we got a Note on the tripartite discussions on the Economic Adjustment Programme; then we had one on accelerated deepening of relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba. Another one was establishing a heritage fund, separate and apart from what exists now. Item five, primarily proposals for the pursuit of mutually beneficial opportunities between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela in the current economic situation, and this particular Note has been the basis of a lot of work we are doing in the energy sector and in the very near future we will have something to say about that. Item six was revisiting current macroeconomic policy management, and this has been very useful in the Ministry of Finance’s handling of the current microeconomic situation. There was also a Note on engaging the Trinidad and Tobago West Indian diaspora which is

actively engaging the attention of the Government, and again we will talk about that a bit later on. There was also work done on liaising intensively with the IDB to operationalize a technology for citing exercise as a necessary step to the creation of research and development centres, and to initiate studies on the citing of a modern port and logistics hub as part of the redevelopment of the Port of Port of Spain.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will these Notes, these seven Notes, be made available to Members of Parliament for perusal?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: As and when it is deemed useful, we did indicate that from time to time we will make some of these Notes public but you must understand that these Notes are Advisory Notes to the Government, to the Cabinet, and we will make them public as appropriate.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister list who are the members that sit on this Economic Advisory Board, please?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have the information today?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It is on the public record. We have published that from the Office of Prime Minister. It is chaired by Dr. Terrence Farrell and—I do not want to go guessing because there are so many committees that I do not want to call a wrong name, but this information has been made public, and if it is to be made public, if you ask a question we can resubmit to you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could the hon. Prime Minister indicate whether the issue on the heritage fund that you spoke about, is that in keeping with the legislation that is proposed to separate the heritage aspect from the stabilisation aspect, or is it a separate issue?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It is in fact that issue as to whether we should have—we currently have a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and one can make a distinction between what the Heritage Fund means and how it should operate and what the Stabilisation Fund is and what it is meant for. There is a discussion and there are different points of views as to whether we should maintain one fund of Heritage and Stabilisation, and there is a stronger point of view that we should separate the Heritage Fund, and the point being made that the Heritage Fund is not to be touched in the way that we use the Stabilisation Fund as we have done recently to provide budget support, and it is in the context of that discussion that the Board has given us advise on the establishment of a heritage fund and we are

working towards a decision on that, and as soon as we agree on that, as Government, we will bring that to the Parliament if that is the decision taken.

Dr. Gopeesingh: These measures that have been advised by, or sent to the Prime Minister from the Economic Advisory Board, do these recommendations impact upon, or are there any relationships of those recommendations to the IMF recommendations which the Government seemed to move on with from time to time? Is there any nexus between those recommendations and the IMF recommendations that the Government works from time to time with?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to make it abundantly clear, this Government has stated over and over that we are taking responsibility for our adjustments and this Economic Advisory Board has no nexus to the IMF and we are taking no instructions from the IMF from this, and this is in fact a situation when there is no nexus between this exercise which will guide this Government's policy and any arrangement which may or may not come with IMF contact.

Outstanding Debts to Contractors (Payment of)

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can the Prime Minister state when outstanding debts to contractors in various sectors of the economy will be paid?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, all Governments are continuously making payments to those persons and contracted agencies who supply goods and services to the State. This Government has been doing that and we have been making payments to legitimate claims from contractors. We have been rejecting claims that have been found to be questionable, or in some instances outright corrupt. This is an ongoing process and we have paid substantial amounts of moneys to contractors since we have come into office and that process is continuing. [*Desk thumping*]

Increase of US Deportees Arrival (Protocols being Considered)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister state what protocols are being considered by his Government to deal with the possibility of an increase of US deportees arriving at our shores in the light of possible new immigration policies by the recently elected Republican administration?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make it abundantly clear that the term “deportee” means something as against the phrase “returning national”. This question is specifically about deportees, meaning persons who have been subject to the United States judicial process and for whom a decision have been made to repatriate them by United States Government action.

Insofar as that is the understanding of the term “deportee”, then protocols are in place, have been in place prior to the arrival of Donald Trump and the Republican Government, and we will continue to use those protocols which give us some advance notice, if I dare say warning, of such persons who are returning to our country having been subject to adverse court arrangements in America. And when they get here some element of debriefing takes place, and depending on the nature of that debriefing and the outcome, such persons may or may not be kept under surveillance and, of course, other persons who might return to our country, not by virtue of any United States judicial process, but who may on their own volition in response to pressures in the US market or a living space, are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are free to come and go as they wish.

Mr. Charles: Would the Prime Minister tell us whether his Government would be prepared to review the subventions to institutions like Vision on Mission that assist with problems like this?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We would like to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we understand the very good work that is being done and there is no point in us burying our heads in the sand. The work that is being done by these organizations are valuable in maintaining national security and national stability, and if as we expect that the flow is increasing, and as we see that these people are arriving in our community and without help, they could become catalysts for criminal conduct in our country, it will do well for us to assist those organizations. [*Desk thumping*]

Unused State of the Art Equipment (Couva Children's Hospital)

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Prime Minister aware that state of the art equipment is lying unused at the Couva Children's Hospital while problems exist with similar equipment at other health facilities; and could he state what steps are being taken to deal with this anomaly?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this question arises from a situation where new—I am not sure if it is state of the art—

equipment has been placed on a construction site by persons who felt that was the best thing to do. UDeCOTT issued taking over certificate to Shanghai Group International Caribbean Limited on July 25, 2016. Let me explain that.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago did not take delivery of this facility since it was under construction. We did not take delivery until July 25, 2016. Could not! This is a facility which was opened for political purposes in September of 2015, while being a construction site containing the said equipment which I am being questioned about. It will be in bad faith to utilize said equipment given that an expression of interest has been issued for a PPP arrangement, and that proposed partners will have to understand that such equipment was in place. Let me explain that.

Since we have taken over this facility, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, wanting to put this facility into the health care delivery system, has gone out for expressions of interest from the public, local and international. As soon as the deadline would have passed and we would have got those expressions of interest, we will know what kinds of developments can take place there and we will determine who and what agency or what company, local or international, will be made to operate this facility, and the equipment is part of that arrangement of the public-private partnership.

It is not prudent to relocate the equipment in a capricious ad hoc manner, and this had been already commissioned on a site due to the risk of damage to the equipment. So that is where this is at. I hope that in the very near future the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be able to report that we have got some useful interest and to bring that facility into the health care delivery system. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: In the event of a successful PPP model being sought for the complex, what would happen to the general population if they seek medical attention in an aspect where there is a PPP situation where the private sector has moved with the public sector? Would they have to be paying for fees there, or for medical care at that institution if that is successful?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the Member is being a bit previous. That is a question we cannot answer now. It will be determined by the nature of the outcome of public-private partnership. We will determine what goes on there, and until we have determined by a collaboration between the Government and the external partner, we cannot answer that question because as I am speaking to you now, I do not know what the proposals we have requested

will be. We have to wait until persons who are interested have expressed that interest, the Government will then evaluate that interest or those interests and determine which one is best for the national population. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: To the hon. Prime Minister, the expressions of interest, do they include both the adult aspect of the hospital and the paediatric, or one or the other?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I just told you it does not only include everything in the structure, it also includes the contents. It is a total offering, structure and contents.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right. Okay.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So that the persons who are looking at it will determine what they can do with the Government on what is there. Everything that is there is under consideration.

Escalating Crime (Specific Policies in Place)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Prime Minister aware that citizens are daily losing hope in the ability of this Government to deal with escalating crime and in the circumstances could he state the specific policies being put in place to assuage their concerns?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): I know of no situation where the citizens are daily losing hope. [*Desk thumping*] What I do know is that the people of Trinidad and Tobago for quite some time, not starting September 07, 2015, but for quite some time, have been dealing with an intractable unacceptable level of violent criminal conduct. [*Desk thumping*] And insofar as there is a response from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago today, our response has been to hold the agencies that we are resourcing and supporting, accountable for carrying out their duties in responding to the criminal element. And insofar as they, largely led by the police service, have been responding, the response has been over and above the normal standard policing in communities.

The police service embarks on and maintains a very high level of hotspot policing, targeting priority offenders, heightened efforts to find and seize illegal firearms, but, of course, recently we have been seeing a number of persons being killed by knife and stone and choking and whatever. However, we go on to support the police with high levels of visible policing and increased patrols, including joint patrols with the defence force, and we are holding out the prospect that in the very near future our municipal reform will add community policing in a

very significant way to that effort. The police service is actively supporting its engagement with the Police Youth Clubs and we are partnering with a number of communities to try and steer youngsters away from being enticed into a life of crime.

We are also ensuring that the police is adequately resourced with those items which are required to discharge their duties. And of course, we are encouraging the police at every level to root out rouge officers from the police service and we are making increased use of technology in information gathering and, of course, at the level of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we have been cooperating very actively with our external partners to increase collaboration in crime fighting between Trinidad and Tobago and regional and international bodies who have an interest in what we are doing here and we have an interest in what they are doing for us outside.

So it is a comprehensive effort and there is no question of losing hope. The worst thing you could do is to lose hope in the face of difficulty. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, given that we have heard most of these strategies before and they seem to be not working, would the Prime Minister give us a timeline with a deadline to achieve the goals set out by those strategies he has identified?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not going to get into any useless old talk about that because crime is not fought like that. It is not fought like that. We are approaching crime fighting as a comprehensive exercise which has to be sustained with no end date. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Can the Prime Minister not give us comfort to say murder rate would be decreased by 10 per cent in six months by these strategies?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member! I would entertain that question. It is similar along the lines of the one that just went. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Khan: Could the Prime Minister on that note indicate that if he could utilize his good office to decrease the violent type of imagery utilized on platforms to incentivize crowd behaviour? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am sure that the Member would find support on this side if he encourages his Members not to go about abusing people personally and accusing them of rape and paedophilia, and similar kinds of disgraceful conduct from your platform. Charity begins at home. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay Members. Members! Please. Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*] Members, please. Thank you.

Dr. Khan: I would assure the Prime Minister I will do my best, once he does his on his side.

Diversification of the Economy (Details of)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Prime Minister state four areas in which he intends to diversify our economy away from the energy sector and can he give an undertaking to provide the number of jobs anticipated in each area?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer to this question has been given on many, many occasions at very many platforms, and I could tell you manufacturing in its very many forms is our number one effort, including manufacturing in the metallurgy area and in other areas that have been traditional to us.

Agriculture and agro processing, and you would have seen in the last budget that the Minister of Finance has made agro processing a tax and duty free activity.

Maritime service is number three where we are working on the possibilities of establishing ship building/ship repair, dry docking and yachting services and, again, we have given fiscal incentives with respect to yachting services and, of course, the creative industries: film, entertainment, fashion and design. Those are just four areas.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Again, I look for quantifiable objectives. In the light of the fact that we have lost an estimated 20,000 jobs, could you give an indication of how this will help in meeting that shortfall?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And if I may quote the Member from a previous era, we expect that with the successful implementation of these matters, operationalized within our ability as a country and the resources available and the markets available, we expect to grow our job market by thousands and thousands. [*Desk thumping*]

**Report on GATE
(Details of)**

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Question number 10 to the hon. Prime Minister: Would the hon. Prime Minister please state why the report on the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE), not yet been made public?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the GATE Task Force was a Cabinet-appointed committee to review policy guidelines on GATE and to make recommendations as it saw fit. The Task Force reported and that report was submitted to the Cabinet, and the Cabinet used that body of information, including advice and recommendations, to establish a Government policy on GATE, and that policy was made public on August 03, 2016. I do not know that the report itself had a requirement to be published in the public. What the report did was to advise the Government as to what are the many options and we did say at the time that there were some options that were offered to us which we accepted and some of which we did not accept. But I do not know that it has to be a public document, it is advice to the Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Karim: Hon. Prime Minister, given the nature of this report and the wide-ranging implications, is it possible for the public and including Members of Parliament to have access to this report?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I have no difficulty in making it available because we have nothing to hide.

Mr. Karim: Thank you. Hon. Prime Minister, just as a follow-up, will you be kind enough to indicate by when we can expect this report?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Now that you have raised it and you have requested it, I will make it available in the not-too-distant future. [*Laughter*]

**Roti Expenditure
(Diplomatic Centre Divali Function)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: In light of the Prime Minister's recent statement that the People's Partnership spent \$350,000 in roti for a Divali function at the Diplomatic Centre, can the Prime Minister indicate whether he has seen or is in possession of a bill fit to this effect?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the comment that is being addressed here is a comment which has to do with wanton spending and profligacy of the worst kind, [*Desk thumping*] and I have seen— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: [*Inaudible*—350 in roti!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister. Member, you asked a question, he is giving an answer. Please, you will have an opportunity to give your supplemental. Proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I have seen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, documentation, including invoices— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—which indicate that the last Government, in serving a roti meal which is a vegetarian diet, the catering cost, not 350 but \$394,568. [*Interruption*] The actual roti on the plate was a quarter million dollars and to put it from the plate to the mouth and having the plate was another \$138,000 and contrary, in trying to— [*Continuous interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I need your protection, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members on the opposite side, you all have asked the question, please let us get the answer. You will have the opportunity for the supplemental. Proceed, hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in seeking to respond to this matter of the nature of the meal and the cost, the opposite Members, my friend from Princes Town, missed the point, that the Divali function, under the last Government, cost \$1.677 million.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question is whether we spent 350 in roti. That is my question. [*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Mr. Prime Minister, one second. Member for Princes Town, this is the third time you have asked the question and the hon. Prime Minister is giving a response. When he is completed, you are going to have your opportunity to give your supplemental. Chief Whip, Member for Chaguanas West, please, this is the third time I have spoken with regard to the Member for Princes Town. You will have your opportunity to respond in a proper fashion. Proceed, hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: In the context of the catering at \$390,000 odd, it has to be seen against the background that in 2016, a similar function was held in response to the arrival of Divali by another Government of Trinidad and Tobago which I head and that function cost us under \$300,000. *[Interruption]* And I am not surprised that the Member for Princes Town is behaving like that because the profligacy of which I speak is similar to an employee in the Prime Minister's office carrying a handbag for \$1.5 million and \$600,000 in overseas travel allowance to carry a staff, so I could understand his behaviour. That is the profligacy I am talking and it is not about roti, it is about profligacy in its general sense. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister was very specific when he made his statement. He said \$350,000 in roti. Do you have a bill to show \$350,000 in roti? *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I confirm that catering—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Padarath: Where is the bill? Where is the bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member!

Hon. Members: Put him out! Put him out!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is the last time— Hon. Member, this is the last time I am not going to tolerate you shouting across this Chamber. Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And this is the last time that I am going to state the facts for the public, that the catering for a vegetarian Divali roti meal cost \$394,000. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister willing to place in the public record that bill for roti? *[Desk thumping and interruption]*

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I just stated that—*[Continuous interruption]*

Mr. Padarath: We want the bill!!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, could you just leave the Chamber for a 15-minute period, please? *[Continuous crosstalk]*

Mr. Padarath: We want the bill!

[Member for Princes Town leaves the Chamber]

[Continuous crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on, hon. Prime Minister. Members on the other side, Member for Chaguanas West, as the Chief Whip, I am not going to continue to tolerate the outbursts that will continue to come. Right? The Member for Princes Town has now been suspended for 15 minutes and Members at the lower end—Member for Oropouche East, Member for Couva North, please—

Hon. Member: Couva South.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—South. My apologies. Proceed, hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, notwithstanding the attempt at confusion, I want to put on the record that the catering for a roti meal at the Prime Minister's residence was \$395,000 for which the actual food on the plate was a quarter million dollars. And I dare say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since Members of Parliament are prepared to stand up in here and call me a liar, I will invite at least one member of the media to see the documents because I do not want to bring into public discourse those persons who supply services and therefore, I will make it available in that way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, your time period has expired. Members, Prime Minister's Question time has expired and we will proceed to Urgent Questions.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Montrose Vedic Primary School (Relocation Measures)

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Education: What measures are being taken to relocate the students of the Montrose Vedic Primary School which has been shut down due to a mite infestation?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me reiterate for yet another time. The Montrose Vedic Primary School is a denominational school that is owned by the Hindu Vedic Board. It is the responsibility of the board to enter into discussions with the Ministry of Education before anything can be done. At this time, we have had no word from the Vedic board.

However, officers of the Ministry of Education in conjunction with officers of the EFCL are looking at several buildings in the Chaguanas area with a view of relocating those students. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the hon. Minister of Education indicate the time frame? Because you have over 600 students and they are writing the SEA exams and you can understand the stress associated with that. What kind of time frame for relocation? Because there are several vacant buildings within the community.

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot, at this time, give a specific time frame. I want to assure this honourable House that we will be inviting the Vedic board, as I said before, to enter into discussions with officials of the Ministry of Education to see how well or how best we can expedite this issue. Thank you.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister of Education, this is not the first time that this matter has happened. Can you indicate from your investigation what continues to be this persistent cause?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had CARIRI engage in an air testing exercise and as on the previous occasion, the cause of the problem could not have been identified. We will, again, engage CARIRI to see whether they can solve the problem. At this point, we do not know what is causing the problem.

Murder Escalation (Effectiveness of Strategies)

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: In light of the sudden escalation of murders, is the Minister satisfied that the recently announced crime reduction strategies involving his direct oversight will have the desired effect and if so, can he state how effective have such strategies been to date?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our strategies are anchored in four imperatives namely prediction, deterrence, reduction and prosecution and these are, in fact, manifested by their operation of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force and other agencies of Ministry of National Security.

To date, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the strategies have been effective but I want to put on the table that neither the Minister nor the Government of Trinidad and

Tobago will be satisfied until there is a drastic reduction of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Reform SDMS Primary School
(Details of Hand over to Board)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Education: In the light of the unsatisfactory and cramped conditions currently being experienced by students of the Reform Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha Primary School, could the Minister please inform the House how soon he intends to hand over the school to the board of the SDMS?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The school will be handed over to the board who owns the school as soon as the school has been completed. Our information is that that school is at an advanced stage of completion. We are working with the contractors to ensure that work is resumed. What has happened is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Education. Members, for some reason, this afternoon, there continues to be a lot of chatter across the floor. I am not going to tolerate it on both sides. Proceed, Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are engaging in discussions with EFCL, first of all, to ensure that money owed by EFCL to the contractors, that that money is paid once the bills have been verified and secondly, when this is done, we will want to engage with the contractors to ensure that they continue the construction of the school so that the students will be able to be housed as soon as possible. Thank you.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My information, based on discussion with the board and with the PTA and others, is that \$11 million is owed to the contractor even though the school is about 90 per cent complete and that when I look at the estimates of expenditure, only \$2 million has been allocated for that school. Could you give hope to the parents that the contractor will begin work even if you pay him the \$2 million, \$9 million will be owed?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, hope lies eternal in the breast and the chest of this Government [*Desk thumping*] and we are very hopeful that we will be able to engage the contractors in all aspects of their work so that they can have the school completed as soon as possible so that our children will have a place to study. Thank you very much.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you state what is the population of that Reform school, the Reform Hindu school, and whether you are convinced that that size, in terms of the student ratio, is adequate for the effective—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, no, it is a totally different question in terms of the initial answer that was given.

Mr. Karim: Can I continue—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, I am not going to entertain the question because again, it is down a different trajectory.

GAMBLING (GAMING AND BETTING) CONTROL BILL, 2016

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption*] “Noise down in de corner dey.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am seeking your protection from the noise down in the corner, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, Minister of Finance. You go ahead.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the regulation and control of gaming and betting and matters related thereto, be now read a second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill before the House, No. 10 of 2016, is an exact copy of a Bill that was laid in this House in 2015 and debated in 2015. The Bill was passed in this House. The Bill was introduced by my predecessor, Mr. Howai, on May 22, 2015; it was published in the *Gazette* on June 04, 2015; it had its first reading on May 22nd. The debate commenced on the May 27, 2015. The contributors were, from the Government side: Sen. Howai, Mr. Cadiz MP, Mr. Indarsingh MP, Dr. Ramadharsingh MP, Dr. Moonilal MP. And the Bill was taken to the committee stage on May 27th and had its third reading and passage with all present voting in favour; all 26 Government MPs, then UNC MPs, voting in favour, no abstentions.

It went to the Senate on June 2nd, 2015; introduced again by Mr. Howai and the contributors on that day were: Sen. Drayton, Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Mohammed who was a temporary UNC Government Senator sworn in

specifically to speak on behalf of the union of members' clubs and lottery workers. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think there would be no better place to start than with elements of the contribution of temporary Senator, Cindy Gibbs-Mohammed, and as I said, she was sworn in temporarily by the UNC to represent the union of members' clubs and lottery workers.

The temporary Senator spoke with a lot of emotion, went through the issues that affect the industry, the members' club industry. Spoke about the potential for employment, spoke about how good it was, how wonderful the legislation was, and if I read from page 61 of the *Hansard* of June 9th, this is Sen. Gibbs-Mohammed, this was in the other place:

“Madam President, this Bill has had tremendous support from all sides, inclusive of the present Leader of the Opposition who said in his budget contribution...that it was time that our industry...”—be—“regulated.”

And if I go to the end of contribution of the temporary Senator who came to represent the union of members' clubs and lottery workers, I found the closing paragraph was quite appropriate. These were her words:

“This Bill protects the vulnerable. It enfranchises the workers. This Bill creates a solid and valuable industry to Trinidad and Tobago. This Bill establishes controls. This Bill will bring hundreds of millions in revenue to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I urge that we deal with this Bill...we all vote favourably on this Bill, regardless of your political affiliations or other suasions, as this Bill is for the people.”

So that was the contribution of the representative sworn in by the Government to represent the union of members' clubs and lottery workers. So as I said, it passed in the House with the unanimous vote of all UNC Members present, all 26 of them, and then went to the Senate and because the House was dissolved on June 17th by the then Prime Minister, the Bill lapsed.

This year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Ministry of Finance does not act by “vaps”, the Ministry of Finance decided to engage in a fresh round of consultations on the legislation. And on January 12, 2016, there was a consultation at the Old Fire Station conference facility with the casino trade union. On January 19th, there was a consultation with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Planning and Development. That was in the Ministry of Finance.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

In Tobago—sorry, the Inter-religious Organization of Trinidad and Tobago, the IRO, was consulted on January 21, 2016 at the Old Fire Station. The Tobago House of Assembly was consulted on January 26, 2016 at the Office of the Chief Secretary in Tobago. The Tobago Chamber of Commerce, the casino businesses in Tobago, Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association were consulted on January 29, 2016 at Shaw Park. The National Council of Alcoholism and Other Addictions, Alcoholics Anonymous, New Life Ministries Drug Rehabilitation Center, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Families in Action, were consulted at the Old Fire Station on February 2nd. The Board of Inland Revenue, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Customs and Excise Division were consulted on February 4th, Ministry of Finance Conference Room.

The Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Central Bank, the Trinidad Chamber of Commerce were consulted on February 16, 2016 at the Ministry of Finance. The Trinidad and Tobago Members Clubs Association was consulted on February 18, 2016 at the Old Fire Station. The Bookmakers Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority, the Betting Levy Board, consulted on February 23, 2016 at the Old Fire Station. The Amusement Gaming Association was consulted on February 24, 2016 at the Old Fire Station. The Racehorse Owners Association, the Racehorse Trainers Associations, the Jockeys Association, the Arima Race Club, consulted on February 25, 2016 at the Old Fire Station.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Trinidad and Tobago, the American Chamber of Commerce, the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards were consulted on March 11, 2016 at the Old Fire Station and the National Lotteries Control Board was consulted on March 14th at the offices of the National Lotteries Control Board. In total, 14 consultations involving over 50 groups. I do not think there has been a more extensive consultation on a Bill in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So let us now move to the dangers facing Trinidad and Tobago. I have in my possession, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Mutual Evaluation Report, June 2016, from that CFATF—that is the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force—entitled “Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures Trinidad and Tobago Mutual Evaluation Report June 2016” and on page 13 of this report, it tells us that we are not compliant with FATF requirements with respect to the regulation and supervision of private members’ clubs which operate as casinos. The report, CFATF goes into much greater detail on page 90 of this report:

“There are inadequate measures in place to prevent criminals and their associates from holding or being the beneficial owners of or having a significant or controlling interest or a management function in a LB”—listed business. “This is of particular concern in PMCs”—private members clubs—“that provide gambling activities through gaming tables and machines that are similar to casinos in Trinidad and Tobago. Given the significant risks for ML”—money laundering—“and TF”—terrorist financing—“by such entities, this deficiency ought to be addressed.”

So that is another demonstration of Trinidad and Tobago’s non-compliance with the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force. On page 153, it states as another example of our non-compliance:

“There is no adequate AML/CFT”—anti-money laundering or money terrorist financing—“regime for the supervision of Private Members Clubs...which operate as casinos. There is no measure in place which prevent criminals or their associates from holding key positions in a PMC.”—private members’ club.

So those are the areas of non-compliance with CFATF and we all know what happens to Trinidad and Tobago when we are not compliant with the Financial Action Task Force.

I would now go to a report that was done for the Ministry of Finance in July 2016 by an organization called Gaming Laboratories International.

2.30 p.m.

Gaming Laboratories International is the world’s largest gaming industry consulting firm. It works for more than 470 government gaming regulators worldwide. The Ministry of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago retained Gaming Laboratories International (GLI) as a consultant on 4th May, 2016, to assist with the development of a modern gaming regulatory structure that would facilitate the most efficient and effective oversight of all aspects of the gaming industry in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to stress, this is the largest consulting firm in the world that deals with gambling and gaming and it works for 470 government gaming regulators all over the world.

And it said in its report, in its executive summary, the heading of the report is: Trinidad and Tobago Gaming Regulation—Building a Fair, Efficient and Effective Framework for the Regulation of Gaming.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

Despite a law that makes common betting houses illegal, the gaming market in Trinidad has grown hastily and without the types of controls one would normally expect from a country of Trinidad and Tobago's status and economic resources.

Notwithstanding the restrictions in the gaming and betting Act of 1963, it was drafted in a manner that has allowed it to be interpreted to allow private members clubs and amusement machines that are largely unregulated and licensed through local authorities.

Although taxed by the Ministry of Finance, there is no transparency into the operation of the facilities and no reports are available to gauge the success or failure of private members clubs or amusement machine operators. Very few of the gaming facilities are paying taxes under the current system. The Ministry of Finance estimates there are currently 249 private members clubs and an unknown number of amusement machines. Very few of them pay taxes that are owed under the current system.

So this is the findings of the largest consulting firm in the world on gambling, Gaming Laboratories International. The report is dated July 05, 2016. So it is extremely current, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, let me move into the Bill itself. In Trinidad and Tobago, from an historical perspective, the man on the street has engaged in gambling for years. There has always been gambling in Trinidad and Tobago like horse racing, lotteries, recently Play Whe, Pick 2, Cash Pot. There has also been the illegal form of gambling known as "whe-whe".

In the late 1990s, the Registration of Clubs Act, Chap. 21:01, was amended to facilitate the use of electronic gaming machines and table games. I want to repeat that. In the late 1990s, the Registration of Clubs Act was amended to facilitate the use of electronic gaming machines and table games. Unfortunately, the changes made to the Act were done without the necessary framework to regulate the mushrooming of the use of such games.

Mr. Singh: You are quoting Howai.

Hon. C. Imbert: So I am being accurate and truthful. The consequence of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that an unregulated subsector of the gambling industry has developed. Particular concerns have arisen with regard to the proliferation of the so-called private members clubs, which operate in effect as commercial casinos.

And although the activities of casino-type private members clubs have been highly visible, there has also been a more recent development, which is even more pernicious, of a thriving amusement gaming subsector, which must also be regulated. This sector has thrived since 2014, with the amendment to the Liquor Licences Act, which allows for the hosting of no more than 20 amusement games in licensed premises as referred to under the Act.

So you had the change in the late 1990s, which allowed the introduction of electronic gaming machines and table games in private members clubs. And then in 2014, a change to the Liquor Licences Act, which allowed for the hosting of up to 20 amusement games in licensed premises. These two factors combined have allowed gambling to explode in Trinidad and Tobago.

As I indicated, there are at least 200 private members clubs conducting casino-style activities and I am told, and am sure the Member for Tabaquite would be shocked to learn this, it is estimated there are 20,000 amusement gaming machines operating in some 4,000 bars and recreational pubs in Trinidad and Tobago. If it is more, sure, but 20,000 slot machines and these other things in bars and pubs across the country, and they have become a very important component of the entertainment that is offered at these bars and pubs.

Statistics indicate that the gaming sector has a turnover of at least \$12 billion per annum and the view is that this is conservative. The sector employs directly some 7,000 persons and indirectly many thousands more who provide goods and services to the subsector. It also provides employment for low-skilled workers, especially women, and in many cases single mothers.

The Bill before the House—Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just say when you add National Lotteries and legal lotteries and so on, it is estimated conservatively that there is at least \$16 billion at play every year in Trinidad and Tobago, \$16 billion. These are the official estimates.

Mr. Singh: Who estimated this?

Hon. C. Imbert: The Ministry of Finance—\$16 billion estimated from the gambling industry in Trinidad and Tobago, including legal and—on \$16 billion.

Now, in the rest of the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the gambling industry is probably the most regulated industry in the world. It typically features a nationally regulated market, based on economic benefits such as tax revenues, employment, economic growth, and so on, economic and social costs and other issues.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

In Trinidad and Tobago, we are probably—I have seen this comment made—the only country in the Western Hemisphere that has such a thriving gaming and gambling sector that is essentially unregulated. I want to repeat that. We are probably the only country in the Western Hemisphere, from Canada to Argentina, that has such a thriving gambling and gaming industry with virtually no regulation whatsoever, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And as I pointed out to you, you have all the dangers of money laundering. You have no controls over criminals becoming owners and managers in these casinos, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this—obviously the former administration recognize this, obviously. When I read the *Hansard* record of the hon. Members who spoke on the last occasion, and let me just repeat who they were: Mr. Howai, Mr. Cadiz, Mr. Indarsingh, Dr. Ramadharsingh, Dr. Moonilal, Sen. Drayton, and so on. Obviously—

Mr. Singh: Mr. Faris.

Hon. C. Imbert: He was not, he was not—[*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is okay, simmer down. Simmer down. Sen. Al-Rawi, as he was then, was not a Member of the Government. I am referring to Members of the Government. Let me read again: Howai, Cadiz, Indarsingh, Ramadharsingh, Moonilal. Those were the hon. Members of this House, with the exception of Sen. Howai, who sponsored the Bill, who spoke passionately in its defence, who asked the House to vote for the Bill unreservedly. I just wanted to make that point.

The reason why I am saying this is when I read the contributions of the hon. elected Members of this House in the *Hansard* on this Bill, I see the passion with which they supported the legislation. I see the enthusiasm with which they pushed through the legislation.

Hon. Member: Zeal.

Hon. C. Imbert: I saw the zeal, yes thank you hon. Member. I saw the forcefulness. I could read in the words how deeply they felt about the pernicious effects of this unregulated sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, this is why I decided not to change anything in the legislation. We need to get something done. We need to get something done. This Bill requires a special majority. It requires a special majority, and this is a case where, since the previous Government piloted this Bill, spoke in support of it and all 26 Government Members at the time voted in support of the Bill—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Where was the Opposition?

Hon. C. Imbert: That was the time—hon. Deputy Speaker, through you, that was the time when there was that insidious, despicable contribution from the then Member for Tobago, I cannot remember which one in Tobago and we, at that time—*[Interrupted]*

Mr. Al-Rawi: Sponsored by the Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, that was the time when you had that despicable contribution and we were not present during that debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the House. So the Opposition in the House did not vote against this particular Bill. We did not participate. We were not there, because we had to leave because of the horrible things that were said at that time about the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. But the whole point is, all jokes aside, all jokes aside, a \$16 billion industry, an industry which has been cited by the Financial Action Task Force as a serious area of non-compliance with respect to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that some of the commercial banks are so scared of this industry that some of the major commercial banks have refused to enter into banking relationships with casinos in this country? Do you know why? Because they will then become a target for the Financial Action Task Force, the financial institutions. They will be deregulated. They will be de-risked. They will lose correspondent banking. This is such a serious matter that in Trinidad and Tobago some of the major commercial banks have refused to open accounts for casinos, because they are not sure what kind of money we are dealing with. You do not know who you are dealing with and where the money is coming from. What is the purpose of the money? Is it money laundering? Nobody knows and all of this is highlighted inside of here.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there have always been attempts over the years to deal with gambling, to try to put an end to gambling, and so on, but history has shown that whenever you try to ban gambling all you do is push it underground. That is all you do. If you look at the history, all other countries, whenever there have been attempts to have an outright ban on gambling, all you do is push it underground.

If I use a parallel, I look at prohibition in the United States, in terms of alcohol in the 20s, and so on. When they prohibited alcohol, all that did is encourage the creation of illegal stills, illegal manufacture of moonshine, and so on. In fact, the quantity of illegal alcohol produced during that period probably exceeded the legal alcohol at the time. So all that did, the total ban/prohibition on alcohol in the United States, all that did is push it underground. We are satisfied now, this

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

Government is satisfied, that the approach of the last Government and persons before that who had sought to regulate the sector, is the correct approach. [*Desk thumping*] It is the correct approach. There is no point in trying to push it underground, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because all they will do is just have more and more illegal activity. People will become desperate.

So, let us look at the legislation. What exactly does the Bill do? Before I continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You still have 20 minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. Okay, Part I of the Bill is the short title. Part II provides for commencement because we have quite a bit of regulations to do. So that you have to have a proclamation clause.

Clause 3 makes it clear that it is inconsistent with the Constitution; that is why we need a special majority. Clause 4 is the interpretation clause. The base of the Bill is found at clause 5, and the Bill in particular is aimed at protecting minors and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling. It will ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair, open and responsible manner. It would provide for consumer protection, as well as for the collection of taxes. It will prevent gambling from being a source of crime, being associated with crime or being used to support crime. The legislation also ensures compliance with international anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing.

Part II of the Bill establishes the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission, which will be managed by a board. The key duties of the board would be to regulate and control the operation of gambling in Trinidad and Tobago and to address the harmful and negative effects of gambling. This Part sets out the constitution and procedures of the Commission. It addresses the appointment—[*Continuous crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, some little murmuring is taking place.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Part II addresses the appointment of a chief executive officer, who will manage the Commission under the direction of the board. It addresses staffing, funding, expenditure, audits, annual reports, procurement rules and other matters that the Commission will be required to observe.

Clause 12, in particular, provides for an Audit and Regulatory Committee, which would have a compliance oversight role. Clause 13 allows for disclosure by

every member of the gaming board on appointment and annually thereafter. It will be a requirement by a member of the board to submit a declaration stating whether he or she has an actual or contingent interest in any licensee or body corporate carry on the gambling business. This, for example, will be someone who is a shareholder or owns in excess of 5 per cent of the shareholding in a gambling company.

The point of this legislation is to create an environment of zero tolerance on crime in this sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the point that we must focus on. Persons under this Part will be subject to the Prevention of Corruption Act, Chap. 11:11. For example, any person who demands or accepts any fee from any person on account of anything done in relation to his office is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to imprisonment.

Part III establishes a very robust licensing regime aimed at controlling the development of the sector. A person wishing to engage in any aspect of gambling will not be able to do so without first obtaining a licence.

There will be several categories of licences. There will be Gaming Owners Licence for the ownership of a gaming establishment; Gaming Operators Licence for the operation of the gambling establishment; Bookmakers Licence for the conduct of betting and sports betting activities. Other licences would include Gaming Machine Operating Licence to sell or lease gaming machines and Personal Licence for key staff such as high management in the casinos. To obtain a Gaming Owners Licence, Bookmakers Licence, or Promoters Licence, the applicant would need to be a company and incorporated in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Commission will be empowered to carry out extensive investigation of an applicant, their background, their associations and any proposed or existing associate employee.

The person must assist in the investigation by providing any information or documents requested by the Commission, and having their photograph taken, fingerprints and also inspection of their premises. If they do not comply the application will not be processed. Hearings of applications to operate casinos would be open to the public and interested parties can object to the granting of a licence.

In the case where a licence has been granted, the Commission will have the power to review, suspend or revoke a licence. It can act where it has reason to believe that activities are being conducted that are not in accordance with the law. And it goes on to give several subsidiary powers such as giving a casino operator

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

a warning or making them comply with certain conditions to come back up to scratch, and so on. There will also be the power to suspend records, and so on.

Part IV of the Bill is transitional provisions, permitting gaming operators that currently operate as private members club, to operate until such time as the Commission issues licences in accordance with the new legal framework.

The Bill also addresses private gaming. Private gaming is defined as gaming that takes place in a private dwelling where members of the public have no access, whether on payment or not, to the place where gaming occurs and no charge, whether in money or money's worth, is made for participation in gaming and equal chance gaming. So Member for Chaguanas West, when you go to play Brag or All Fours at "yuh pardner" house, it would not require a licence.

Part V of the Bill is specific to the betting sector and there is a transitional clause at clause 63, permitting betting shops, bookmakers and promoters to operate under the existing framework.

In terms of taxation, Part VI of the Bill addresses the payment of taxes by licensees and taxes should be payable as set out in clause 66, with the exception of bets made on live or simulcast horse racing, which will remain the responsibility of the Betting Levy Board.

Specifically, with respect to protection of the vulnerable, in relation to minors, there will be an absolute ban, or it is proposed that there be an absolute ban on gambling by minors and on the employment of minors in gambling establishments. A minor is someone who is less than 18 years of age. So, if and when this legislation becomes law, no longer would children be able to participate in gambling or be employed in gambling establishments. It will be a criminal offence to invite, cause or permit a child to gamble. This includes sending them promotional material or providing them information on gambling or trying to entice children to get involved in gambling.

Another issue would be problem gamblers. Two funds would be established, the Rehabilitation Fund and the Development Fund. The Rehabilitation Fund will support initiatives by NGOs to help persons and families suffering the effects of gambling addiction through preventative measures, such as awareness and educational programmes and rehabilitative programmes.

The second fund, the Development Fund, would provide assistance for sports development, arts, culture and health. These funds would be managed by a committee with experience or qualifications in addiction, dealing with addiction,

dealing with gambling, sports development, health, arts, culture, finance and accounting, and so on.

The Commission will also create codes of conduct and policies to ensure fairness in the conduct of gambling and inform consumer participation in gambling. It would be mandatory for every gambling establishment to make available to patrons the rules of every game at a prominently accessible location on the premises, prominently display minimum and maximum betting wagers and provide guidance and assistance to patrons to enable them to decide on the merits of playing a game in a gambling house.

With respect to anti-money laundering and terrorist financing, these processes are designed to prevent gambling from being a source of crime, being associated with crime, or being used to support crime.

The Bill will ensure that only suitable applicants would be granted licences. There would also be ongoing assessments of the suitability of licence holders, in the context of anti-money laundering and terrorist financing.

Fit and proper criteria: all persons in key positions, the managers, and so on, must meet fit and proper criteria. They must be of good character, competent, honest, financially sound, likely to discharge their responsibilities fairly. Fit and proper tests for key executives, top-level managers, will be applied by the Commission when a person applies for a licence for this position. Similarly, persons such as directors, significant shareholders, and so on, must also be adjudged to be fit and proper to hold the particular position in the casino industry.

With respect to corporate entities, the Commission will also consider the corporation's financial strengths, the nature and scope of its business and the fitness and propriety of key personnel of corporations owning casinos such as owners, directors, managers and controlling shareholders.

There will be ongoing assessment, routine and regular assessment and then there will be enforcement powers given to authorized officers to inspect licensed premises, monitor activities, examine documents, records, and on so on. And the latter parts of the Bill deal with offences and penalties for infringement of the law.

At this stage, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to go back to the report by Gaming Laboratories International.

Mr. Singh: Hon. Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Singh: I notice that you said the latter part of the Bill and that you—the question of regulations, a year has elapsed since this matter was tabled, but there has been no regulations circulated to Members. Will you be circulating regulations to Members in order for us to look at the detailed operations of this Bill?

Hon. C. Imbert: I am advised that draft regulations have been prepared and they should be finalized shortly and will be circulated to hon. Members and all concerned. Okay?

Mr. Karim: When?

Hon. C. Imbert: Shortly. I am told that they have been prepared. They would go through the normal process, review by the Legislative Review Committee and would be circulated to hon. Members in the very near future.

What I found interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the problems in the industry, one of the things pointed out by the consultants were the problems that people face when they go into casinos. Let me give you some examples. There is no independent review of gaming equipment in Trinidad and Tobago to ensure it is fair, reliable and in proper working order. There are no technical standards for electronic gaming devices and associated equipment. There is no way to ensure game fairness or accountability of gaming revenue. There is no independent oversight of cards, dice, roulette, wheels, layouts, chips or other implements used in the gaming operation, which creates a risk of patrons cheating the gaming operation, employee fraud, gaming operator fraud and other improper activities. There is no oversight or transparency to the issue of credit, creating a serious threat to patrons' safety, incidents of money laundering, proliferation of organized crime, loan sharking and there is no oversight to foreign holder accounts. There is no policy, no legal policy, for the handling of patron disputes, if you have a problem, if you feel you have been cheated, there is nothing you can do literally, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There are no standards or oversight for gaming surveillance. So there is no ability to investigate criminal activity in the sector. Neither the operators nor the Government have any organized efforts to deter problem gambling, gambling addiction, or promote responsible gambling.

The requirements for licensing are hopelessly incomplete, this is current I am talking about, failed to provide transparency of ownership, which enhances the risk of infiltration of organized crime known criminal elements, gambling cheats or other notorious persons in the gaming operations.

Based on all the consultations, as I said, there were 14 consultations, consulting with at least 50 organizations and also a series of other in consultations, and based on the report from Gambling Laboratories International, they have told us, the Government has the support of the majority of high quality gaming operators.

3.00 p.m.

I just want to make a point at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am satisfied that once this sector, we, “leh we say” we, on this side are satisfied, once this sector is properly regulated, it can be a serious boost for employment, for economic activity, for tax revenue, for entertainment in Trinidad and Tobago, once it is properly regulated. “Ah doh tink” anybody should have any fear of losing their jobs, “ah doh tink so at all”, because once there are proper regulations in place, and these casinos come out from the shadows, and come out into the light, there should be no problem whatsoever, with people gaining meaningful employment in these casinos. In fact, I expect to see an expansion of this industry in Trinidad and Tobago. I expect to see it. So I would like assuage the fears of any persons who currently work in this industry. Our objective is to legalize this unregulated sector, and to offer sustainable and meaningful employment for those—safe employment for those employed in the sector—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Al-Rawi: Who meet the requirements.

Hon. C. Imbert: Who? Well, obviously they will have to meet the requirements. It is my understanding, I am not—I have not been told this, that the Members on the other side may wish to take another look at some of the provisions in the legislation. I am not absolutely certain of this, but if it is the wish of hon. Members opposite, because this thing requires a special majority, we on this side are not going to be so foolish to try and railroad anything. So if it is the wish—*[Interruption]* no, well, it requires a special majority. It requires your support. *[Desk thumping and interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member, please address the Chair. Address the Chair, please. *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill needs to be passed. This legislation needs to be introduced in Trinidad and Tobago. The regulation of the gaming industry requires attention. It requires oversight. It is a problem. There are far too many reports of organized crime in this industry.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, November 18, 2016

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would hope that hon. Members opposite would support the legislation in the same way that they were so passionate about it, when they presented it into this Parliament in 2015. I would hope we would get the unanimous support of Members opposite. I wish to advise hon. Members opposite, that we will be sending this Bill to a joint select committee of both Houses of Parliament, [*Desk thumping*] in order to have final consultations on the merits of the legislation. [*Desk thumping*]

I beg to move.

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very happy to join this debate and I note with interest, the statement of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that he requires the support of the Members of the Opposition. I hope he now recognizes that the Members of the Opposition have an equal task, role and responsibility, to be engaged in the proper governance of this country, and not to be sidelined or for promises to be made on the other side—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, my apologies.

Question proposed.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Time now begins to run.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Three-o-four? Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, I am happy that the Member for Diego Martin North/East now recognizes the very important and equal role that we play in the governance of this country, and recognizes that the support of the Opposition which represents more than 340,000 persons in this country, [*Desk thumping*] must have a voice in the affairs of this country, even if it is the intention of the Member for Laventille West, to drive daggers into the hearts [*Desk thumping*] of the Member—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his contribution, the hon. Minister and Member for Diego Martin North/East said that banks were afraid to take money from these operators and that is true. A lot of them do not even have bank accounts, and the banks are afraid, but what about the workers of this country? The workers of this country who are now afraid, because the very Minister has told them 0-0-0. [*Desk thumping*] What is going to happen to them? What about their fears; their fears? They do not even have money to take to the bank. So one has to be very careful when one makes these pronouncements. You see, legislation in terms of this Bill would be developed and the industry will be regulated because we are for the

regulation of the industry; there is no doubt about that. Banks will then be able to take their money, but what legislation is there to protect workers when they are told that they are going to get 0-0-0? What can they do? Go on the streets and march?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, riots.

Dr. S. Rambachan: No riots? Thank God we have a very responsible group of citizens in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but citizens are only able take so much, and one day, the voice of the citizen will rule as the voice of God [*Desk thumping*] in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition when she was Prime Minister, and we in Government were never afraid to bring strong legislation into this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] This is a piece of strong legislation, because we always recognized that when there were social ills in the country, we needed to intervene in order to do something, to put some balance back into the country. But you know, I remember and I recall very vividly, in a situation where crime was deteriorating, and where peoples' bodies were dropping all over the place, and where blood was staining the streets, and being absorbed into the soils of this land, we had come to this Parliament to ask that soldiers be precepted so that we could have more people dealing with the crime. This is one of the things the Minister of National Security has said, that you need to have more policemen and more people looking after crime. We had the opportunity then to do that, but they refused to support that legislation. Today, we could have probably had a different outcome, a more positive outcome for Trinidad and Tobago if they had supported that piece of strong legislation also.

Just today, in my own constituency in Guaracara, a 74-year-old grandmother was murdered, and that follows in my own constituency, the murder of a 30-year girl, who was autistic. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can you or anyone in this country continue to stand by as a silent onlooker, as the Government stands by now as silent onlookers, to the plight of the vulnerable citizens of this country?—everyone now being vulnerable in this country.

The Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, last night his house was burglarized, his Honda car taken away. Thank God that the burglars who entered his house did not affect his family in any way, and we really, really sympathize with him, and thank God for that. No one is exempt from the hands of the criminals, and what we have is a situation where it seems that the Government is standing as silent spectators to the plight of the people in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are more interested in how much money was spent on a Divali function, than interested in the over 400 persons who have now lost their lives in this country. [*Desk thumping*] We are debating that 4,000 persons attended a Divali function. Yes, 4,000 persons for \$390,000 and ate a plate of food that cost \$63.00 per plate, and you are debating that against the fact of [*Desk thumping*] dealing with the situation of—[*Interruption*]

The Member for Diego Martin North/East, he said that they had engaged in a fresh round of consultations, because—and I am very happy you did that because what you realized is that the industry raised concerns, new concerns which they, having had about a year to study the Bill they were able to raise new concerns. One of the things we must do in this country is always ensure that we arrive at the best law in the country. [*Desk thumping*] We must always arrive at the best law. So that I congratulate you for sending this to a joint select committee. But I wonder whether that was done simply because the hon. Attorney General was afraid that we will bring to this Parliament his contribution in the Senate, [*Desk thumping*] where he raised several concerns about this Bill, and knew that he could not come to railroad that Bill through the Parliament, because he himself had very serious objections to this Bill [*Desk thumping*] when he debated this Bill in the other place, about a year ago. So that it is just that they are not coming here going to the Joint Select Committee because they want to, because they know themselves that they had very serious concerns, and he articulated this, the Attorney General articulated this, in his contribution in the other place about a year ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are also hearing now of the July 05, 2016 report. We would like to obtain a copy of that July 05, 2016 report, because we do not have the benefit of those reports to inform our own discussion in the Opposition about that. But the Bill before us, No. 10 of 2016, to provide for the regulation and control of gaming and betting and matters related thereto, must be seen as an important and essential piece of legislation to deal with the myriad of social, financial, human and other issues, which arise as a result of unregulated gambling.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the pursuit of our agenda here today and this debate, I would like to pose some questions and make a couple of statements, which I believe can inform our discussion, and focus on what I believe to be the core issues. I will like to ask, for example, what constitutes for this country good and effective gambling controlled legislation? I use words “in this country”, because you can go and look at all kinds of models and I have heard about in the Nevada

model and this model and that model, but what is the model that will be most relevant for Trinidad and Tobago? So what constitutes good and effective gambling-controlled legislation in this country? What must it accomplish? I think if we are to relook this legislation we must ask, what should it accomplish? Our criteria must be very clear in order to evaluate this legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is the interest of the State in this legislation, and this is primarily one of revenue collection, and ensuring that gambling enterprises pay their fair dues to the public purse. I heard the hon. Minister say that the estimate by the Ministry of Finance is about \$16 billion. Now, he has not put into that estimate what goes on in the black market in gambling, what goes on as the parallel gambling market.

So, for example, if you go to Chaguanas and you go where that closed vending area is, a couple months ago you would have read in the newspaper of someone who had put some bets there, had won \$100,000 and they refused to pay, and then there was commotion in the area there, and the police came and quiet down the commotion and everybody went their way. That caused me to ask, is the police aware of all of this illegal gambling that is taking place, and they are not doing anything about it? But what I am saying to you, there is a parallel gambling—underground gambling that is going on. Where, for example, the NLCB is offering 24 to one, you will find that the parallel gamblers, using the same numbers are offering—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Members on the Government side, there are pockets of discussions taking place, and it is—I am getting a little disturbance; Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—are offering about 36 to one. So I would like to add about 25 per cent more on the \$16 billion, that the Minister has quoted, that gives you a \$20 billion industry. If for the sake of argument, you say 50 per cent of that goes in paying out winnings and in administration costs, you are looking at about \$10 billion to be taxed. If you use the 30 per cent tax on profit above \$1 million, then you are looking at about \$2.8 billion in taxes if you have a system that collects taxes and profits, depending on what model you take into consideration.

So you are looking at \$2.8 billion to \$3 billion that you are probably losing in taxes, if you really regulate this, and if you really collect the taxes as they ought to be collected, this is big business. In every other part the world, where you have had gambling, you also have other kinds of addictions that go with it; other kinds of addictions and other kinds of social problems, for example, drug running,

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

prostitution. You know, they say gambling is an addiction, but for some people sex is also an addiction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that has its own social outcomes in societies, and sometimes sets a bad example.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so you require enforced—you, the State wants to collect revenue and wants to ensure that gambling enterprises pay their fair dues to the public purse, and this requires as you have stated, enforcement of laws against illegal gambling, but I am not sure that the police are doing what they are supposed to be doing about illegal gambling. Because if you go back to *Newsday* of 2003, in an article written by Nalinee Seelal, you will see from then that:

“The National Lotteries Control Board is calling for a crackdown on bush whe whe games that”—

—they estimated was:

“...taking away more than \$50 million—

—a year:

“...from the NLCB Play Whe...” game.

Fifty million dollars annually was being lost, and that was in 2003. We are now in 2016, where the rate of gambling and the extent of gambling has increased tremendously.

But you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gambling is not like other businesses in which the State has only a financial interest. Gambling is addictive behaviour, and with severe consequences for the well-being of individuals, families and communities, and this dimension cannot be ignored by the State. While it is true that people are exercising a choice in gambling, since it is an addictive behaviour like drugs, the State should direct some of the revenue from gambling to a public education programme, similar to what we see for smoking against cancer, and what have you. I am happy to see that in the Bill, there is a suggestion of this kind of thing that will happen, to ensure that the public is well informed about the dangers and the risks of gambling, but more so, in terms of rehabilitation of persons in this regard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also feasible, and this is one thing that we may have to consider in the Joint Select Committee, to argue for certain kinds of zoning regulations, so that casinos are not located in the midst of residential areas. We have to look at this thing very, very carefully because as you go along, you will find as our experience with casinos and private members’ clubs and so on deepen,

and new kinds of ideas, that the interest of citizens will have to come into play in the legislation.

The State, like all States, has an interest the well-being of families, the pillars of any functioning society, and has an obligation, therefore, to ensure that addiction to gambling does not destroy the fabric of family life economically and otherwise, and that is one question I want to pose again, maybe repetitively, but pose it: does this Bill do enough to address the addictive side of gambling? Does it do enough to address that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, societies evolve mainly in response to the expressed wishes and needs of people. Politicians may want a kind of society, they may, through legislation even try to mandate a kind of society, but at the end of the day the people decide what kind of society they live in. We live at a time in the world when it seems that individual gratification and satisfaction, at any cost, is trumping morality, decency and even self-respect. Unfortunately this appears to be a way of life. The old statement, "If it feels good, do it". Forget the consequences, and that is very unfortunate, but that seems to be happening. Our society, it seems to be no different from any other society, in terms of what has come to be accepted as new freedoms for expression and entertainment, compared to even 10 years ago or five years ago, and addictions are now not limited to drugs. Gambling again, is a serious form of addiction and as a result, at some time or the other, those like us entrusted with the power to regulate the affairs of society, through the making and the application of laws, as well as the use of moral suasion, must act and act decisively.

It is not at all times that freedom could be absolute and should be absolute, if not, there will be chaos in societies. There has to be regulations, and the potential social ruin that is coming in this country, through gambling and other forms of illicit activity, must attract legislative intervention like this Bill. This was why we brought the Bill, and this was why we supported the Bill, and we have no intention not to support a similar Bill, and we want to work this out in the interest of all, not in the interest of a few. It must be worked out in the interest of all, because you see, you know, this society where there is so much aberrant behaviour, unless there are consequences for behaviour, people do not change, and this is why I am disappointed with the way we are dealing with crime. We seem to have all the strategies in place, but somehow nothing is working, because it seems to me and to a lot of people in the society that we are not applying the consequences.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

It seems to me that the statement, “Who will guard the guards”, have become real true in this country, and the people now are not trusting the police, and far less they are not trusting the Government in this country, [*Desk thumping*] because for the last 14 months in this country, now 15, all the things that they have promised in this country to deal with crime, nothing has materialized, [*Desk thumping*] 0-0-0.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Gambling the lives of citizens.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, you are right, Madam Opposition Leader. The lives of citizens are being gambled away also. I cannot understand how people in charge of the resources to fight crime are just letting the criminals have their day, play mas as it were, with the lives of people in this country. So we can talk about gambling, but when we talk about gambling we have to talk about enforcement, but we have to talk about enforcement in so many other areas of this country where people are behaving illegally, especially the criminal elements, to the detriment of God-fearing citizens in this country, [*Desk thumping*] to the detriment of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So yes, there will be a social ruin through gambling, but there is a ruin in the lives of our citizens through what is going on here, and no one seems to be able to put a stop to it. You know, the hon. Prime Minister said earlier, he thinks that people are not losing hope in this country. Mr. Prime Minister, I invite you to really walk, in a non-political way, the streets of this country, and talk to the hearts—from the hearts of people, and you will understand the disconnect between your Government and the hope [*Desk thumping*] that people have in this country. There is a disconnect, Mr. Prime Minister, a real disconnect between—from the level from which you are operating, and the fears of people in this country, Mr. Prime Minister. You need to sincerely and honestly go out there and walk among them, and understand their fears, understand their trepidations, understand when they go to sleep at night how they sleep with one eye open; that in some villages and some homes, there are some people who, while others sleep, they stay up as watchmen in the home in order to make sure that the rest of the home is safe. In businesses in particular, I know in central Trinidad, where people go to sleep, one member of the family stays up in that business in order just to make sure that the rest of business is safe and the members of the family are safe. I say that to you because that is happening also in my constituency, and that is increasing following the death of that autistic girl, where she, with her family were taking a rest in their hardware and they came there and killed her, an autistic child?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the growth of gambling, even if State sponsored like the NLCB, has become a disease in this society; a disease, for some, yes, for those who are addicted, which at times appears intolerable. Links had been made, and I want to repeat, between gambling, money laundering, drug running and prostitution. If you look carefully now at the infrastructural configuring or configuration of some of these gambling houses, you will see that it betrays this multiplicity of allied activities. You actually have rooms being built now by these casinos, and supposedly you could stay over and what have you, and that kind of thing.

Hundreds of millions of dollars that could be better spent on constructing family homes, educating children, opening a business, contributing to social causes, are now being gambled away in Trinidad and Tobago. I have no problem with people wanting to gamble. I have said that is their choice. I am for regulation. They said they have \$6.7 million they are paying per week in wages in this industry to 7,000 persons, that amongst to \$350 million a year, only in wages to the industry. People are able to get something to put food on their table, and so on and so forth, but even that must be balanced against the social costs of this. It must be balanced against the social costs of what we are talking about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that the NLCB annual revenue is in excess of \$2.5 billion? The annual revenue of the NLCB is in excess of \$2.5 billion, and in 2015, the income from the different games amounted to \$2.44 billion of which \$1.544 billion was paid in prize money? And agents received in 2015, \$170 million in commission, and this is what is interesting now, the administrative cost was more than even the agents received, which was \$207 million. In other words, in lotteries, people gambled over \$800,000 per day in Trinidad and Tobago. You see the addiction we are talking about?—that is one that we can say is legal. The contribution to the Consolidated Fund by NLCB amounts to approximately \$200 million a year. Do you know what? In this *Guardian* article of July 31, 2012, the headline was:

“Despite global economic crisis NLCB continues to fatten Treasury”

It seems to me people that it does not matter whether you have money or not, people believe, “Yuh gamble, yuh might win”. Between 2008 and 2012, almost \$1 billion and \$50 million was contributed to the Treasury by gambling, this is serious business, you know. This is very, very serious business. So I have nothing against the protection of jobs. The Minister said he could expand the industry and so on, but I want to warn in that context too, that this is the business that has been

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

bringing people into this country, and who have been coming here and doing what they want without any regulations.

So there is another article in the *Guardian* by Radhica Sookraj of July 07, 2013, and you see this is it, all these things are public knowledge to everyone except the police and those enforcing the laws. So in this one, it says:

“Liquid cash luring casino owners to Trinidad and Tobago”

—“Liquid cash...”, and this talks about:

“A large amount of liquid cash floating in the economy is luring businessmen from Eastern Europe...”

Not just the Chinese, you know?

“...to set up private members’ clubs in T&T. Many believe poor enforcement of regulatory controls within the gaming industry has caused the Eastern European casino chain to spread its operations.”

So they are all coming here because there are no regulations, and they are doing what they want in this country, to our detriment.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in such a lucrative and profitable business venture, and a culture that, I can show you now and you will agree with me, embraces gambling by so many as a way of life, it is not surprising that illegal gambling has taken an official—seemingly official foothold in our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the police are going to certain places and taking \$406,000 and \$300,000 on certain nights. Did the police ever ask where that money is coming from? Did the police ever wonder to question whether that is part of the illegal play whe that is taking in this country? And the police are actually, they know who these people are, and they know where to go and get that money when that money is set up there, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I congratulate the police service for moving quickly to arrest at least one person, but let us hope they arrest all of them involved in that ring. It does not give anybody comfort in this country to hear the Commissioner of Police say that 150 policemen in this country have been suspended for illegal activities in the country. It does not give you comfort. Whom do you trust?

3.30 p.m.

The Minister of National Security, as a very distinguished former member of the defence force in this country, would say that soldiers are people who could be trusted, but we also saw recently of two soldiers, who, one early morning, were held with arms and ammunition along the highway. Who can you trust?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I have made a strong case for regulation. But, you know, there was a Prime Minister in this country who was against casinos at one time. Maybe he knew why he was against casinos, inspired as he was, probably by his religious and spiritual convictions. But, at the end of the day, it is a matter of personal choice but, at the same time, the personal choices of one group must not bring harm to others. It must not. It is in achieving this balance of rights while protecting the vulnerable—and that vulnerable includes those who work in these casinos. People who work in casinos could be highly exploited. They could be used as front men and front women, and when the crunch comes, they are thrown to the wolves. So legislation must protect even those who work in these institutions. [*Desk thumping*] They make pawns, and the big guys get away, so you never know who the big fish is. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, exactly, and we must incorporate these things in the legislation to protect.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from a religious point of view, in a sense, all religions are against gambling.

Hon. Member: No.

Dr. S. Rambachan: No? All right. Hinduism is not against gambling? [*Laughter*] It is a matter of personal choice, personal morality. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my view that all religions are against activities which contribute to the demise of human beings, and all religions uphold morality, ethical behaviour and spiritual values in their own way. It is impossible to stop gambling. That is my point, but it is possible to regulate it and control it. And like any legislation presented here in Parliament, this Bill has a number of good clauses, a number of good clauses, and the clauses have good intentions, but some of the clauses have far-reaching consequences, and I think this is where the industry is raising a hue and a cry.

Some of the fines in the legislation seem to be disproportionate, very, very high—\$25 million, \$5 million and what have you—and we need to sit down and discuss it, because that is why I said at the beginning what it is we want to achieve with this legislation. The regulations are very important. I would hate to see us come back to this Parliament to pass this legislation without having the regulations in place. I think it is extremely important that we have the regulations in place in order to deal with this legislation.

I am also happy to see, as reported in the media, and it is noteworthy to me that those involved in the industry are not against regulations, and that is something important. So that the people in the industry are not resisting. They are

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

saying, “Okay, let us have regulation of the industry.” They want that because they know why that is important. It has many good benefits for they themselves.

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

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am happy to see that they want regulation, because they understand the value and importance of regulation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, when you talk about this gambling Bill, you have to talk about youth, you have to talk about the future, you have to talk about children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the last occasion I spoke in this Parliament, I hope that the Minister of Finance and the media would have paid a little more attention to what I was saying. [*Crosstalk*] They would pay more attention. They are not even interested in a politician saying drive a dagger in the hearts of UNC people and kill them dead once and for all.

Mr. Imbert: Who said that?

Dr. S. Rambachan: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I came to this Parliament and I showed in reference to the same 4,000 restaurants that the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying where there are these machines, that simply by under a liquor licence, Mr. AG, you can get, I believe, up to eight or 10 machines. But do you know what is happening? They pay \$3,000 for each one of those machines, but that is not where the problem is. That is a problem, because in those restaurants I have seen with my own eyes while parents are waiting for food or go to collect food, children are going and playing on those machines, and you do not want that for your child, Member for San Fernando West. You do not want that. You would not want that for anybody’s children, because that is part of the addictive process.

But what happens in those restaurants—and I am saying there today—that while the members’ clubs are paying \$60,000 for a roulette machine, in those very restaurants you have 12 seats around a machine in which something is spinning in the middle, a roulette machine, and they are paying \$3,000 for that because they have found a way to beat the law. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$57,000 they are saving on their licence fee, because they are beating the law under the liquor licence. That is wrong. That is wrong, because if you have 249 private members’ clubs in

the country, and I just estimate you have two machines each in a private members' club—that is 500 machines—and you multiply that by \$60,000, you have approximately \$30 million in revenue. But if you have 4,000 places and you have a thousand of them with machines, you are losing money in terms of what should be collected as revenue in this country, but the bigger point for me is in those restaurants, bars and so on, children are now gambling away.

Member for Arouca/Maloney, I have seen children leaving school, going home in the evening walking down, and they will slip into these places and they will go and gamble. We cannot have a society like this. We cannot. We cannot continue to have a society like this. Something has to be done. We cannot inspire the future to be one of decent opportunities for the realization of the potential of young people if we forge a society in which people are led to believe that through illicit activities they can become rich and they can become powerful. We cannot do that.

This cannot be the way forward in a world where the urge to be materially significant or rich generally knows no moral boundaries. If we do, then those entrusted with legislative leadership must intervene alongside those entrusted with spiritual influence and moral regeneration—like the teachers, the parents, the fathers and mothers, the youth leaders, the priests, the imams and the pundits—to make an intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They must make an intervention.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people criticize us on the other side for giving \$25,000 to religious organizations at Christmas or Eid or Divali, but little did they realize that that \$25,000 was not for feting. It was because we recognized the roles of religious institutions in this country in moral regeneration. [*Desk thumping*] There are things that you can do as a Government and things you cannot do as a Government, and you must recognize early in life when you are in a Government that you work in partnership with the NGOs and the CBOs, and in this country in particular with the religious organizations. [*Desk thumping*] This year they did not get anything. You have to make choices in how you distribute your resources, financial resources. The churches need money in order to do the job that they have to do.

Mr. Prime Minister, as I speak, I want to make a special appeal to you Mr. Prime Minister. In my constituency, there is a place called the Whiteland Empowerment Centre, and I wrote you about it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 120 children and 200 adults were receiving all kinds of classes, led by a programme in which there were volunteers, people from PhDs down, and it was being managed

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

by Pastor Winston Mansingh, and because the URP wanted to spite me, they have refused to pay the electricity bill for a year now, Mr. Prime Minister. [*Crosstalk*] I have asked. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, because the building was a dilapidated rundown building in which there were vagrants and vermin and we cleaned it up under the URP programme, and when we came out of office they closed it, Mr. Prime Minister. They closed it. That pastor who is working in that area against drugs, making sure children are educated in AIDS. Mr. Prime Minister, I talked to Mr. Clint Ramcharan, the PS. I spoke to the Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, on some occasions you continue to make your point, but let us tie it back in to the relevance of the debate please. Right. Tie it back in.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am saying is this. When you allow places like that to be closed down, you are destroying the work that has to be done by the religious institutions, and by people in the communities to ensure that people do not go the way of addictive gambling, because they think that that is the way of life and that is how they can become somebody significant, when in those institutions we are trying to make them more significant. How does the orphanage, Operation Smile, 25 children feel when in February last year a bus was acquired through the Community Development Fund and the Member for St. Ann's East and the Minister refuses to hand over that bus to the children of Operation Smile. [*Desk thumping*] I wrote you, Mr. Prime Minister, and I can bring the letters and give them to you, and your Minister, they are refusing to do it, Mr. Prime Minister. That is not right, because you are destroying the hopes and aspirations of young people. [*Desk thumping*]

And, further to that, do you know that at Operation Smile, there are three students from there who have gone on to university. One just graduated in sports management, one in social studies, and that particular place is now trying to build another building, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am talking about young people and moving them away from addiction and showing them a better way of life, and that Government is destroying the hopes of those people. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure that the Prime Minister will correct it and make sure it happens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I talk emotionally about it is because I have worked hard in my constituency in this country as a Minister of Government to deal with some of these things, [*Desk thumping*] and the Prime Minister would not like to hear that at all, because this involves children, and I know that he has in his heart a place for children also, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2011, the Centre for Christian Ethics at Baylor University wrote a paper called “The Hidden Social Costs of Gambling” and it was estimated that the social costs on society of one additional pathological gambler is TT \$70,000 a year, and for every 100 gamblers there is one pathological gambler. Can you imagine what is happening in this country and the social costs for us?

And, you know, not only the crime costs are involved in gambling, the ones related to police, to apprehension, adjudication and incarceration expenditures, you know. There is a connection between gambling and crime through pathological gambling. The American Psychiatric Association, in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 4th Edition, defines it as persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behaviour as indicated by five or more of those items.

Among those behaviours that result in crime, as a result of pathological gambling, is forgery, fraud, theft to finance one’s gambling; and then there is the business and employment cost, which includes lost productivity on the job, lost work time and unemployment-related employer costs, such as retraining workers or searching for replacement workers, and then there is bankruptcy, as another social cost. Bankruptcy imposes a cost on society in the form of legal and other resources expended. And there is suicide. There is homelessness. There are all of these things.

Illnesses related to pathological gambling: stress-related illnesses, cardiovascular disorders, anxiety, depression, cognitive disorders. You have the social service cost: unemployment, the treatment of unemployed and then you have family costs which include divorce, separation and child abuse. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt told a gathering on March 13, 2014, she said that one of the most serious causes of domestic violence in this country is gambling; gambling. A friend of mine in Port of Spain who has a high-end restaurant, he closed down his private members’ club in his restaurant because he saw the impact upon single mothers, and the way that gambling was destroying their lives, and he closed it down. He closed it down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a lot we need to do in this country. There is a lot we need to do. You have in this country, you cannot go and deal with the play whe, illegal play whe. I am not saying that you should not have police in order to deal with people who are driving recklessly on the road, but you could put 20 policemen to catch a man doing one kilometre more than the speed limit. The Government is putting the policemen there, and they are not using the policemen for what they should be using them which is to fight crime in the country. [*Desk*

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

thumping] They are not prioritizing or allocating resources as it needs to be allocated to the deep-seated diseases in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

The health sector is in crisis. Security is in crisis. Cancer patients cannot get drugs—\$63 million lost in drugs and you have not done anything to deal with the people who are mismanaging C40, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So you want to deal with gambling, but there are other social ills and important mismanagement that are taking place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, again, tie it in back to the debate. Members at the lower end on the Government side, please, I am getting some murmurings from your end. Proceed, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind and the minds of my colleagues on the Opposition that regulation is necessary. We know regulation is necessary. We are very concerned about what will happen in the JSC, and that the Government will live to its promise to have an effective Joint Select Committee, and that the people who are stakeholders in this will be properly consulted, and their views will be brought to bear, and when we come back here we can have a piece of legislation that is in the interest of all the stakeholders and the interest of the country as a whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to play our role in this society as an Opposition. We are going to ensure that there is good law in this country. We are going to ensure that there is good governance in this country, and if today there is not good governance in this country, it is because over the last 15 months they have not governed this country in the way it should be governed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these words, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for San Fernando East—San Fernando West, sorry. The Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join in contribution to this Bill, “An Act to provide for the regulation and control of gaming and betting and matters related thereto”. The Bill before us is 11 parts, 94 clauses long. It proposes six consequential amendments to several pieces of law: The Gambling and Betting Act, the Gambling and Betting (Licensing) Regulations, the Proceeds of Crime Act, the Registration of Clubs Act, the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority Act and the Betting Levy Board Act, five pieces of law, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before us today stands the country. The country is grappling with a situation which has existed for far too long from successive Government to successive Government. I am very pleased that the Minister of Finance has put this Bill forward, specifically in the form in which it was in 2015, so that it can go to a Joint Select Committee [*Crosstalk*] and let me say why, if the Member for Siparia would just calm down for a moment and stop disturbing. The reason that I am pleased for this is that in June 2015 when this Bill— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, your back has been to me for a little while—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am so sorry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—and then you were conversing. So please, let us—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Perhaps I can use the opportunity to ask the Member to give way. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the substance of the Bill in 2015 was brought to the Parliament by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, Member for Siparia, then Prime Minister. It was put into the House of Representatives on May 22, 2015, which I remind, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the period when the then Prime Minister allowed the most atrocious form of attack on any person that has ever sat in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, ably assisted by the Member for Oropouche East, who said he took great pride in the contribution of Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, and as a result of that the then Opposition in the House of Representatives refused to participate in that kind of democracy exercised by the Member for Siparia's Government then.

The Bill came to the Senate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on June 02, 2015. Parliament prorogued on June 17th and on June 9th, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a mere few days before Parliament was coming to an end, I as an Opposition Senator saw the Bill in the Senate in circumstances where the then Leader of the House, now Member for Chaguanas West, then Sen. Ganga Singh, specifically told Senators opposite that we would not be debating this Bill on the floor of the House, and that it would go to a Joint Select Committee. When I stood then, utterly surprised that the Bill was being debated on June 9th, I was compelled to make observations as to shortcomings that I had observed in the Bill's format then. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the same position today. The Minister of Finance put on the record

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, November 18, 2016

when this Bill was laid in the last session of Parliament, and carried over to this new session of Parliament, that the Government was concerned about the three-fifths majority support, and that specifically the Minister of Finance in speaking with the Member for Siparia had asked—and the answer was given—whether they would support the Bill in the form that was proposed by them, shortcomings and all. The answer given by the Member for Siparia was yes. If the Bill was brought without a comma change, a full stop change, et cetera, that there would be support by the Opposition. That being the case, we laid the Bill exactly as it was.

We intended then, as we have declared today, that this Bill should go to a joint select committee so that we can take account of the very serious observations put onto the Parliament record in part when I was a Senator in June 2015. So there is no inconsistency to the Member for Tabaquite at all in the approach that we have taken. Knowing that we are dealing with an Opposition of the type that we have now, we are bound to take this thing through certain processes.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to put this in a slightly different context. The Opposition is moving all over Trinidad and Tobago celebrating almost, it seems at times, by reflecting upon the number of murders in this country, so much so that there two frontline Senators: Sen. Gerald Ramdeen and Sen. Sturge, came with written documentation to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, carried on the news last night, produced a list of people who were dealing with—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Relevance?

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I am just giving him a couple minutes like how I did with the Member for Tabaquite in order to tie it back into the debate.

Dr. Moonilal: Stay on top of him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I will be aware, Sir. Hon. Member, proceed.

Hon. F. Al Rawi: Let me stop the previous behaviour of the Member for Oropouche East, as he is wont to be previous in his interruptions, and I would paint it in a pellucidly clear manner for him to follow, because I am sure everybody else does.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4) now.

Hon. F. Al Rawi: There is illegality to be had in gaming. There is criminality associated—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, hon. Member.

Dr. Moonilal: He is insulting me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed hon. AG. Overruled. But, hon. AG, at least I would give you a couple minutes to tie it back into the debate please.

Hon. F. Al Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe the Member for Oropouche East is slow to follow, so I would put it now this way. The position is—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Is slow to follow?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please.

Hon. F. Al Rawi: Yes, maybe the Member for Oropouche is slow to follow, because the Member for Tabaquite spoke about—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4), he is insulting me. Am I slow to follow?

Hon. Member: Yes. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, I have overruled. I would like the AG to come to the point. So proceed, AG.

Hon. F. Al Rawi: Thank you. Maybe the Member for Oropouche East is slow to follow the logic of the argument, because the Member for Tabaquite perhaps he did not listen to. The Member for Tabaquite spoke very clearly about how crime and criminality are rooted to the concepts behind which this Bill stands. This Bill is intended to deal with unfounded activity, criminality in the gaming sector as it stands unregulated and, therefore, to touch and concern is not only to answer the Member for Tabaquite, but to paint the picture clearly.

So I am speaking about crime and criminality, and in speaking about crime and criminality, I am cautioning that it stands in the public domain that the Opposition has sent its frontline Senators to the population to read out statistics of people, 420-something-odd people, where there are almost 23 duplications on the list. And, therefore, one is slow to accept anything by way of truthful statement from the Opposition. I make that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to deal with some of the points raised by the Member for Tabaquite because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill is squarely intended to deal with a major problem.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, November 18, 2016

Now, let me take a step back for a moment. There is an international situation, there is a local situation. The country is grappling as it had for many years, as it is now for many years, with the situation of an unabated crime situation which seems to get the better of society. We heard that there was no respect even for a Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Caroni Central was burglarized last night, as was the Member for Diego Martin North/East in the period prior to 2015. Crime touches everyone in this country. We are all exposed but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact is on the local front, crime and criminality has been squarely targeted by this Government in a number of areas which match our international observations, and which relate to this Bill and let me explain how.

The international observation comes directly from the Financial Action Task Force. The FATF, as it is called, 40 recommendations specifically speak to the obligation to observe certain immediate outcomes. The immediate outcomes, three and four, target what are referred to as non-designated listed businesses—that is immediate outcome three—and then immediate outcome four, specifically, gambling or gaming sectors.

There are recommendations that are associated with those as well. The international perspective was born in 1989 in the creation of FATF. In 1992 we, as a region, comprising then several countries—now 26 countries in the Caribbean area—formed ourselves into the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and in doing that we took on what is called an FSRB, a FATF-Style Regional Body approach, to supervise ourselves and evaluate ourselves for compliance with the FATF obligations.

In 2005, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago went into what is called the third-round mutual evaluation by CFATF. They came in, they looked at our laws. They looked for technical compliance: do you have a law against gaming or gambling? Do you have a law against financing for terrorism? Do you have a law against money laundering? We went through an observation under third-round mutual evaluation, which came up with technical compliance list.

The PNM administration then, in 2009, set up the backbone structure of anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing structures. Specifically, in October 2009 taking us to February 2010, we passed the Proceeds of Crime Act, we passed the Financial Intelligence Unit legislation, we passed the Financial Obligations Regulations of 2010 and we passed amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that stood as the backbone of Trinidad and Tobago's approach, because associated with gaming and gambling, associated with money laundering, comes corruption and criminality. That is tied in to what people call "the money behind the wickedness". The famous reference in Trinidad and Tobago to Mr. Big, who is paying, who is profiting for crime to be committed.

In the period 2010 to 2015, the last Government was the People's Partnership Government. Unfortunately, all momentum achieved was lost. Specifically, Trinidad and Tobago was required to do a national risk assessment. We were required to develop laws to treat with unmasking beneficial ownership, meaning, telling us who the real owners of properties, shares, companies, et cetera, are; who stands behind a non-profit organization; who stands as owning a casino or a gaming industry. We were required to do that. We were required specifically to make amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act, to the Financial Intelligence Unit Act, and we were required to operationalize our laws.

We went into a 3rd Round exiting report because we were put into a grey list and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last Government did not achieve the requirements for exiting. Trinidad was put into a merged 3rd Round mutual evaluation, with its upcoming 4th Round mutual evaluation. That 4th Round mutual evaluation was specifically focused upon whether we were operationalizing our laws in a meaningful way: how much money laundering was being tracked; how many offences were scored against those who had committed them; how much counterterrorism financing; did we have laws against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; did we deal with who the real owners are behind transactions and deeds and properties and companies? None of that was dealt with.

The National Risk Assessment was due to be published by 2013 then 2014—not done. The designation of persons supporting terrorism was required to be done under the anti-terrorism legislation—not done. The establishment of a seized assets advisory committee was required under the law to be done—not done. And the Government then had supervision in particular of taking us into an onsite evaluation for the 4th Round mutual evaluation, in January 2015. Needless to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with none of these things being done—importantly including laws to deal with the regulation of the gambling sector as it was called—Trinidad and Tobago scored 11 losses out of 11 points to be reviewed. Let me explain that.

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, November 18, 2016

A country is deemed to go into enhanced follow-up or supervision by both FATF and CFATF if you score with low or moderate points in nine out of 11 outcomes. Trinidad and Tobago scored negatively in 11 out of 11 outcomes. That is not a record that anybody should be pleased with, particularly when we had a five-year period by the last Government to have dealt with the laws in relation to the regulation of gaming. So, therefore, I want to put this into context. When in June 2015 we came to the Parliament to look at this particular legislation, six or seven days before the end of the parliamentary term, we saw it as a failure on the part of the Government then to do the best efforts for our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our mutual evaluation for 4th Round by CFATF occurred in January 2015, and the report was published in November of 2015, one month after we took office as the new Government on September 07, 2015. Upon coming into that position, the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago took the chairmanship of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and I am very pleased to say that Trinidad and Tobago, our country, has come in for incredible commendation for the work that the country has done under Trinidad and Tobago's supervision for the last year at CFATF; specifically by improving the work effort by over 200 per cent by the secondment of staff, but most importantly from the local perspective in driving the anticrime plans of taking the profit out of crime.

In taking the profit out of crime, we have signalled that the same old, same old approach to dealing with criminality cannot be tolerated. We have said as a Government in our legislative agenda, in the consultations which we have, that we are obliged as a country to focus on taking the big man's profit who stands behind crime, as opposed to simply going behind the individuals who carry out the instructions—the small man who unfortunately catches himself in the middle of illegality, be it in drug mule carriage, be it in firearm possession, be it in the unlawful activity that we see on our streets almost on a daily basis. *[Interruption]* Yes, \$2 million in the container; \$2 million found in cash in a container recently, similar to hundreds of millions of dollars found in juice tins exported out of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* Correct, cocaine found in juice tins.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about putting together an architecture to fight crime, this Bill, this Joint Select Committee which would produce the work which this country will be benefited for, this approach is exactly what is required to take the profit out of crime.

We all know that casinos, gaming, as it is currently operated—you heard the Member for Tabaquite speak chapter and verse about the goings-on in these

Gambling Control Bill, 2016

Friday, November 18, 2016

entities—inside of here is where money laundering can occur. Inside of here is where loss of foreign exchange can occur. Inside of here is where there can be abuse to casino workers. Inside of here is where children and elderly persons can be exposed to unfortunate habits of addiction. Inside of here is where unchained criminality can prosper because there is no regulation against those who can own it, because the beneficial ownership is not strictly supervised. Inside of here there is loss of revenue for the State. Inside of here is open abuse. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me explain why this Bill has come now.

You see, on coming into the position as Attorney General, the first thing that was required for the Government to look at was what its legislative agenda would be. I am pleased to say that we have managed to step in and tidy up the legislative drafts which have stood in a state of analysis paralysis. The prioritization for this Government has been squarely upon following the money. When we speak about following the money this Bill articulates squarely with unmasking beneficial ownership by amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act; by amendments to the Companies Act; by amendments to the Financial Intelligence Unit Act; by amendments to the Financial Obligation Regulations; by amendments to the Customs Act; by amendments to the Exchange Control Act; by amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act; by amendments to the law of trusts; by amendments to the method by which deeds are registered. Let me explain how and why.

In regulating gaming, in knowing who it is actually is the ultimate owner and beneficiary, in how much passes through bank accounts, through amusement machines, one has the ability now to track where the underground community of money operates. One has the ability to put it into the banking system and not expose our jurisdiction to what is referred to as corresponding banking issues or derisking issues, where international agencies—such as the Global Forum, such as the FATCA stand-behind arrangements with the United States Government, such as the Financial Action Task Force—look to us and say, “Look, your jurisdiction is an exposure because too much illicit money can flow through your banking system and, therefore, we will shut you down.”

But very importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it not a truism to say, is it not a fact to say, that the proceeds of crime go into cash, property, companies or products? That is ultimately where proceeds of crime can go. We see the effects of it by turf war, by criminality, by people shooting because they want drug turf or they want certain contracts, et cetera. We remember what happened with the Member for Oropouche East, when he presided as Minister of Housing and Urban Development, in known criminals turning up to do HDC contracts, an inexplicable situation. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). What I have to do with known criminals and so on? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: It was on the TV.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will prefer you rephrase your comments, Sir. You were talking from a factual statement?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And your citation would be?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was widely covered on television, et cetera. [*Interruption*] Let me rephrase. Let me state. I said when the Member for Oropouche East stood as Minister of Housing and Urban Development, known criminals turned up to perform HDC contracts. There is nothing wrong with that construction. I did not say the hon. Member put them there. I do not know why he is again being previous to jump up and associate himself with those sentiments. I am talking about the fact that known criminals turned up to deal with HDC contracts. What is wrong with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Dr. Moonilal: Who is the known criminal, was it Mr. Franklin Khan's wife, was it Mr. Imbert's wife? Who are the known criminals?

Hon. Member: What? Nah, nah, nah. You have to withdraw that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member! Members, Members, please. Hon. AG, you are talking from a factual point of view in terms of that? Okay, proceed. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: No, no, no.

Mr. Imbert: Let me see the Standing Orders.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot take the word of the AG that it is factual. [*Desk thumping*] He must produce the necessary documentation.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: That is not how privilege works. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will continue, unless you stop me, with the greatest of respect. [*Crosstalk*] Let me for the benefit of the country—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, is it on a point of order?

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6). He said Ministers' wives were known criminals.

Dr. Moonilal: No, no, no.

Hon. Members: Yes you did! Withdraw it!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, listen.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, all I said—

Mr. Imbert: Withdraw it!

Dr. Moonilal: Hold on, there is nothing to withdraw. All I said was the Member is saying when I served as Minister of Housing, known criminals showed up. I then asked him, who are these known criminals?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one second.

Dr. Moonilal: Is it Ministers' wives?

Mr. Imbert: "Look, he say it again!"

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please. I would like, with regard to the comment that the other Member is making, what was the statement please?

Dr. Moonilal: I asked, who were the known criminals? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No.

Dr. Moonilal: Because I do not know. I do not know known criminals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, a statement is being made about Ministers' wives. Was that statement made?

Hon. Members: Yes!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Could you withdraw it please; withdraw.

Dr. Moonilal: Would you like me to withdraw the questions I asked?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Based on the Minister's wife.

Dr. Moonilal: I asked, who are the known criminals?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would like you to withdraw that statement, Member.

Dr. Moonilal: I withdraw the questions I asked; no problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Minister AG, with regard to your statement, once you are talking about a factual, continue, please.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will remind, it was the infamous “Spanish” quoted all over the news as the person who was the contractor in the HDC projects right here in Port of Spain. Under the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and under the Standing Orders and under May’s *Parliamentary Practice*, a Member takes ownership for what he says. He does not need to produce evidence, and I take ownership of those statements.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I would like you to tie it back in as quickly as possible to the debate.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Of course; I am talking about criminality, and criminality and unfettered criminality is what this legislation is about. When one has the position of a potential criminal, where beneficial ownership is not known, having the privilege in an unregulated context to own a casino, next door to a church, what are we talking about? That is directly relative to this. Again, Members seem to be slow to accept the reality.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that which is to be frowned on in Trinidad and Tobago is exactly what this Government is focusing on. Now, I listed amendments to law and I was about to connect the dots. You see, we have had a situation in Trinidad and Tobago. I did a quick check, in the period 2006 to 2017, we had a police service—[*Interruption*]—for the financial year ending 2017, meaning 2016 now; I am looking at the budgetary allocations ascribed specifically to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and I want to explain this.

Our country constantly says, “Blame Minister, blame this one, blame that one”. The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago had itself amended, by worth of COP, UNC and then PNM, beginning UNC/PNM in 2006, where the Commissioner of Police was given the constitutional authority to manage the police service and to be essentially the accounting officer for that. I did a tabulation out of interest. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, coming to this current financial year, that the police have received \$20,913,694,262? Let me repeat that—the period 2006, actual budgetary figures to this year’s budget, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has received approximately, rounding it up by a small amount, \$21 billion in money. Why do I say that?

If with \$21 billion, we have four money laundering cases—the number one case on alleged corruption in relation to the Piarco Airport matter has been in the Magistrates’ Court for 16 years—[*Interruption*]—yes, I am not speaking about it such as to prejudice—if this is the situation, \$21 billion spent, criminal justice system at a grinding pace, detection and conviction levels we saw a spike in them

in April 2010, where murder and homicide was up to 33 per cent detection and conviction; after the removal of SAUTT we plummeted to 3 per cent under the last Government; it continues at abysmal rates. But my point is, if after so much money, ability to manage your own service, ability to regulate your own accounting officer, we have existing laws, if after all of that we have not seen the kind of impact against crime, then you take the approach that we do now.

Let me explain what it is, this Bill being a part of it. You unmask beneficial ownership. You make sure that the real owners behind companies are known. You unmask beneficial ownership in trust arrangements. Where John Brown buys a property in his name, really for the benefit of somebody else, because you could do that; that is a legal trust. You unmask the real profitability structures by bringing “explain your wealth” legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 15?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You bring “explain your wealth” legislation. You unmask beneficial ownership. You look at the Companies Act and you make sure that you are dealing with predicate offences from proceeds of crime. So that you can step away from the cycle where those who really are the profiteers of crime, get away with it. Now, that fits in to exactly why we are debating this today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to refer to an article. I was asked for proof, and I am going to deviate for a second. I want to refer to a publication appearing in the *Guardian* newspapers. It was an article by Geisha Kowlessar published on Friday, October 18, 2013, and I am going to read this:

Two weeks after greeting Kenneth “Spanish” Rodriguez with a handshake at the site of the Duncan Street police post in Port of Spain, Housing Minister Roodal Moonilal purported to have no knowledge of Rodriguez when asked why Rodriguez was notably absent at the posthanding-over ceremony.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I overrule; proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The article continues:

Rodriguez is the controversial figure connected with the construction of the \$2 million police post at 64 Duncan Street, was one of the many people arrested as suspected gang members during the state of emergency in 2011 but was

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, November 18, 2016

subsequently released. A Beetham Gardens community leader has denied he is involved in gang activity.

Appearing in colour, a rather portly demonstration of character, flashback picture:

Then acting Prime Minister Roodal Moonilal, right, greets contractor Kenneth Rodriguez during a tour of the proposed Duncan Street police post on October 4.

That is the criminal we are talking about. And again, I am not speaking about the Member himself, I am speaking about the fact that this was in the public domain. I was asked for it, I did not have to do it, but I have now put it on to the record. [*Desk thumping*] And I thank the research skills of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. “But he still doh know Spanish, language or otherwise.”

In dealing with the unmasking arrangements, I can confirm that we have prepared the legislation which will be coming to Parliament very shortly. One of them will be confirmed before Cabinet hopefully in the next Thursday to come, this next meeting coming. But what I am saying, gaming, this Bill, regulation to bring it into the light and scrutiny of the regulators, is not only beneficial for the members, but it is beneficial for the country as equal as it is beneficial for making sure that we follow the money. Civil asset forfeiture, explain your wealth legislation, where you go to the civil court and say, “Listen, we would like John Brown opposite to explain how this mansion has been afforded, when John Brown is unemployed.” We would like this particular entity or person that owns a fleet of cars, while being supposedly unemployed without any record of taxation, if that is produced by the Board of Inland Revenue, to explain the position. And if you cannot explain it, the position is offered as with due process you lose the asset.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is critical for us to fight crime and criminality by following the money. That is where this country ties in this Bill as well with the FATCA legislation, with the requirement that we have a reciprocity of the exchange of tax information. Where it is going to be an immediate requirement for us to consider the Global Forum’s requirement that we engage in at least 12 FATCA-type arrangements, intergovernmental agreements for the exchange of tax information, whether by multilateral treaty or individual double taxation relief treaties.

It is also going to be the requirement where we start to open up the doors of the Board of Inland Revenue, if the country so desires, to inspection by the Financial Intelligence Unit, to inspection by the Financial Investigation Bureau of

the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, with due process. Not with fishing expedition, but by the fact of saying let us follow the money. Let us find out who the profiteers really are. The Government has specifically committed to doing this, not only through consultative approach where it is necessary, but also through the due process sanctity provided by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago. [Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am hearing some rumblings from the Member for Oropouche East yet again. I wonder if he has a position on civil asset forfeiture. I genuinely wonder.

Mr. Imbert: Or court clothes. [Crosstalk]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I wonder if he has a position, the hon. Member, speaking as he does as a proposed leader for the United National Congress, to look at these issues. I want to put on to the record, this Bill requires a three-fifths majority, but a lot of the laws that we are speaking about will require the Opposition to have a supportive position in relation to civil asset forfeiture, beneficial ownership. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. We are almost at teatime, please. Go ahead hon. Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I honestly do not take on the Member for Oropouche East much; I honestly do not. I not know if anybody does. I do not know if anybody genuinely does. You see, to take on comments like that means that you actually have to have made a valid point that somebody actually believes, and that is an essential requirement for validity of argument.

I am saying that this present Government will certainly have to engage with the Opposition, as we propose in joint select committee to do on this Bill, and on this occasion it is a requirement because there are observations which we consider to be consistent with those made in June 2015, but there are some matters that do not require consultation. If for instance one reflects upon where we stand in relation to FATCA, there are two or three small amendments on the table, and that is an easy matter to put on the Parliament floor itself. But where there are ramifications of the type that this Bill has, it is obvious that a consultative approach through the joint select committee where the views of the industry stakeholders can be more wholesome and fulsome is a requirement.

But I want to caution, Trinidad and Tobago in the enhanced follow-up perspective of CFATF, has a deadline to achieve. If we do not put ourselves into a

Gambling Control Bill, 2016
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, November 18, 2016

ready position for reporting to the ICRG, the International Co-operation Review Group that reviews us, both at the Financial Action Task Force and at the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, by May 2017, then we are going to be in trouble.

This is why this Bill has come now, because it is so closely linked to the other bits of legislation. *[Interruption]* I was asked to say it again. The enhanced follow-up requirement of CFATF to FATF is that Trinidad and Tobago has to demonstrate some of its successes by May 2017, and this aspect of gaming is one of those requirements. But this Bill, and I want to point to its validity, is specifically linked to amendments which we have prepared. It is work which was not done by the administration prior, but you have to connect your legislative pieces so that when you amend on the left hand, you are conscious of what you are amending on the right hand. If there is incongruity, we will find ourselves in observed difficulty by those who assess us—our mutual evaluation assessors and our second assessors in the form of FATF.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I just enquire how much time I have left?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have five minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We have been asked by the country to carry forward a proposition. The proposition is implementation of measures which will make a meaningful difference to the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, be it on the stimulation of the economy in what is a very difficult time, where oil and gas production now stands at the lowest levels since perhaps we achieved independence, where the tax write-offs which are temporarily affecting our cash flow have come in to bite significantly on our revenue. Whether we look to the citizens' requests for a safer society, we genuinely believe that thinking outside of the box and linking Bills such as this to the follow-the-money train is the way in which you will drive criminality down.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has observed that it will get worse before it gets better in some senses. That is to be a call to Government to do what it must, because we are being very vigilant, in the joint patrols that the Minister of National Security has secured with the Government of Venezuela, patrolling our borders for the first time in forever; in the operationalization of naval assets in a way where we stood unprotected for five years, we are definitely closing the noose on the importation of illicit substances. In the work being done by the Minister of Finance in tightening the architecture for supervising the finances of Trinidad and Tobago, be it at Customs, at Inland Revenue. When you tighten these systems you are going to be putting pressure on Trinidad and Tobago.

And I wish, as I observe that significant exercises are being conducted by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in several hot spots and other areas of concern, I wish to pay a public compliment to the joint activities of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, who have taken up the call, divisional commanders under supervision of Commissioner of Police Acting, inspectors at stations, sergeants at stations now being accountable to the public for what they are doing in terms of driving criminality away from Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government can and will do and has committed to do its part on eradicating money laundering, corruption, waste and mismanagement. We are purchasing the rewards of that right now. We are very pleased at the efforts to squeeze drug and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes of your time.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you; I will proceed to wrap up.

We are very pleased on the war that has been unleashed against drugs and gunrunning. [*Desk thumping*] We are very pleased about the operationalization of scanners for the first time at the port, never plugged in before, where containers can be examined, and we can find cash or illicit substances in containers, for the first time. We are very pleased to put a dagger in the heart of criminality, of waste, of corruption, of mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*] We are very pleased to receive the Opposition's support on unjust enrichments. We are pleased to receive the Opposition's support on follow the money. We will be pleased to receive the Opposition's support on civil asset forfeiture, explain your wealth legislation. We will be pleased to speak to the Opposition's support, if and when they give it, on the exchange of tax information, so that the global network works together to drive criminality out. [*Desk thumping*]

Money does not prosper in this industry only in Trinidad and Tobago; it comes and it goes to other jurisdictions. Trinidad and Tobago wants to know for fact whether people have properties abroad; whether that money came from Trinidad and Tobago, be it in Holland, be it in the United States of America. Wherever it may be, people want to know the truth, and therefore the systems to take us there have to be supported.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I propose when this Bill returns into whatever product that it may from the Joint Select Committee, to provide detailed submissions in relation to the clauses and observations made, and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill.

Adjournment

Friday, November 18, 2016

4.30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, December 02, 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter that—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip.

Mr. Singh: The fourth Friday, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is Private Members' Day. So we are skipping the fourth Friday so that subsequently the 2nd is Private Members' Day?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would be very happy to do that, but there is nothing on the Order Paper from the Opposition for Private Members' Day, so that is why we have gone to the 2nd. There is no Motion on the Order from the Opposition as a private Motion. So—

Mr. Al-Rawi: “They doh want to do Motions. They ain’t file nuttin”.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: They had filed nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House, filed by the Member for Tabaquite. However, I would like, from Standing Order 12(2), to seek your leave in order to extend the time, as we are beyond 4.30. So do I have the leave of the House in order to go to this Motion and then we will proceed to the adjournment of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

**South-West Regional Health Authority
(Failure to Provide Prescription Drugs)**

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The matter that I want to deal with here this afternoon is the failure of the South-West Regional Health Authority, pharmacy department, to provide drugs that are required by one Mr. Baran Roopchan of Preysal Village in Couva. Mr. Deputy

Speaker, this is a very serious situation because what Mr. Baron Roopchan faces is not unlike what several other patients are facing at the San Fernando General Hospital, the south-west region.

On November 2, 2016, Mr. Baran Roopchan of Preysal in Couva visited my office and indicated that he was an outpatient of the Neurosurgery Clinic at the San Fernando General Hospital. And how he came to be a patient there is as a result of a fall he had while working with a contractor. And while in the hospital the contractor went and gave him \$4,000 and then forgot all about him because it appeared that there was no workman's compensation. And it also appeared that the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is not very good at examining work sites to see whether all of the regulations under Occupational Safety and Health are being followed. And therefore, this man is a victim of poor supervision by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and also, he is being abandoned now by the contractor who simply said, "Here is \$4,000" and he goes his way.

So, Mr. Baran Roopchan ends up having to buy, having to obtain medicine that has been prescribed for him. And on July 27, 2016, he was given a prescription, and he is 60 years old, by the way, he was given a prescription to get certain quantities of Arcoxia Neurorubine Forte and Lyrica 75 mg.

Mr. Karim: And Neurorubine.

Dr. S. Rambachan: This man is not working. His man does not have disability because he has now applied for it. He is 85 per cent disabled, so therefore, he cannot work. He is 60 years old. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this gentleman goes on 27th of July, 2016 to the pharmacy at the South-West Regional Health Authority and they tell him, "There are no drugs". So he cannot get it. He does not get it in July; he does not get it in August; he does not get it in September and then he does not get it in October. And then he goes to a pharmacy, Central Drugs Limited, and he gets a prescription, an estimate of the drugs. And the drugs are costing him \$1,041.50; a man who does not even have \$800 a month as disability, no job. He borrowed \$20 from someone to come to my office in Couva in order to have me help him. And up to this day, this day he has not receive drugs. I just spoke to the gentleman this afternoon, he has not received drugs from the South-West Regional Health Authority.

I wrote to Mr. Anil Gosine, the Chief Executive Officer at South-West Regional Health Authority on November 2nd, asking that this gentleman be helped. He referred me to the pharmacy. The pharmacy, I spoke to the pharmacist,

South-West Regional Health Authority
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

Friday, November 18, 2016

the pharmacist indicated that there were no drugs and he was not sure when they were getting any drugs there. And this gentleman is now languishing. I wanted to say “scrunting” because he cannot find \$1,041.50 in order to buy these drugs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is intolerable in this country, intolerable. [*Desk thumping*] Billions of dollars in this country. Billions of dollars we are going to spend hundreds of millions dollars next year in Carnival. All kinds of things we are spending money on. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this gentleman is in constant pain because the South-West Regional Health Authority is not giving drugs.

And I will hear from the Minister of Health this afternoon, Member for St. Joseph all about C40 and the number of drugs that have in there and the drug problem and so on and so forth. That will not solve the problem. [*Desk thumping*] This is not an afternoon for excuses. [*Desk thumping*] This is an afternoon where I have come to ask, through this Parliament, the people’s Parliament, the people’s place where there is resolution for their problems for the Minister of Health to tell me, when this man is going to get his portion of drugs [*Desk thumping*] that he has to get. When will Mr. Roopchan get these drugs?

I am told by people of the South-West Regional Health Authority that there might be alternative drugs, but the doctors are refusing to prescribe those alternative drugs. And if that is true, I also want to know whether that is true and why is it they are not giving out the alternative drugs that might be available? Why it is they are prescribing it? Is it that these are the only drugs that they know? They do not know the other drugs or they feel that those generic drugs are inferior and are not going to do the work and therefore, they are sticking to these drugs. What is the truth?

But I am not here, and this Parliament is not here, and the people of this country are not looking in this afternoon to hear any excuses. I have come with a specific issue, the issue of Mr. Baran Roopchan of Preysal Village in Couva who cannot get his medication since the July 27, 2016. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to answer, and I will be using two authorities this afternoon. One, the WHO, rational drug therapy.

“The Pursuit of Responsible Use of Medications.”

Responsible use of medications requires that:

“Patients receive medications appropriate to their clinical needs, in doses that meet their own individual requirements, for an adequate period of time, and at the lowest cost to them and their community.”

The second authority is that of the hon. Prakash Ramadhar. Appropriation (Financial Year 2017), Bill, page 11 of his *Hansard* referring to my contribution.

“What are we doing? The parasitic oligarchy, my friend.”

This is the hon. Member for St. Augustine:

“I will not call names because we need and I ask the Prime Minister to help you,”—meaning me—“to help us find out who these people are, unearth it and fix it finally. [*Desk thumping*]”

It means everybody across there agreed.

“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 nowhere.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Baran has four drugs—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—two drugs are not on the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health—[*Interruption*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—the National Formulary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—Minister of Health. Members, I would like to also hear the Member’s discourse. So, please.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: They do not want to hear the truth.

Mr. Singh: I want to hear about Baran receiving drugs.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Baran has four drugs on his prescription. Two drugs are not on the National Formulary.

Dr. Rambachan: So, who gave him the prescription?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The doctor wrote a prescription. The two drugs which he cannot get that are on the formulary are: one, Etoricoxib, a COX-2 inhibitor, and Pregabalin.

Mr. Singh: That is no alternative.

Dr. Moonilal: So you blaming Baran?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Hold on. I want to read into the *Hansard* and I am not going to call the company's name nor the drug's name. A company agrees to settle Rofecoxib suits for \$4.85 billion. And it goes onto say, because this drug even prescribed for Mr. Baran should not be prescribed for him. [*Crosstalk*] And if you will keep your cool I will answer you.

There is a whole class of drugs called COX-2 inhibitors that the company that brought it almost went into bankruptcy because of class-action law suits with the United States because they were causing deaths, cardiovascular incidents and so on.

The particular drug recommended to Mr. Baran, Etoricoxib has not even been approved for sale in the United States because it is a highly dangerous drug. And because I reviewed Mr. Baran's case file, he suffers from a core morbidity where this drug, as prescribed, is contra-indicated because he could possibly die.

The evidence goes on to say, [*Crosstalk*] I am giving you the evidence. The evidence goes on to say that none of these drugs are first-line drugs. And the Member for Barataria/San Juan is nodding his head in agreement. They should have never been prescribed to Mr. Baran. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly. And I want to tell you that the first-line drugs are available in Trinidad and Tobago, but because we have a corrupt drug procurement system which does not place the consumer and the patient at the centre, [*Crosstalk*] it is a business. And [*Crosstalk*] exactly, Member for St. Augustine. And the doctors are the ones who advocate on behalf of drug manufacturers to put these drugs on a formulary that have no right to be on a formulary. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rambachan: So the doctors prescribed wrong drugs to the man?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Not wrong drugs. They are prescribing drugs in their own self-interest. [*Crosstalk*] Pregabalin. And as recently as January 15, 2016, the company that manufactures COX-2 inhibitors which are nowhere in any formulary, and let me read it for you.

WHO drug information COX-2 inhibitors, New Zealand. Stringent condition for COX-2 inhibitors because of the increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.

NHS in England NICE guidelines, National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines, states:

COX-2 inhibitors should be removed from their formulary in England due to the high risk of cardiovascular risks and other NSAIDS and lack of proven advantage of COX-2 inhibitors.

I want to tell this honourable House that in Trinidad and Tobago there are first-line, first-world drugs available for this gentleman. [*Desk thumping*] He has no reason to suffer. They are available in the pharmacy, but because of prescribing habits, because of financial gain, our patients in Trinidad are made to suffer. Let me go to the other drug.

Dr. Rambachan: Are you saying the doctors have given the man a wrong prescription.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I am saying the doctors are not—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Minister of Health, Minister of Health, Members, we are going down a road which I do not appreciate. Member for Tabaquite, you had your opportunity. Right now the Minister of Health is giving a response. Please. Minister of Health, continue. There is not provision, Member for Tabaquite, for you to be enquiring and asking additional questions. Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Baran has the same core morbidity that led to a class-action suit against Merck pharmaceuticals, and I want to save his life by telling him [*Desk thumping*] to go a first-line drug which is readily available in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us deal with the other drug, Pregabalin. [*Crosstalk*] Let me read what the NHS says about Pregabalin in England. And the Member for Barataria/San Juan is quietly nodding his head because he knows all of this is true. And PAHO has recommended that COX-2 inhibitors be removed from our National Formulary. [*Crosstalk*] Pregabalin, the other drug that Mr. Baran is on.

And let me tell you, Sir, let me tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are first-line, first-world drugs available to treat the same condition that Pregabalin is being used for.

Hon. Member: On CDAP?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: They are available in the hospitals. These drugs were never available on CDAP. [*Desk thumping*] Get your facts right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Minister of Health, address the Chair, please. Address the Chair.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: When used for pain, Pregabalin does not work for everyone, but a proportion of patients benefit sufficiently. However, the report goes onto say and I quote from the NHS guidelines in England.

“Less harmful...”

Listen to the words, Member for Tabaquite.

“Less harmful, alternative drugs can often be first-line treatments for the...”—
indicated conditions—“...for which Pregabalin and gabapentin are now
used...”

—and should be used because of the potential to cause dependence of Pregabalin.

Both drugs have no right to be on a formulary in Trinidad and Tobago to be dispensed as sweeties because they are unsafe for indiscriminate use as shown by the NICE guidelines out of England. It is banned in New Zealand. It is not used in Australia and in the United States they cannot get FDA approval to use these drugs, but we dump it in Trinidad, we dump it in Trinidad for use here. Let me tell you the racket with drugs. Let me tell you the racket with drugs.

Dr. Rambachan: Where are you getting the drugs?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The drugs are first-line drugs are available here, safer drugs. You want the man to die. I want the man to live. [*Desk thumping*] They are available in the hospitals. Talk to the pharmacist and he will tell the doctor what—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rambachan: Your hospital prescribed it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: There is a racket with insulin. You have people forcing the Government to switch a proper brand of insulin that costs \$5 million a year to bring in, to another brand which has no clinical advantage, but the price would jump to \$30 million a year. I am stopping that. [*Desk thumping*] I am stopping that because everybody wants a drug added to the formulary, but if you ask them what are they taking out of the formulary, no way. There is a drug called—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: That they took to the formulary—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes of your 10 minutes to conclude.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: When you ask them, what is the clinical advantage of Brilinta over Plavix, nobody could tell you. But if you ask them: are we going take out Plavix and put Brilinta? The answer is, no. So every year the formulary just increases and increases. The drug bill just increases and increases and the

people suffer. [*Crosstalk*] This man has no right to suffer because the front-line drugs are available now. [*Crosstalk*] The front-line drugs are available now and have been available for six months.

Mr. Karim: What is the company?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Six months. The front-line, safe drugs. [*Crosstalk*] You have to speak to the person who prescribed the unsafe drug for Mr. Baran. So Mr. Baran has no right to suffer because front-line, safe drugs are available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health,—[*Interruption*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—your 10 minutes have expired. Leader of the House, to confirm the time.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to repeat that we will—[*Crosstalk*] I beg to move that the House now adjourn to Friday, December 02nd, at 1.30 p.m. please.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.50 p.m.