SENATE

Tuesday, January 24, 2017

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses who is out of the country.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T., S.C.:

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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

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

TO: MS. AYANNA LEEBA LEWIS

WHERE AS Senator Dennis Moses is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, AYANNA LEEBA LEWIS, to be temporarily a member of the Senate with effect from 24th January, 2017 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Dennis Moses.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 23rd day of January, 2017."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Ayanna Leeba Lewis took and subscribed to Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2017

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2015 and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2016, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries* (*Hon. Colm Imbert*)]
2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry* (*Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon*)]

10. Ministerial Response to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA), on an inquiry into the Land Settlement Agency in Relation to Squatter Regularisation. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]

11. Ministerial Response of the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an Inquiry into the Administration and Operations of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago (PETROTRIN). [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]

12. Response of the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*The Vice-President* (*Sen. Nigel De Freitas*)]

URGENT QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Madam President, I crave your indulgence. The urgent questions put to the Minister of Planning and Development and the Minister of Education, both these Ministers are a far distance away and the questions have been prepared, and I am asking that these can be deferred to later into today's proceedings?

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I will defer the questions to later in the proceedings.

Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Leader of the Opposition (Precautionary Measures)

Sen. Wayne Sturge: To the Minister of National Security: Given the death threat made to the Head of State, what immediate precautionary measures are being put in place to ensure the safety of the Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice and the Leader of the Opposition?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam President. The agencies of national security have taken the appropriate and necessary action to ensure the safety and security of the Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice and the Leader of the Opposition. I am not at liberty to go into any details of the specific measures. By so doing, can compromise the very security of the officeholders. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sturge: Supplemental. And what precautionary measures do you intend to put in place for us, the ordinary citizens?

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, I will not allow that question. It does not arise.

La Brea Health Centre
(Medical Attention for Residents)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of Health: What measures are in place at the La Brea Health Centre to ensure that immediate medical attention is received by residents affected by the January 22, 2017 oil spill?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the measures in place and working at the La Brea Health facility are: staffing—we have over 13 people that staff the centre on a rotational basis comprised of doctors, primary care physicians 1, primary care physicians II, registered nurses, district health visitors and enrolled nursing assistants. For an oil spill, the major health risk that we have to manage will be respiratory distress and for that, equipment available and functioning are nebulizers, oxygen tanks and concentrators. So the facility is well-equipped with a combination of staffing and equipment to deal with any emergency situation that may arise from the oil spill. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, to my hon. Minister of Health. Could you inform this Senate whether the La Brea Health Centre will be open around the clock in order to facilitate emergency cases given this recent oil spill?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam President. What is unusual is that to date no one, no resident, has presented themselves to the facility seeking any emergency care out of the oil spill. Let me repeat that. To date, no one from the community has presented themselves to the facility seeking emergency care. The hours that the centre is open from are: Sundays, 8.00 to 12.00; Saturdays, 8.00 to 4.00, and Monday to Friday, 8.00 to 9.00 p.m., and to date no one has sought emergency care. So the question of opening 24 hours may not arise. [*Desk thumping*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Madam President, may I say that the Government is in a position to answer all oral questions on the Order Paper. Thank you.

Road Deaths
(Efforts to Curb Increase)

15. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of six (6) road deaths occurring in less than four days immediately prior to September 23, 2016, can the Minister state what is being done to curb such deaths?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, six road deaths occurring in less than four days is a cause for alarm, and although we saw a reduction in road fatalities in 2016 over 2015, the Ministry viewed this as one road fatality is one too many.

The Traffic Management Branch of the Minister of Works and Transport is engaged in the following projects specifically design to enhance and improve road safety. They are: the installation of zebra crossing street furniture; traffic signs and specialized road markings which reduce the risk of accidents involving pedestrian attempting to cross on active roads; the installation of high tension barriers to eliminate injury and property damage including fatalities caused by median crossover traffic and roadside crash along the Uriah Butler Highway and the Solomon Hochoy Highway; provision of road studs on highways and main roads; provision of accessible pedestrian signal devices; deployment of spot speed enhancement cameras; increase in the complement of motor vehicle officers of the Licensing Division to ensure that drivers obey the traffic laws and adhere to the motor vehicle regulation.

In conjunction with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service introducing the speed measuring device, known as the speed guns; to ensure strict adherence to the legal speed limits on the nation's highway; embarkation of the reform of the legislative framework governing the fixed penalty traffic ticketing system and the introduction of a demerit points system in Trinidad and Tobago which would create the platform for more orderly road use and result in future reduction in road fatalities and road accidents. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate, since the implementation of these initiatives as outlined, whether there has been a reduction in the number of road fatalities in our country to date?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, the simple answer was given within the description I gave. In 2016, there was a reduction over 2015, and we expect this to continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure indicate whether there is any intention—Works and Transport—by the Government to purchase any more speed guns, as it is called, since we have been informed that there is a limited number available to the police, through the provision of your Ministry? Could you indicate to us whether there is any intention to purchase more speed guns to assist in this area?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam President. The answer is yes, and maybe as early as Friday the newspaper article inviting suppliers to tender for the option to supply these devices should be in the newspapers as early as this Friday and it is an open competitive bid, and based on the information that we have, it should cost a lot less than it cost about three years ago. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ameen: Madam President, to the Minister. You mentioned the use or the installation of more cameras and there were plans to have cameras installed to deal with—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, you have to just ask the question. Put the question to the Minister, please.

Sen. Ameen: Does the Government plan to introduce cameras that would help with dealing with people who break the laws on the road that cause these accidents? Because presently our laws do not allow cameras.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam President. This requires a change in the legislative framework which the Attorney General—very soon it would be piloted in the Parliament. I could give you the assurance that the cameras are here. A lot of the cameras have been installed and once the legislative framework falls into place, yes, we will be using that as one tool to correct some of the bad attitudes on the nation's roadways. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate to this honourable Senate what would be the number of new devices—speed guns—that would be added to the current number that is in existence at this time, given the advertisement that you just mentioned which will be in the newspapers in a few days' time? What number are we talking about in terms of increasing?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam President. The Ministry of Works and Transport is looking at technology, not only the technology of the speed guns. The advertisement in the newspaper that will be coming out, I think on Friday, should be for

nine. However, I must add, we are also implementing the technology of spot speed, meaning, you do not have to have a police officer standing on the side of the road holding a speed gun. So we are also looking to implement some of those standalone speed devices. So we have fixed speed and nine speed guns coming in. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, in terms of the spot—what is the name that you called it?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Fixed spot speed devices.

Sen. Mark: Fixed spot speed devices. Could you indicate to us, as a Parliament, when you believe once it is approved and you get those fixed spot speed devices in place, what time frame do you anticipate the operationalization of these devices, and how many of them do you anticipate to be effected during the period over the next, let us say, two years, given what you have just said?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you. Madam President, I expect it to be operational in the shortest possible time, and given the financial constraints that we all know that the country has to undergo, we will be installing them on a phased basis over the next two years. [*Desk thumping*]

St. James Hospital
(Steps Taken to Address Brown Water in Taps)

16. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

> What steps are being taken by the Ministry to address the issue of brown water flowing through the taps at the St. James Hospital?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, a most unfortunate situation arose and out of which it was reported that at the St. James Medical Complex brown water flowed from taps adversely affecting consumption and other use thereat. This occurred as a result of three ruptures along the water transmission distribution system. These incidents occurred in the St. James area between September 17th, 2016 and September 20th, 2016.

These incidents resulted in disruptions in the water supply for extended periods and upon repair and re-commissioning of the system, WASA undertook of necessity to flush out the system, a process by which the initial supply is to be discharged as waste. It must be noted that upon receipt of the complaint with respect to water quality, WASA repeated the flushing exercise and the supply was monitored to ensure that proper quality was restored. This was in fact achieved and the problem is now fully resolved. [*Desk thumping*]

Purchase of Basic Items for Jurors
(Action Taken)

17. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Attorney General:

What measures has the Attorney General taken to address the Judiciary's inability to purchase basic items for jurors, which has impacted the commencement of criminal trials?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the Judiciary has provided the following information in answer to the question as posed: The reports that the sitting of the criminal courts were adjourned due to the unavailability of refreshments and toiletries for jurors were not accurate.

On Monday 19th September, 2016, the sitting of the criminal courts in Port of Spain, San Fernando and Tobago in fact commenced. For those courts where a jury was empanelled and asked to return on the adjourned date, this was due to either of the following: other matters engaging the attention of the court, or the attorneys were engaged in legal arguments which cannot be done in the presence of the jury. The criminal courts continue to sit and function, and the question as posed by the hon. Senator seems to have been misinformation on that basis. I hope that this satisfies the enquiry? [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, to the hon. Attorney General. Hon. Attorney General, are you indicating to this Senate, based on the statement you have just rendered, that the statement that appeared in the newspapers of this country on this particular incident were totally misleading, and therefore, wrong? Is it that what you are saying?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam President, I thank the hon. Senator for the supplemental question. The answer which I have just provided comes from the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to whom I posed the question as asked by the hon. Sen. Wade Mark, and that was the response provided to me, that the reports that the sitting of the criminal courts were adjourned, et cetera, were inaccurate. So it appears so, but I rely entirely upon the information as provided to me by the Judiciary itself on this matter.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, to my hon. colleague and friend, the Attorney General. Hon. Attorney General, would you want to indicate to this Senate whether it is incumbent upon the Judiciary when there are inaccurate reports published in the newspaper that some attempt ought to be made to have those reports corrected within the shortest possible time frame?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I would not allow that question. It does not arise so I would not allow it.

Termination of Special Security Unit
(Details of)

18. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Has the Office of the Prime Minister taken a decision to terminate the services of officers in the Special Security Unit? If yes:

(a) can the Prime Minister inform the Senate of the basis for the decision; and

(b) what assistance and benefits will be provided to the officers so affected?

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. Cabinet decided in April 2016 that the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service should provide security services for the Office of the Prime Minister, the official residence of the Prime Minister and the Diplomatic Centre at La Fantasie Road, St. Ann's. This led to the restructuring and eventual disbanding of the security unit of the Office of the Prime Minister. That is the answer to (a).

The answer to (b), Madam President, through you. All officers of the Special Security Unit were separated in accordance with their contractual provisions and in accordance with good industrial relations practice. Additionally, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited were approached to provide assistance with respect to the identification of alternative employment. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister indicate to this honourable Senate whether he can provide us with the number of officers whose services were terminated?

Hon. S. Young: Madam President, I do not have that number with me now.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I again crave your indulgence and I would like to advise, by agreement, that the Opposition Chief Whip Sen. Wade Mark and the coordinator of the Independent Bench, Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir, we have all agreed that the Private Members' business be taken, that sitting, next Tuesday the 31st at 1.30 p.m., when on that day we will deal with Motion No. 1.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I just add to the hon. Leader's intervention that we also agreed that given the fact that the next Private Members' sitting day in the month of February, which is the fourth Tuesday, Carnival Tuesday, we have agreed that we will have Private Members' Day on Tuesday 14th of February instead of Carnival Tuesday.

2.00 p.m.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2017

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

> That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2015, and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2016, be now read a second time.

Madam President, the Bill before us has five clauses and a Schedule. The clauses are very routine and very straightforward and they simply seek the approval of this Senate to vary the appropriation for the last fiscal year. In common parlance, this is called closing the accounts for fiscal 2016. If there were no variations of expenditure, this procedure would not be necessary. The Budget Division will simply settle the accounts, send it to the respective authorities like the Auditor General and publish the accounts for 2016.

When you look at the Schedule, you see that just two Heads of Expenditure are being varied. The first Head is Head 78, which is the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and that Head is being varied in the amount of $370,497,277. The other Head that is being varied is Head 31 which is the new Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and that Head is being increased, as the other Head is being increased, by the sum of $120,781,446. The total variation in terms of Heads of Expenditure that are being increased is $491,278,723.

At the same time, we are seeking to reduce two other Heads of Expenditure: Head 40, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in the sum of $370,497,277 and the Ministry of Communications which is now being replaced by the amended or expanded Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in the amount of $120,781,446, making a total reduction of Heads of Expenditure of $491,278,723, the exact amount that the other Heads have been increased. The effect of all of this, Madam President, is a nil effect so there is no increase in the appropriation for the last fiscal year.

What I would also inform this Senate about is the reasons for this variation of appropriation. The first Head that needs explanation is the increase of $370,497,277 for Head 78, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. As you would be aware, Madam President, in fiscal 2016, the Government, in fulfilment of a

manifesto promise, increased the cap on pensions for persons who are in receipt of both the senior citizens' pension and the national insurance pension. Previously, the cap for those pensions was $4,500. So if one earned the NIS pension of $3,000, the maximum senior citizens' pension that one could receive, once one qualified, would have been $1,500.

In 2016, we brought the requisite legislation to the Parliament to increase the cap to $5,000 thereby increasing the amount available to a recipient of the senior citizens' pension to $2,000. So they would get $3,000 NIS and $2,000 senior citizens' pension. In addition, there was an increase in the number of persons accessing the programme because we also increased the statutory limit for qualification for a senior citizens' pension from $3,500 a month to $4,500. This is the qualification. So the combination of the greater number of persons accessing the programme, because the statutory limit for qualification went up by $1,000 plus the increase in the cap if you are in receipt of both pensions, the combination of those two led to a requirement for an additional $370,497,277.

This was paid using Treasury Deposits which is a device, a mechanism that is available to all governments, where you have extraordinary expenditure that was not budgeted for. You are required when closing these accounts to retire these Treasury Deposits and Ministers of Finance would look for savings in other Heads of Expenditure in order to find the money to retire the advances from the Treasury Deposits.

We found the money in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. The reason why we were able to find this sum of $370,497,277 is because when we did a final review of the fuel subsidy, we determined that because of the decline in oil prices in 2016—for those who may not be aware, oil prices hit a low of $29 in January 2016, dropping from a high of $107 in June of 2014, and then began to creep back up but remained flat for most of 2016. In fact, if I check the price of oil now, it has been see-sawing or fluctuating fairly wildly for the last month or so. Today, it is up 1.42 per cent at $53.50.

And while I am on that, we use the benchmark West Texas Intermediate. There are other oil prices that are published, it can be confusing. We used to use Brent crude oil as our benchmark but we have since switched to WTI. I prefer to look at the Urals crude oil, which is the Russian crude, as well as the OPEC basket which are currently today at $54 and $52 to get a better understanding of the price we get for the basket of crudes we have in Trinidad and Tobago. Because we have light sweet crude off the east coast but we also have heavy crude on land so when you look at the budgeted price of crude oil for the Trinidad and Tobago situation,

you have to look at the combination of the heavy crude, land crude and the light crude offshore. So that we had predicated the budget on an oil price of $45 being the basket of crudes that we receive in Trinidad and Tobago and so that would be on an average price and oil was significantly below that on average for the fiscal year. I think it averaged out at about $40, if my memory serves me correct, for fiscal 2016.

So as a result, the price of petroleum products: gasoline, super gasoline, premium, auto diesel and so on, the price of petroleum products follows the price of oil which is—these are products that have derived from crude oil in the refinery. So that as the price of oil was lower than anticipated, the price of petroleum, ex-refinery, was lower than anticipated and, therefore, the subsidy was less than anticipated. So we have been able to realize savings in the estimated subsidy of $370,497,277 so that balanced out the increased expenditure on old-age pensions for fiscal 2016, so that had a nil effect.

In addition, the Ministry of Communications was merged with the Ministry of Public Administration sometime around March. In fact, my documents tell me it was *Gazette* No. 35, Vol. 55 dated March the 17th, 2016 that the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was created by merging Communications and Public Admin. As a result the Ministry of Communications as a stand-alone Ministry no longer existed. However, the expenditure that would have been expended by that Ministry, if it had continued, of $120,781,446 was now required to be added to the Ministry of Public Admin because Public Administration had no communications responsibility prior to March. But now that communication was added as part of the expanded portfolio of that Ministry, the funding in the appropriation was simply passed on to the new Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. So we took the residual allocation of $120 million from the old Ministry of Communications and it was given to the new Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. Again, a net nil effect.

In terms of the fiscal outturn, the actual expenditure for the 2016 was—let me get the actual number, I do not want to be inaccurate. It was 52 billion, 405.9 million. So the actual expenditure for 2016 which ended—the fiscal year ended on the 30th of December, 2016—was $52.4059 billion, considerably less than the original figure of some $63 billion. It is about $11 billion less. But it was, in effect, $171 million higher than the number estimated at the time of the delivery of the 2017 budget and the preparation of the estimates of expenditure for the 2017 budget, which like all of these documents, shows the revised expenditure and their original allocation for previous years.

So that, whenever you get any one of these documents, the estimates of expenditure, recurrent expenditure for example, you would get what was estimated for 2017, you would get the revised figure for 2016 and you would get the original projection for 2016. So the revised figure for 2016 in terms of overall expenditure was just $171 million lower than the actual so the actual expenditure was $171 million higher.

In terms of revenue, the actual revenue was slightly lower than was originally anticipated. The actual revenue was $44.753 billion as compared to $44.941 billion which was what the budget documents would have shown on the 30th of September. So as we go along, these figures are refined because Ministries get releases of funds but they do not always spend all of the releases that they get. The public servants use their best judgment to estimate what it would be but there would always be small variances when you come to close the accounts. So the actual revenue for fiscal 2016 was $44.753 billion as compared to 44.94 which was the revised estimate and this had an effect on the deficit. The deficit was originally estimated to be $7.2 billion for fiscal 2016 but when you take the revised revenue being $188 million lower than anticipated and the revised expenditure being $171 million higher. You add the two, you get a variance of about $350 million. So the deficit, instead of being $7.2 billion, was a bit over $7.5 billion.

And, Madam President, that is it basically. I want to say at the outset that none of this has anything to do with the 2017 expenditure. We are closing the accounts for 2016 and therefore, I personally would like to keep this debate very tight dealing with the subject matter which is the variation of two Heads of Expenditure for last year; it has absolutely nothing to do with this year. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much. Madam President, the Bill before us, as outlined by the hon. Minister, is designed to close the gap so that we can—between revenue and expenditure, given the shifts in terms of increases and decreases as outlined by the hon. Minister and this, as he rightfully said, is to address the financial year of 2016 to bring closure to the finances for 2016. And of course, the Minister, as he said, would like to keep it tight. [*Laughter*] Well, I myself will try to keep it as tightly as I can but we need some further explanations as we proceed to attempt to keep it tight.

Madam President, the Minister said that there were savings in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and these savings were transferred to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in an effort to address what he described as

earlier advances made through Treasury Deposits to satisfy what he described as a manifesto pledge which saw the ceiling that was accessible to pensioners who were in receipt of both NIS contributions of $3,000 and senior citizens' pensions. That is one element. And he also talked about another aspect of his Government's manifesto pledge.

Well, I want to ask the hon. Minister, since that was a manifesto pledge by his Government and since the Minister was aware that new recipients would have accessed this new arrangement so that they can take advantage of this additional $500, why did the Minister not anticipate that expenditure when he brought to this Parliament the 2015/2016 Appropriation Bill? [*Desk thumping*] Because if it was a manifesto pledge, as was indicated by the hon. Minister, it meant, Madam President, in crafting his budget and crunching his numbers, he would have known that that was an obligation that he would have had to budget for and the Ministry of Finance does have some of the best technocrats in the country, and the Minister has, at his disposal, the research facilities of the Central Bank and the CSO. So some rough estimation could have been had as to the number of recipients who would have accessed this new provision that was identified by the hon. Minister. But what we had, Madam President, was a situation in which the Minister did not properly budget for that expenditure of $370 million in his 2015/2016 Appropriation Bill under the heading Social Development and Family Services, that Ministry in question.

And, Madam President, I want to tell you the basis for this obvious error, mistake, by the Minister of Finance. You would recall that, as the Minister admitted, we budgeted the price of oil at a certain level, or a certain price was given, and within a short space of time, the price tumbled. I do not have the numbers here or the figures with me. And as such, the Minister of Finance was forced to engage in what is called a midterm review as you would recall and a lot of very important changes were advanced by the Minister in his midterm review in order to bring a balance as far as is critically possible to the realities that the Government was faced with at the time.

Madam President, you would recall that the Minister of Finance issued a directive, an edict, an instruction, to all Ministries to reduce expenditure across the board by 7 per cent. Everybody knows that, [*Desk thumping*] and this would have been done without serious thought. The Government just issued an edict and Ministries were just instructed to slash and cut 7 per cent across the board. And I am not surprised, Madam President, I think no one should be surprised in this honourable Senate that the Minister of Finance found himself at a particular point in time in fiscal 2015/2016 with a hole in Social Development and Family Services Ministry.

So what did the Minister have to do when, Madam President, he found out that there was a major shortfall in his financial commitments to address what he has just admitted, the increases as a result of the ceiling moving from $4,500 to $5,000, as an example. And the Minister—I do not know exactly what time it took place, maybe the Minister, in his winding-up, will tell us whether it was in the month of July or in the month of August that he found himself in a crunch to meet that obligation to tens of thousands of senior citizens who were accessing pensions and other facilities under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

And Madam President, what was the outcome? You know what was the outcome? The outcome was that the Minister had to go to the Central Bank to borrow, to advance a loan of $370 million pending the passage of the 2017 budget probably. So imagine, we are in a situation where the Minister has to meet certain obligations to pensioners in this country and because the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services did not have the wherewithal, did not have the finances to meet those obligations, a loan, an advance, had to be taken and we are being told that Treasury Deposits had to be retired at an appropriate time in an effort to address this lacuna at the time.

But, Madam President, this has to be a situation in which the Government ought to have been a little more careful in what it actually did at that time. But you know what is even more important? I want to tell you something, Madam President, these numbers that the Minister outlined here today, which appears to the hon. Minister to be simple and straightforward and to be—he wants a tight debate. I want to tell you something, Madam President, behind those numbers, we have a story. Those numbers tell the country a story and what we are seeing today is a situation, according to the Minister's own admission today, and I have the numbers here. The Minister outlined the numbers. Hear what he said, Madam President, to you and to me and to all of us. He said expenditure at the end of fiscal 2016 was anticipated to be $63 billion, according to the original estimates, $63 billion.

But when he went through the mid-year review and the address of the Prime Minister, with the collapse of oil prices and his failure as a Minister of Finance to come up with creative and innovative solutions and initiatives to generate new streams of income in the country, Madam President, what did we discover? Seven per cent on average.

2.30 p.m.

In fact we, have made a rough assessment. We could be wrong, Madam President. You could correct us. The Minister could correct us. We believe that, based on our estimation, it was much more than 7 per cent across the board. It may have been more like around 10 per cent across the board, in terms of cuts in expenditure for 2016.

So do you know what happened, Madam President? We moved from this ambitious number of $63 billion. And you know where we ended up? At $52,405,090,000, according to the Minister of Finance. That was the end of the year number when it came to the expenditure for 2016.

Madam President, the hon. Minister went on further to indicate the actual revenue. The actual revenue, according to him, was $44.753 billion. But the estimated amount was $44.941 billion, giving us, Madam President, a deficit of 7.2 initially. But as the hon. Minister admitted, when the public officers did the final numbers, it turned out to be $7.5 billion as the deficit for 2016.

Madam President, do you know why I told this honourable Senate that these numbers would tell us a story? It is because of this. When a country, when an economy, when a society, is rolling into deficit after deficit after deficit and there is no economic growth, no increases in production, no increases in output—instead what is happening, we have negative economic growth in the country. So imagine in Trinidad and Tobago—and the Minister said he wanted this to be a short debate. How this could be a short debate? How this could be a tight debate, when you have a deficit facing this country in 2016 of $7.5 billion? [*Desk thumping*]

And not only that, no economic growth. In fact, I want to tell you, according to the *Economic Bulletin* of July 2016, issued by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, do you know what it states here on page 2? GDP indicates that domestic economic activity declined by 5.2 per cent year on year, due to declines in both the energy sector of 9.1 per cent and the non-energy sector by 2.8 per cent.

So, Madam President, here it is, deficit $7.5 billion, and at the same time the economy has crashed and we are now in the negative zone, negative territory, where we are now minus, according to the Central Bank figures, of 5.2, Madam President, minus 5.2. That is a dark hole for Trinidad and Tobago. No economic growth, but yet still we are borrowing money. That is what a deficit means. A deficit means, Madam President, that our revenue and expenditure are not in line. We are spending more than we are earning. There is a gap and that is what the fiscal deficit tells you. So to fill that gap in 2016, what did the Government have to do? They had to borrow.

So what is going in Trinidad and Tobago? No economic growth for 2016. The projection is minus 5.2 per cent. We are borrowing, Madam President, in order to fill the gap. We are not growing, and this Government, in 2016, did not produce, did not bring forward one economic project that it can say and claim it is their own, [*Desk thumping*] not one economic project. All they have been doing is opening projects that the People's Partnership started. [*Desk thumping*] Not a project has been opened by this administration since it came into office in 2015; and they say they are red, they are ready—red and ready. To do what? I do not know, Madam President.

Madam President, here it is we have a society in which the hon. Minister of Finance is on record as saying he does not want to take the debt to GDP ratio beyond 60 per cent. Because, according to the OECD countries there is a benchmark that they have established that we should not go beyond, 60 per cent. We could go lower—40 per cent, 45 per cent, 30 per cent, but not above 60 per cent.

Madam President, what we are faced with in Trinidad and Tobago is a situation where the People's National Movement, led by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister, is taking this country into what has been popularly described as the debt trap, a debt trap, the debt trap.

Madam President, this is why I am telling you that it is rather disingenuous for the hon. Minister to come here, present these numbers, take his seat in five minutes and say: "You know what? I want a tight debate." But the numbers do not tell us he could get a tight debate. The numbers tell us that you need to explain to this country your role, Madam President—that is, the hon. Minister's role—in this debacle that we are facing in 2016. [*Desk thumping*] It is a manifestation of utter failure on the part of the Government, as it relates to their economic policies and programmes for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What 2016 reveals is a lack of vision, a lack of strategy, a lack of planning, a plan, no focus, to take our country forward. That is what these numbers are telling us.

Madam President, what we are in danger of in this country, the IMF has already predicted that we may end up in the 70 per cent zone, in terms of debt to GDP. Because right now we are close to about 61/62 per cent and we are heading and rushing onward to possibly 70 per cent. That is not healthy for any economy, particularly when we do not have any projects, no real programmes, no strategy for transformation, for recovery, for revival, for development in our country. All we have are promises. All we are given are promises.

So this is a very serious matter that we are dealing with here, even though the numbers might appear to be just, you have increases, in where?— Public Administration and Communications. Increases where?—Social Development and Family Services. And you have decreases in other areas, and, of course, savings, as the hon. Minister said, in energy, where you had decreases because they found $370 million.

So, Madam President, I wanted to ask the hon. Minister, seeing that he is the acting Minister—may I put on record? We on this side would like our colleague, the Leader of Government Business, we want to wish him a speedy recovery. [*Desk thumping*] A very hard-working individual. We want to wish him a very speedy recovery, a very, very speedy recovery. That is Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan. We want to wish him a very speedy recovery, Madam President.

Do you know what I wanted to ask the hon. Minister? If he had done the correct budgeting, and if he had given, for instance, proper directions to Ministries, there is something called discretionary spending and there is something called non-discretionary spending. If the Minister had done the proper kind of directives or given the proper kind of directives, then there would be some areas that you have discretion in cutting, adjusting, and there are others that are completely non-discretionary. Pensions would have been one of them. No discretion when coming to meeting the obligation for old-age pensions in this country. And had the hon. Minister done his homework, along with his technocrats properly, that $370 million so-called savings, as a result of a lowering in fuel subsidies, might have been able to be transmitted and directed to maybe Petrotrin, for investment. [*Desk thumping*]

Do you know, Madam President, that Petrotrin's asset enhancement programme for 2016 was about $300 million? And what we saved, according to the Minister, and sent to social development, was about $370 million? Suppose that same $370 million could have been given to Petrotrin and just under what is called public expenditure, capital expenditure, directed there; and dealing with that and that alone, what you will have, Madam President, is a situation where the south of our country—and the hon. Minister of Local Government, who is a southerner, would have been able to testify to this matter. Because of the ageing assets of Petrotrin, you have oil spills every week in south Trinidad. How long is that going to continue? [*Desk thumping*] How long is that going to continue, Madam President?

Hon. Imbert: Point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Mark, come back now to the Bill at hand, please.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Madam President, the Minister is not seeing the linkages. I am not saying you, Madam President. I have the greatest respect for you. I am saying that the Minister is not seeing the linkages. But I will be guided by your ruling.

Madam President, I want to deal with the whole issue of public administration and communication. As we are dealing with this, I want to ask a question, as it relates to communications. Under communications, you have something called CNMG and something called GISL. Those are some of the critical communication media that fall under communications, and then, of course, they have a radio network, I think it is 100.1 Sweet Music and then a couple other radio stations they have under their belt, in terms of communications.

Madam President, I know that that particular company, CNMG, where the money—this $120 million, let me explain something. Whilst the Minister did not go into any kind of details on the $120 million, we cannot approve $120 million in a blanket kind of arrangement, you know. We have to drill down to see where this $120 million was allocated and what items. And what we are discussing is that this question of communication is very critical, because here it is you had a merger of public administration and communication and you had one big Ministry emerging out of that.

But in terms of public administration and communication, we know that public administration, one of its main functions and responsibilities is the provision of proper, affordable, cost-effective goods and services to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what public administration is supposed to be doing.

In addition to that, Madam President, public administration deals with modernization. It deals with transformation. It deals with e-governance and e-government. These are very fundamental roles and duties that they have to perform. And, therefore, in those circumstances, when you look at the role of public administration and communication we have to ask the question whether the people of this country are being short-changed. And they are being short-changed. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell you something, Madam President. There was a survey, I want to bring to your notice, that was conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank and it dealt with citizen frustration with bureaucracy. This is the survey that was conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean. Madam President, this—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Madam President, point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Mark, try and link what you are saying. You are dealing with the Ministry of Public—right, try and link it a little faster, please. Okay?

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I was coming to do that. But my friend seems to be impatient. But what I was saying is that we are dealing with public administration and communication, and if we are talking about allocating a certain amount of money towards public administration and communication, it must mean that as a Parliament, as a Senate, we would like to know what that particular Ministry does and what this money was utilized for in 2016. That is what we are asking. And we are saying, Madam President, one of the functions of the Ministry of Public Administration is the provision of goods and services to the nation. And that is the link; that it provides services to our country.

And I was just bringing to the attention of the honourable Senate, through you, that there is a lot of frustration in the country, as it relates to the bureaucracy involved in the quality of services provided by the public service. [*Desk thumping*] And Public Administration is responsible for the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What I am saying is that there was a survey that was conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank that showed—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: No, no, no, no. Point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I am trying actually to help you. Okay? So try and condense what you are saying and make it relevant to the business at hand. Okay?

Sen. W. Mark: Yes. Madam President, this is a money Bill and we do not have a vote on a money Bill but we do have some flexibility in debating a money Bill, even though it might appear to be tight in the context of what it is.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, please. I have ruled on this matter. Either follow my ruling or I will deal with—I will take appropriate action. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Mark: You would like the President to throw me out? My God, I think you would miss me if I leave.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have five more minutes. [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: Look, look, look. I think the five minutes "save meh". I think the five minutes has saved me, Madam President, from being tossed out.

May I say, as I rush towards my conclusion, in terms of communications, I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether he is aware that that cash-strapped operation called the CNMG, that the People's National Movement owes over $850,000 to that outfit? I am just asking. I would like the hon. Minister, the Leader of

Government Business and the Minister of Trade and Industry, when she is speaking—the hon. Minister, that is—to clear the air on whether the PNM, since 2007, has failed to honour its commitment to CNMG, as it relates to some $850,000. [*Interruption*] No, no, that is what I am asking. I would like you to clarify that particular point for me as we move forward.

So, Madam President, there are several areas that, when we look at the numbers it tells us a story of the economic management of this society and the overall management of our economy and it is not a rosy picture, Madam President. It tells us that the Government has failed to manage this economy in a proper and prudent manner and as such, the citizens are feeling the pain, the hurt, and the discomfort as a result of the mismanagement of this economy by this Government, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam President, I have tried, with your leave, to be as tight as I can so that, for instance, the message could be sent out clear and unambiguously that this Bill is not simply about the numbers that we have before us, but behind these numbers we have a story and I think it is important that we tell the story to the Senate and to the country so that the country would know all is not well in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, as I close, the prospects for the first four months of this year do not appear to be good as well. I would like the hon. Minister in winding-up, if he could give us an appreciation from his own analysis, what is the current status of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago for the first four months of 2017?

Hon. Imbert: Madam President, point of order. Point of order, 46(1).

Sen. W. Mark: I am hoping that he can give us that.

Hon. Imbert: He is asking about 2017. You cannot do that.

Sen. W. Mark: No, I am asking if he can give. I saw, Madam President—[*Interruption*]—may I conclude, because I do not want you to stop me. I would like to conclude at this time and to call on the Minister of Finance. He has a duty and a responsibility to account to this Parliament for the first four months of 2017. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you very much, Madam President.

Sen. David Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate with all of the wonderful activity going on in this Chamber. It is a pleasure to join in this debate. I listened intently to the hon. Minister of Finance, the Acting Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, a man of many portfolios; a super Minister.

Hon. Imbert: "Nah, nah, doh say dat." Take that back.

Sen. D. Small: If I have digressed or—I take it back, Minister.

Madam President, the Bill before us is the Bill to deal with the finance—essentially I understand. It is a Bill to close the financial accounts for 2016. I have, if you would permit me, just a couple of introductory comments before I delve into—I have several things inside of the Senate document here that I will be seeking the leave of the hon. Minister of Finance to provide some clarification; if not today at least at some point in time in the future.

I want to set the frame, Madam President. The year 2016 was the first full year where we really struggled under the oil price scenario where prices were at levels that were really unprecedented. We are operating in an environment where global changes are coming and they are likely to reverse many of the things that we take for granted now. There is a wave of protectionism for economies going on around the world and small economies tend to be hurt when that happens.

We look at what is happening in some—well, we have the wonderful Brexit story that has been going on. We see the first set of changes in the US system. We have a potential situation in France where you have a President, a person who is running for election. If Marine Le Pen is successful it will bring a whole change to the way in which the EU operates. I am setting the frame.

Madam President, yesterday at the energy conference one of the speakers made a critical statement that I fully endorse and support. The statement was that maintaining the status quo is not a winning strategy in this environment. It is something that I want us to internalize to be able to drive through the system; that maintaining the status quo in this current environment is not a winning strategy. I understand why we are trying to keep things on a level. But if we really want to be sustainable, maintaining what we have now, how it is, is not going to help us to win.

I searched long and hard, Madam President. There was a phrase about you must never let a downturn—or, you must never waste a good downturn. I could not find the origination of that phrase. But even my good colleague, Sen. Mahabir would agree that an economic downturn presents the opportunity for us to make structural changes.

We have a situation where I am not sure, when I speak to people, if they understand the depth of the crisis that we are facing now because of the attempts—and, you see, I want to link it to the attempts to maintaining the status quo. By maintaining the status quo, people are not understanding or grasping or feeling the depth of the economic challenges that we have now.

The hon. Minister of Finance in his presentation went through the issues of oil price. Around this time, around February of last year the oil price went down to like $28 or $29. Today, right now, it is about $53, and for most people that would have seemed to be a good recovery. But given what oil price has been averaging in the preceding five years, it is 50 per cent of what it should be or what we have grown accustomed to, or what we have started to budget for. And that is the issue.

The data will share. I have shared this data on more than one occasion. The average oil price, WTI, over the period 2011 to 2014, that was the highest period in the history of oil prices, where the price of oil averaged over $100 in each of those years. So to adjust back to an oil price of $53 as we are today, it is a huge adjustment. It is a huge negative adjustment.

And even if we get out of this cycle, Madam President, even if today, tomorrow, some event happens in the world order and oil prices go back to $100, I am sure the hon. Minister of Finance will agree with me that if the price goes back he will get some breathing space. But the effect, given what is happening with our production, we will not really reap the benefits from that oil price, that increase in the prices. What we need is to grow production.

Most importantly, Madam President, as I start to wrap up my preamble, in any scenario where energy prices recover, we have to learn the lessons of the past about not repeating the mistakes and putting to bed some of the old practices because we will be taking a step backwards.

3.00 p.m.

I want to close my preamble, Madam President, by a key statement made by another one of the speakers at the Energy Conference yesterday, that we should start to act and plan as if energy prices will remain low for the medium to long term. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, could we please allow Sen. Small to make his contribution? So could Senators be silent and allow Sen. Small to continue. Sen. Small.

Sen. D. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. As I was closing my preamble, Madam President, in my short contribution—I will not be long—but I believe that it is a key statement. We have to act and plan as if the current energy prices will be here with us for some time. Because if we accept that oil prices are going to be in the low $50 range for the next five years, if we accept that as a planning basis, then the revenue assumption going forward would be $35 billion, $36 billion, then our expenditure assumption cannot be in the $50 billion range. We will have to adjust downwards. I think this is what is needed, because we are carrying a deficit. I understand why we are carrying a deficit at this point in time, but we need to start to plan a little further going forward.

Madam President, the Bill before us deals with changes that were made in how moneys were appropriated, and I was actually surprised by the content of the Bill, because an increase that I would have liked to see in the 2016 appropriation would have been an increase under the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, as it relates to the establishment or the re-establishment of a mission in Georgetown, Guyana for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Because I think we sit here and our neighbour, our Caricom neighbour is set to be in the next probably five years the biggest oil producer in this region given what the forecast is. If we really want to be a partner with Guyana and to share our knowledge and to share our experiences, having that diplomatic presence would be key. It would allow for our manufacturers and our service entrepreneurs to be able to enter that market with the support of the Government. So I would have liked to see an increase in the measures that would have allowed us to have a mission there.

Madam President, also, one other item when I looked at the provisions provided in the Bill, I would have liked to see an increase also in the provision at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as was ventilated well in the public, Madam President. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the hon. Minister of Finance is well aware the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is under resourced regarding something called the Production Sharing Contracts Audit Unit. This is the unit that audits the Production Sharing Contracts to make sure that the hon. Minister of Finance gets his revenue. So I would have liked to see an increase there.

So, Madam President, I now go to two areas. The first issue I want to look at is on the document circulated to Senators. It is a document entitled the "Senate Document", and I have a couple of queries that I would like to ask and seek clarification on. Under Head 18, Ministry of Finance, on page 23 of the document, under "Reasons for transfer"—[*Crosstalk*]—the Senate document. The document headed "Senate document".

Hon. Senator: We do not have it. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. D. Small: We all got that. Well, there was an attached document. This was part of the material supplied—[*Crosstalk*] Madam President, I will be guided. My understanding is the "Senate Document" is a supporting document to the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: No, it is not.

Sen. D. Small: Well if it is not, I will be guided. [*Crosstalk*] Madam President, still I proceed, because I do not plan to engage us for more than a few more minutes. I have a few queries that I would respectfully seek the hon. Minister's indulgence in his winding up to respond.

Madam President, under the document, under the heading "Ministry of Finance" there was a transfer of funds to facilitate—on page 23—the award of a contract for the maintenance of mobile scanners which were donated by the US Government. The provision was $11 million. All I am asking, if you have four scanners and the provision is $11 million, what is the contract term? Is it a one-year contract? Is it a two-year contract? Is it a three-year? I have no idea, but $11 million for the maintenance of four scanners sounds like a big number, but I am not sure. Given the information I have here, I am not sure what to derive from it. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I have a couple more that I would just seek, again, the indulgence of the hon. Minister. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, Madam President.

Hon. Imbert: Will the Senator give way?

Sen. D. Small: Certainly, hon. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much. I would just like to inform hon. Senators that that document which I am seeing for the first time, Senate Document, relates to the Report of the Finance Committee in the House of Representatives. It is not intended for this debate and must have been sent here in error. I am seeing it for the first time, but the matter before us is the variation Bill. In the other place, we debate the Report of the Committee, the Finance Committee, and also the variation Bill, but in this place we do not debate the Report of the Finance Committee, because it is a Finance Committee of the House of Representatives. So that has been sent here by mistake. I would have to find out what happened.

Sen. D. Small: Well, Madam President, this is interesting to me, because this is a document we have received on previous occasions and we have been able to question on it. [*Desk thumping*] I would seek your direction, Madam President, before I even attempt to proceed, because it has been my experience here that this document has come here before, and I have spoken and queried and sought clarification on several issues therein. If that was an error at that time, I do not mind, and if it is an error now, I need to be guided. I do not plan to detain, but I have just a few queries that I would like to ask, and if I am not permitted to do so, then I need to be guided.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I am going to suspend the sitting for 10 minutes, and when I come back we will resume. So this sitting is suspended for 10 minutes.

3.07 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

3.18 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam President: Sen. Small, before you recommence your contribution, let me just say that this document that is named "Senate Document" contains what I would say to be background information. If you actually read the front of it, it talks about the variation which then leads into the Bill that is before us. Now, when the hon. Minister of Finance introduced the Bill, he dealt specifically with the items that are set out in the Bill and, therefore, I do not think that we should be referring and asking too many questions on what is listed in this Senate Document; those items that do not form part of the Bill.

Yes?

So, therefore, I am saying, let us stick to the items in the Bill. Let us keep our discussion to those items and not to all the various Ministries that are listed in this Senate Document. That would be going outside the purview of the Bill. Okay?

Sen. D. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President, and I will be guided by your decision and ruling on this matter. I would like to place on the record it is not my intention to be disruptive in the Senate, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Small, I never had that view. In fact, we needed to sort it out, and I am glad that we have and so let us just continue.

Sen. D. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President and hon. Minister of Finance. Thank you very much for clarifying that matter, because in my preparation for this debate, Madam President, there were many and several issues that I flagged here that required quite a lot of questions, but I would leave that for another time and I would take that up in a separate way.

Madam President, the Bill before us, the issues around the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, I understand the rationale provided by the Minister regarding the change in the oil price, and the fact that the oil prices have been favourable towards us in terms of the subsidy has allowed the Ministry to be able to generate a savings on the subsidy, but I would still like to make the point, if you will permit me, Madam President.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is a premier entity in the civil service. They are the ones that are the guardians of the entire sector. They are the ones who are the administrators of the sector. When I look at the provision—I am sure the Minister of Finance is very happy for the provision there that allows some easing on the State's purse, but I think that the Ministry requires some attention. The Ministry has challenges. I think that the issues that I have raised around the Ministry—understanding or being a place to be able to perform efficiently—those require attention. I will begin to wrap up now because the bulk of my initial contribution was to deal with all of the questions that I had that I was going to request queries on specifically, but that is fine, life goes on.

So, Madam President, I think that where we are today, this is a straightforward Bill. I had no particular opposition to it. Given that it is a money Bill, opposing it did not even make sense, so that I am here to just say that these are provisions—I want to make a holistic comment. 2016 was a year where we had the opportunity to start, in my respectful view, the problem of fixing or turning this economy around. I respectfully submit that we did not take all of the opportunities that were there, because I think that the wonderful environment in which we currently operate in is one that is so, so difficult to forecast that any opportunity to fix the systemic problems that we have should be taken.

Madam President, the driving force of our economy has experienced, according to the Minister, a staggering decline in price levels. The current mini recovery is not sustainable. I do not believe it is going to get to a number that gives us any hopes of any type of windfall revenue going forward. I am on the record here, Madam President, on several occasions as saying that I believe, it is my personal understanding currently—although as I have learnt from one of my colleagues, sometimes it is good to say that this is my current thinking, and my current thinking could evolve—but it is my current thinking that the entire oil market, energy market, is going through a fundamental strategic rebalancing and it is going to change permanently from what we understood as the market.

What is critical to understand as we look at Government expenditure challenges is the revenue picture, and what we consider to be a reasonable forecast of government revenues. I want to say this. It is always easy to compare what other countries are doing and then say, perhaps, "Why are we doing it here?", but we also have to understand in the world of oil and gas Trinidad and Tobago is part of a small group of countries who are oil and gas exporters. If you look at virtually every country, they have seized upon the opportunity to make significant changes, cuts to public expenditure. They have restructured their natural oil companies. They have looked at ways to try to prepare their economies to sustain this shock for going forward. I am not sure if we have taken that particular step in the things that we are doing.

As we go forward, Madam President, I think that the measures in front of us represent actions that are to close a financial period. All I am saying, I am particularly disappointed that more was not done in that period to be able to say that we have seen that the market is going in a particular direction, and we started the process, from a policy perspective, of understanding we need to adjust and these adjustments need to be sharper than perhaps what we are envisaging. So, Madam President, with those few words, I would like to wrap up my contribution. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam President, and rest assured that I am going to be extremely tight in my contribution. I know how anxious some folks on the other side might be that I will contain myself within the Bill. The Minister was very clear. The Minister of Finance was very clear. This is just about to take note of some increases and decreases in expenditures over just a few Heads and this occurred during fiscal 2016.

All in all, four Heads were varied: Heads 40, 70, 31 and 78. Head 40 with regard to the 370 thousand, 497-odd from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. What happened here is that a savings came about as a result of a lower subsidy being required from the Government, and also because of the oil prices and petroleum prices being lower than estimated as well. This sum of 370 million-odd was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. So that was one of the variations.

The other one would have been the Ministry of Communications varied by 120 million-odd, and it is that that Ministry was dissolved. They no longer existed as at March 2016 and that amount of money was transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. So they got an increase of that very amount of $120 million-odd. The Ministries were—for want of the right word—amalgamated so it then became Public Administration and Communications.

So, I want to say that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is one of the most important Ministries responsible for safeguarding our very vulnerable citizens. There are a number of payments that must be made available—and they are called grants—every month. For example, there are a number of other payments, but the main ones would be the Senior Citizens Pensions, the disability and the public assistance. This is one of the main reasons why we are here today. It is that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would have found it necessary to get these additional resources of $370 million to meet the responsibilities which they have in terms of cheques and payments for the Senior Citizens Pension, the Disability Grant and the Public Assistance Grant cheques.

The core responsibility of that Ministry, as I said, is income support and the delivery of the social services and providing a safety net for the poor. What happened is that at the time the Government had taken a decision—and I go back to the PNM manifesto and that manifesto became policy—which committed that within the first year we would implement a number of measures that would provide relief.

Sen. Sturge: Standing Order 46(1). The PNM manifesto is not being debated.

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: As I said, this is where our policy document came from, the PNM manifesto. We had committed in the first year to implementing a number of measures that would provide relief to those most in need within a reasonable time frame and that, in fact, is what we did. So what we did is, we reviewed the national insurance system, what was called the old age pension, with a view to increasing the cap and put in some more money into the hands of the our economically disadvantaged citizens so that they would have more moneys available to them for the basic things which they would require.

As a result of that, our view is that the statutory limit to qualify for the maximum pension moved from less than or equal to $500 to less than or equal to $1,500. What this did was to increase the number of persons who qualified to the maximum pension of $3,500 and some 6,618 persons benefited by that movement and also the statutory limit to qualify for the Senior Citizens Pension also moved from $3,500 to $4,500.

You will know that there was a Legal Notice, Legal Notice No. 209, dated November 20, 2015, which provided for these two movements; the statutory limit to qualify for the maximum pensions, that again moved from $500 to $1,500 and also the statutory limit to qualify for the Senior Citizens Pension increased from $3,500 to $4,500. That is all that it is. Again, as I was saying, as a result of all of these movements there would have been an immediate pension benefit to some 28,000 persons. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. There would have been an immediate increase in pension paid to 28,000 persons.

Now, Madam President, I want to make it very clear that the Ministry as is usual would have budgeted for 13 months of payment with the expectation that funds would have been available to pay the benefits right up to October, because benefits are to be paid on the 1st of every month. However, because of the increases as a result of Legal Notice 209 and a decision taken by the Government, and the additional persons coming on to the system and the resultant increases as well, by August the Ministry would have recognized that there was going to be a shortfall in the moneys that were allocated to them and, of course, we knew that there was a shortfall in revenue as a result of the volatility in oil prices as well overall.

So here we are, during September, the Ministry was able to make up for the shortfall. By August, they would have realized but by September they would have been able to make up for the shortfall. What they would have done is that they would have transferred moneys from one head to another within the Ministry's votes—they would

suppress one for the other—however that could not have been realized in October. The Ministry would have had its collaboration with the Minister of Finance and a Cabinet decision would have been taken and, therefore, we would have had this $370 million-odd advance to cover the benefits for October, and this is why we are here. That is the explanation for it because we are here in Government, we took certain decisions in our manifesto and in order—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Madam President, 46(1).

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:—to achieve this certain things followed by virtue of the Order 120. [*Crosstalk*] I want to say—I am going to speak to those persons at home as well—that the monthly expenditure now as it is for those persons who benefit from this amount which I spoke of, the $370 million, it would be Senior Citizens—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Tedious repetition. We have heard that point before. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am now giving a breakdown of the $370 million-odd and I had not done that before. I want to say that it is that every month 90,800 senior citizens benefit from this particular grant. The total amount of that is $292,317,156. And, again, the Public Assistance Grant, 25,906 families benefit from the Public Assistance Grant and also the Disability Assistance Grant some 24,058 persons benefit from this Disability Assistance Grant. This is where the $307 million-odd comes from.

Hon. Senator: That is where it is going to.

3.35 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: That is where it is going to, sorry. It came from and this is where it is going to.

I want to say that in defining our development goals, our Government has always emphasized the importance of putting people first, because we know that people are our greatest asset. I want to say all of this great country, particularly the most vulnerable, must be loved and cared for and treated with dignity and respect, and this is the kind of attention that this Government gives to those most in need. [*Desk thumping*]

In our 2015 manifesto turned Government policy, our social sector programmes were recited and, Madam President, these are: to reduce poverty and improve social justice. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Standing Order 46(1).

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Is there a Standing Order against that; against being a jack-in-the-box? [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam President. I was just speaking to our social sector policy, which is to reduce poverty and improve social justice with the objective of ensuring a more stable society. Our party has always stood for a caring society. The focus is always on the needs of the elderly, the children, and the disabled. The disadvantaged groups will continue to be our focus. As I said, we are a caring Government and we are centred around the needs of these vulnerable persons.

We addressed the questions of grants, and I just want to make known that there are about 13 grants that are offered. So in addition to the public assistance, the disability and the senior citizens pension, there are other general assistance grants and they can be found on the Ministry's website.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Do not forget to say that no Minister handing out food cards again.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Oh, no, absolutely, no Minister is handing out food cards anymore.

Madam President: Minister, please.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Awfully sorry, Madam President. My humblest apologies.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I know the hon. Sen. Wade Mark had made reference to the cut in expenditure. I want to say to him that all our Ministries have had to cut expenditure, and naturally that is the responsible approach to the falling oil prices and energy prices, which have had a negative impact on our revenues.

Madam President, it was not all blue skies. They knew of this since early 2015, end 2014, but yet still the last Government continued to—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Madam President, we are not here to debate 2014 and 2015.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: The last government continued to be irrational and reckless in their expenditure—but coming back, we have had to cut expenditure, [*Crosstalk*] including in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Where we sought to cut, it is not at all on the grants. All of our grants have remained intact. Where the Ministry sought to cut expenditure would have been in the areas of programmes and seminars and outreach programmes,

and so on, miscellaneous costs like that, that is where we cut expenditure, in keeping with—not edict—but the instructions by the Ministry of Finance— very justified instructions by the Ministry of Finance, which all of our Ministries have had to follow. But again no grants were cut, and I emphasize that, so it is in the other areas.

What the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has undertaken to ensure is that all of their operations will, in fact, be more efficient and more effective, and more cost effective in general, in its delivery of its services.

Again, I want to say that over fiscal 2016—and I am remaining within the confines of the debate—the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in fact, paid $35 million in subventions to NGOs and to community-based organizations and to faith-based organizations and to statutory bodies that provide services to persons who are disadvantaged, persons with disabilities as well. That is with regard to 2016. So no one was left behind despite the crunch—if you want to call it that—or despite the decreased revenues. No one, no vulnerable persons in situations of vulnerability were left behind by the Ministry and by the Government.

With regard to the disability grant, in fiscal 2016, 24,058 persons who have a disability of some kind or the other, were paid disability grants every month. Often these persons cannot work and they depend solely on this grant, and I want to assure the public that at no point has the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services jeopardized or played with the payments of pensions and grants to these persons, like persons with disabilities and so on.

Again, with regard to the Public Assistance Grant paid to all of the very vulnerable citizens, vulnerable because of various situations, some 25,906 families received public assistance grants in fiscal 2016. The Government and the Ministry take their role and responsibility very seriously, and all of these payments continue to be met and have been met all through 2016 and will continue to be met by this Government.

In closing, I am looking to the future. Madam President, I want to say— [*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Standing Order 46(1), we are not here to debate the future. We are here to debate 2016.

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, please, please. When someone is rising on a point of order, the other person has to sit. But Sen. Sturge please, that is not a point of order. Continue minister.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: In closing, I want to say that Government has a very long-term vision in terms of dealing with our development strategy, and this is echoed in our National Development Strategy 2016 to 2030, Vision 2030, Many Hearts, Many Voices, One Vision. The long-term goal with regard to poverty eradication is that it will be fully eradicated, and that all citizens in Trinidad and Tobago will have a culture of discipline, productivity, tolerance, respect, civic mindedness; that our citizens will be helpful and that we will have, in fact, a very diverse, educated, innovative and entrepreneurial population.

There are a number of goals which speak to social services delivery as well, to ensuring that all of these will be improved to better serve the needs of the vulnerable groups as well. There are strategic initiatives and actions under this goal, and I do not think it is necessary to say that at this time. But it is very important that as we move ahead, those on the other side work alongside us, and that they do not attempt to mislead the public—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Standing Order 46(6), imputing improper motives, "attempting to mislead".

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I just want to say in closing that it is important that the Opposition and the Independents work with us as well when it comes to the delivery of our services. I want to quote from the *Hansard*, Madam President,—if I am allowed to quote from the *Hansard*—of the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, in the other place—that for the 15 months that the PNM would have been in power, all of the benefits were paid to all of the persons who needed to benefit from it, on time and to the persons eligible for those payments.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gerald Ramdeen: Madam President, the hon. Minister of Finance in commencing this debate indicated that we were here for two very simple measures, and he very accurately pointed out, as he always does, the purpose for which these transfers are being made to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in the sum of $120,781,446 and to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in the sum of $370,497,277. I sat and listened to the hon. Minister of Finance and he carefully chose his words in opening this debate and piloting this piece of legislation.

The reason that was advanced for these measures set out, and has been stated as being the increase and decrease in appropriation for fiscal year 2016, also reflects the reallocation of funds to retire an advance from the Treasury Deposits in the sum of $370 million-odd. Then it goes on to say it was necessary to have a variation of

appropriation of resources to bring to account expenditure funded by an advance from Treasury Deposits for reimbursement to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the encashment of cheques in respect of senior citizens pensions and public assistance and disability grants.

What stood out in the contribution of the Minister of Finance is that he added on the words that this is a measure that is available to all governments, the way in which this was funded by the Treasury Deposits. What I want to ask is, is that the proper way for us to manage the affairs of our economy? [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance was very careful in pointing out that the reason why we were able to get this $370 million-odd was because the price of oil and energy resources plummeted, so that the subsidy the Government would have to put out, that also went up. So one wonders, when we are all complaining about the price of oil and the price of gas going down, if it had stayed up, what would have happened to the pensioners who are to benefit from this $370 million? What would have happened to them? Is it that the plan of the Government—or I should say this: is it that the Government has no plan and therefore wherever you get it, we get it and whenever you get it, we take it, and if we do not get it, well too bad for the pensioners?

Sen. Mark raised a very pertinent point, which is: how as the Minister of Finance can you present a budget and not know how many people you are catering for in implementing a financial list? You have the CSO, you have the technocrats at the Ministry of Finance, and you are putting forward a budget and you do not know, or you do not cater—you do not accurately know how many people you are catering for, so you fall short by $370 million.

But I think what is more telling is listening to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and her setting out how caring this Government is, and how much they did for those people, because "people are our greatest resource". Those are her exact words. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is perhaps one of the most important Ministries in any government, especially in this Government, especially in the times that we faced in 2016, because the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is the Ministry that targets those there are most vulnerable in our society. Notwithstanding what the Minister of Trade and Industry would have said, I would like to use this opportunity, not to advertise all the grants that are available, but to tell you about the real life examples of people who benefit, or people who depend upon what is offered by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I am not going to speak here as a Senator detached from what is going on, on the ground.

In the middle of 2016, things had become so hard that almost everywhere you go in this country Members who sat on this Bench and Members of the Opposition, people were coming to them in droves because they could not make it, things were so hard. The Leader of the Opposition took a decision to tell all her Members of Parliament to do all that they could to help all of those people who were begging for help in 2016.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: "Allyuh have all de money."

Madam President: Minister.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, notwithstanding what the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry said, I can tell you what I did. I went to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. The building is opposite the Magistrates' Court in Port of Spain. When I went there I questioned and asked and made enquiries about these grants and how we could access these grants for people in need. The staff at that building, which was the former service commissions building, told me, "You cyar get help here, Mr. Ramdeen. You have to go down to the office on the corner of Duke and Richmond Streets". If you know the office on the corner of Duke and Richmond, that office is filled every day with people who walk there with walking sticks. It normally has traffic because your disabled people park up there and have to get people to assist them to come out. It is around the corner from Sen. Sturge's office.

So I sat there for about 45 minutes to wait my turn, and watching these disabled people go in and out of this Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, until my turn came. I went up to the counter and asked them, "I am really here not to benefit myself, but I want to find out how we could access these grants for people who cannot make it to these offices." They told me to go upstairs, Mr. Ramdeen, and speak to the manager, so I did that.

When I sat and spoke to the manager of that office, I can tell you what he told me, when I explained to him that there are people all over this country who want to access these grants and they could not access them. Do you know what his response was, Madam President? I will tell you what his response was. "Mr. Ramdeen, I applaud you in what you are trying to do, you know, but you are really wasting your time", because the truth is, number one, you cannot get a form from any of those Ministries to give to anyone. They must come there and get the form themselves. That is number one. Number two is that if you get the form, the manager of that office told me, "Mr. Ramdeen, it doh make sense. We have no money to give any grant. So even if you fill out those forms, even if you get the forms, even if you bring the people here and they submit the forms, Mr. Ramdeen it have a committee who go sift out that, and at the end of the day the truth is the Ministry have no money for any grants."

So we are lucky—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: That is not true.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, I am speaking about what I experienced. If the Minister of Trade and Industry went to another Ministry, she can tell us what she experienced, or what the hon. Minister experienced. But I can tell you the story of what I experienced and I am sure what I experienced is what the ordinary man experience every day in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Then I heard the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry talk about people are our greatest resources. Well that is true, I always say that, but our children are our greatest treasures. Under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the position is that under that Ministry, that Ministry is responsible for almost all of the children's homes in this country.

We spend a long period of time, and almost everyone in this honourable Senate, not a long time ago when we debated the last piece of legislation in this Senate, spoke about how much we must care for our children and how important our children are. Everyone was singing the same song. Well, the last piece of legislation we debated had its genesis in 1923. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is responsible for children's homes. In 2015, the Attorney General was sued by two children.

Sen. The Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Madam President—

Hon. Imbert: Madam President, a point of order, Standing Order 46(1).

Madam President: Two persons cannot at the same time. So on the Government Bench, could you choose who is going to invoke the Standing Order, please?

Sen. The Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Madam President, Standing Order 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, please continue, but in continuing just try to come back to the Bill. I have given you leeway.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am guided, Madam President.

I am happy that we can devote $370 million to the old age pensioners, because they represent a vulnerable sector of our society. But there are many other vulnerable sectors of our society, Madam President. There are many others that are forgotten, and one aspect, one group of the most vulnerable people who I would have liked to see benefit from this $370 million are the children in children's homes. Because I can stand here today and say that in 2015 there was not one—not one—children's home that met the standard to be a children's home, to be a rehabilitation centre—not one. [*Desk thumping*] This $370 million could have been used to do that.

Madam President, in 2015 there were people in our country who depended upon the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and for what did they depend on that Ministry of Social Development and Family Services? Senior citizens homes, senior activity centres, social programmes, social assistance. That vulnerable group of people depended on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for housing assistance, because there is a grant there for $15,000 and $20,000, but because they did not have the money, those people were left out in the cold. Housing items—Household Items Grant under the Ministry. There is a Medical Equipment Grant; domestic help; dietary grant. How many of us know that under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services there is a dietary grant?

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, I told you earlier to get back to the Bill. So the Bill spoke about the increase in the allocation and it was explained what that increase in the allocation was for, what it was to meet. So the debate is not about all of the services that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services offer. I am trying to get you to just be a little more specific to the matter at hand, please.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged, Madam President. But the $370 million shortfall that was allocated to the pensioners, they are not the only ones. So what we have to ask ourselves is how many other persons? We are lucky that the price of oil went down, so we could cater for the pensioners. What about the other persons? And those are the persons who, at the end of the day, fall within that bracket, who depend on these grants. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: "Address the Chair, please, and forget de man."

Hon. Imbert: You are in charge here?

Sen. Mark: No, I am saying forget you.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: What we must ensure is that we have better fiscal management of our economy. The Minister of Finance made reference to the fact that the default is $7.5 billion, the deficit is $7.5 billion; that was for 2016. What is going to happen if we continue like that? We cannot continue along a path where at the end of the financial year we are looking here, there and everywhere to make up the defaults that we ourselves have incurred over the years. This Bill here, the five clauses here represent a very, very simple proposition. It is government by "vaps", that is what it is. It is government with no plan. And the problem with that is this: when you have no plan, and you are just looking here, there and everywhere, anything that seems good, you pick it up and do it. It sounds right, you do it. Do you know what you end up with? You end up in a situation where it is not us who are prejudiced, it is the man on the street. It is the ordinary man on the street who is disadvantaged. That is the problem.

The decisions that the Government makes, we might be the ones participating in the decision-making, but the decision-making affects each and every one of the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot allow what has happened in 2016 to continue to happen, because today we are lucky we have the money to move from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Ministry of Communications, to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. But if we continue like this, or if we continue along the path that we followed in 2016, this Bill that is only five clauses might still be only five clauses, but we might end up with about three pages with Ministries, to try and clog the hole here, there and everywhere. We just cannot continue like that. So what do we do?

Madam President, the first thing that the Minister of Finance should do is to ensure that we do not have to do this in any coming financial year, that we could properly understand what measures the Government is putting in place, that the Minister of Finance would properly understand who are the targets of the financial policy that he is putting in place and make provision for them. We cannot continue every month like we did in 2016, borrowing money to pay recurrent expenditure. We cannot continue like we did in 2016 where you take $725 million and guarantee a loan to an RHA that "not bringing in a cent", because we are going to find ourselves in this same position, where we have to take out $370 million to ensure that pensioners get their cheques.

How are we going to ensure that those who go to the RHAs are going to get their medication? How are we going to ensure that those who go to the pharmacies get their C-DAP? Those are the real problems that the people in this country face on a daily basis. If there is proper fiscal management by the Government, whose duty it is to manage and distribute the resources of this country, we will not find ourselves in a position where you go to a pharmacy and there are no drugs, you go to a hospital and there are no drugs.

Whereas what we are doing here might be a very simple measure, I will implore the Minister of Finance to manage the affairs of our country so that we will ensure that all of the vulnerable people who depend upon the Government—who depend upon the Government for assistance—will not find themselves, when they look in all the different areas to get help, what they face is a closed door. We cannot afford that, and the people of our country cannot afford that.

We must ensure that in times like these, to borrow the slogan from Sen. Small, that the little that we have is used in the right way, is distributed to the right people, and it is not wasted as is the record of the PNM. It is not wasted.

So in the short contribution that I make, Madam President, this is a Bill that we really do not have any say in, but at the end of the day it is a very important measure. I think all of the pensioners of this country will benefit from the $370 million that is provided for, that they will be happy that the Government found the money to do this. I hope that we do not have to find ourselves in a position where the pensioners of our country, the poor, the disabled and the vulnerable have to come back and find themselves in a position where they face a closed door by this Government. Because at the end of the day, the greatest responsibility that is upon the Government is to look after the poor, the disabled and the vulnerable. No matter what the Government tells us, we have enough resources in this country at this time to look after all our people if it is managed properly. I hope that the Minister of Finance will do exactly that and ensure that all of those people will benefit from the resources of our country.

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

4.05 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, on this innocuous Bill I did not intend to speak, but there are a few things I would like to say. First off, I would like to say that I really look forward to money Bills being introduced in the Senate. For while I have no vote on the money Bills, I will always use them as an opportunity to put forward my own views on what policy should be with respect to the use of the very, very scarce resources of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam President, with respect to the matter before us and I assure you I shall always bring it to the point. With respect to the matter before us, the issue seems to be simple: after all, how many of us could dispute the need to transfer $120 million from the Ministry of Communications to the newly named Ministry of Public Administration and Communications? It is simply a change in name and we are to ratify this, which is something that was done in the past.

But the issue before us, Madam President, is a pretty tidy sum of $370 million which is being moved or has been moved—and we must now approve what has already been done—from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and the Minister gave us the rationale on why he moved it from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

The question, of course, which has to be raised is this: why the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and not, say, the Ministry of National Security? It was advanced in a prior debate from my colleague Sen. Chote that maybe if we were to reduce the allocations from the Ministry of National Security, it would not in any way seriously injure crime fighting in Trinidad and Tobago. Because the more we seem to be spending on that Ministry, the less we seem to be getting an output with respect to crime reduction.

But I do not wish to focus there with respect to priority, Madam President. What I wish to address is the option that was available to the hon. Minister of Finance which was to look at every Sub-Head of expenditure in the Ministry for which there was approval and to determine which of these Sub-Heads can be reduced without causing injury to the public interest. Basically, can we remove waste and inefficiency and maybe could we assess all of the programmes with respect to relevance to determine whether we could not now review them so that the savings from those programmes which are not doing what they were intended to do, can now be placed into areas where the Government thinks it should now focus priority?

So with respect to my position, I think—and as now a member of the PA(E)C, the committee of the Parliament which is reviewing expenditure on a real-time basis—I think we have an opportunity to look at all Items of expenditure approved in a budget to determine whether at periodic intervals we cannot find Sub-Items which may have escaped scrutiny in the appropriations debate, but which subsequently we find are not as useful as we thought they were and we are then able to vary as we see fit.

In any event, when we speak about the variation of appropriations what we are referring to is the shifting of funds from one area A to other areas B, C, D, and E that we could not reasonably have foreseen when we initially presented our fiscal package. It is based upon circumstances which may have occurred during a fiscal year which warrant, therefore, a change of priority, and given that situation, we approve the variation of that which was appropriated.

And in that context let me look at the $370million varied from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Sen. Small raised a valuable point: should we waste a valuable downturn? In every crisis there is an opportunity. What was the priority here? And I am sure the Minister in winding-up will indicate to us what the priority, in his view, was. But Petrotrin, the state agency which is in charge of refining but also drilling, I was told is in need of a major upgrade in many of it's facilities. It is a point that Sen. Mark alluded to. And, should it not have been that, consistent with energy investments by the energy players in Trinidad and Tobago at this time when we need to be much more efficient, given that we have to, as my colleague Sen. Small indicated, act as though oil prices will be low for quite a while, aim to do what we can to make sure that our oil producer is efficient?

And efficiency may have suggested, Madam President, in my mind, that this $370 million that, ordinarily was a subsidy that would have been given to Petrotrin on account of the high oil prices, would have still been given to them so that they may reinvest in plant and equipment to upgrade their facilities. But that is a priority that, I think, the Minister will address.

The second issue, again speaking on policy in the energy sector, we have known and I have raised it before, that there is a problem with small service stations providing a very valuable public service to the motoring public not able to accept card payments because the margins are so small. Was there consideration that, at least, some of the savings on the petroleum subsidy could have been passed on to these small service stations so that their margins could have been a bit larger to allow them to accept cards, credit cards and debit cards, for payments and to make them feasible small-business family-owned operations? So that there are concerns with respect to whether this entire savings should have been directed, Madam President, to this bill of $370 million that we need to send to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. And on this I now come.

Madam President, $370 million to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services may sound like a lot, it may sound like a lot, but for this Ministry which is a huge Ministry appearing before the committee which I have the honour or chairing on Social Services and Public Administration, this is one Ministry that has two Permanent Secretaries; so large it is. And when we look, Madam President, at the number of old-age pensioners in this country, 90,000-plus and you multiply that by $36,000 each person receives in a year, you would find that the old-age pension bill alone will be in excess of $3 billion. That is what the Minister has to send to this Ministry to finance an old-age pension bill. That is 90,000-plus old-age pensioners receiving this. This is what we could have anticipated. This is what the Minister anticipated.

But because of what the Minister of Finance indicated—that some adjustments were made to those individuals who are in receipt of NIS payments alone, the $3,000, no other pensions—we now have something that could not have been anticipated an additional expense to the old-age pension bill for people who are now getting maybe an extra $1,500 or $2,000 because they are in receipt of NIS alone which, and they have no other source of income-and therefore, there is an income supplement.

I trust by now we have the number of persons who are affected, so that in the future, and I think that these debates are meant to influence how we are going to ensure that we do not have the same problem reoccurring. So that when we come next year to debate a variation Bill, it should not be for this problem, but for something that could not have been anticipated. The issue is, we should now have the number of NIS recipients who are in need of this income supplement and we could now, in the current period and the future periods, know what this Bill is going to be.

But, Madam President, Sen. Small raised a valuable point and I want to close on that. And that is, not only must we take advantage of the crisis that we have in low commodity prices, but we need to get back into a structure of planning, medium-term planning, medium term being a three to a five-year period, and we need to foresee because we tend to present budgets in our country on an annual basis, thinking that 2017 alone is relevant. When we present a budget, a fiscal package in 2017/2018, we need to be thinking on a bit of a longer horizon, and focusing on the pension bill of Trinidad and Tobago; I think, Madam President, we need to be looking at this now in a much more clinical way.

And that is on account of the following: the Minister of Finance has a huge pension bill on his own on account of the retirees from the state sector, that is, the public servants who are retiring. Yes. He has that bill. He has the old old-age pension bill and we are seeing that he needed $370 million to supplement. But, Madam President, there is an issue that we need to be cognizant of and I want to use an opportunity to influence policy. It is critical because when I look at a particular statistic, in 1970 when I started high school—so that was not so long ago, well it is "kinda" long, but it is within memory. I started in 1971. [*Crosstalk*] I started in 1971, but in 1971, Madam President, the life expectancy of a female in Trinidad and Tobago was 67 years.

In 2016, the life expectancy of a female in Trinidad and Tobago is 75 years. So within our lifetime what have we seen? We have seen the life expectancy of a female rising by some eight years, from 1970 to now. What does that tell us for planning purposes? It tells us that when we look at the labour force and we look at the public service and we see huge numbers of women entering the public service—in fact, if you were to look at the highest echelons now of the public service you will see so many more Permanent Secretaries today as opposed to 20 years ago. We are seeing more and more women in the public service. What does that tell us? It tells us that whereas about 40 years ago the life expectancy was 67 years, the pension obligation of the State was seven years, now the pension obligation of the State will be some 15 years.

Madam President, we have seen a problem requiring a variation which arose on account of the Minister of Finance not anticipating that there would be a need for $370 million to supplement the old-age pension bill because there were people who qualified for NIS, but also qualified for a part. What we are seeing in this country really is an ageing population and an ageing population with a larger and larger and larger number of retirees, we need to make provisions, Madam President. As we budget on an annual basis, we need to understand that this problem of a growing pension bill at the level of the State, NIS, old-age and income supplement is going to become a very important public policy position that we need to take.

How are we going to finance this obligation so that we could on an annual basis make provisions when we present the budget in September and not have year after year to come back to the Parliament to seek an appropriation for something that we could foresee?—that our pension bill is growing. This one we could not have seen.

Madam President, I approve the measures, but it signals to me that we need to look, in budgeting in Trinidad and Tobago, more at the medium term so that we will be able to plan for the contingencies, inevitable, that will be confronting Trinidad and Tobago as our population ages. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: No. No. We were told by the hon. Minister said that there was one more person; that is why we did not field our person.

Madam President: I apologize. But could I just say that if someone—you have to put on your mike and catch my eye so that I will know that someone is going to speak. Who is the next speaker? Sen. Baksh.

Sen. Allyson Baksh: Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017 in this honourable House. Madam President, the matter at hand concerns what essentially is a very simple matter. It relates to sums already budgeted for under one Head which is not utilized and is being shifted where required under another Head.

Madam President, this type of flexibility is important for proper governmental economic planning especially in the present economic reality of volatile oil and gas prices. Madam President, the increase and decrease in the appropriation for the fiscal year 2016 inherent in this Bill reflect the reassignment in ministerial responsibility as assigned by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the advice of the Prime Minister hon. Dr. Keith Rowley in accordance with provision of section 79(1) of the Constitution.

As a consequence, it was necessary to have a variation of appropriation of resources under the recurrent and capital expenditure in the sum of $120,781,446 to realign the provisions in line with the reassignment of responsibility to the Minister of Public Administration and Communications.

In addition, the increase and decrease in the appropriation for fiscal year 2016 also reflect the reallocation of funds to retire an advance from the Treasury Deposits in the sum of $370,497,277. It was necessary to have a variation of appropriation of resources to bring into account expenditure funded by an advance from the Treasury Deposits for reimbursement to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago regarding the encashment of cheques in respect of senior citizens' pension and public assistance and disability grants under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Madam President, in total a variation of appropriation for fiscal year 2016 in the sum of $491,278,723 is now being requested. The explanation for the total sum in question is that, during fiscal year of 2016 the actual oil price and petroleum products were lower than estimated resulting in a lower subsidy than originally anticipated, resulting in savings of $370,497,277.

This in essence is a positive thing and this Bill now seeks to transfer the funds in question from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Madam President, in March 2016, the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Communications were merged to make one Ministry, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. This resulted in a decrease in the requirement for the Ministry of Communications for the balance of that year, approximately five and a half months, because this Ministry no longer existed after March 17th, 2016. That essentially is the reason for the savings and it was a decrease in one area which is now required to be moved to another area.

Madam President, it is my contention that the entire sum of $120,781,446 transferred and allocated to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications were moneys well spent.

I propose to spend the remainder of my contribution focusing on some of the good work done by the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in 2016. But first, Madam President, I must commend the Prime Minister hon. Dr. Keith Rowley [*Desk thumping*] for his forward-thinking decision to merge the former Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Communications. This decision has worked well since there has been significant improvement in service delivery of the combined Ministries, as a consequence of the synergies between the two functional areas of public administration and communications.

In 2016, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was able, in keeping with its commitment to public sector modernization, to implement a number of initiatives aimed at reducing cost, while at the same time maintaining and improving public service delivery.

There are six initiatives which were conceptualized and undertaken; these are, first, well:

Number 1: the rationalizing of the public service consequent on reduction of ministerial portfolios;

2. rationalizing of government accommodation;
3. reviewing the arrangements for the management of contract employment;
4. implementing guidelines for allocation and use of government vehicles;
5. operationalizing of the centre of Government;
6. the implementing of a free island-wide public broadband wireless network.

These initiatives focused on a range of key issues including, how the public service is structured, how it operates and how it is managed to deliver timely, effective and efficient services. We have already made progress in a number of these initiatives and there have been significant reduction in administrative and other costs. Given the country's current situation, we can expect that the demands on public services will be great, so now we are faced with the challenge of maintaining and improving services at a time of fiscal constraint.

Madam President, the rationalization of the public service consequent on the reduction of ministerial portfolios was achieved. Government successfully rationalized, reassigned and reduced ministerial portfolios creating greater synergies, integrated portfolios and optimizing scarce human resources to enhance public service delivery.

The reduction in ministerial portfolios which took place in September 2015 enabled the new Government to realize overall operational cost savings in areas such as signage, printing and other communication costs. Cost savings in physical facilities and equipment, machinery and salary costs related to Ministers and secretariat support.

Madam President, this Government has also completed the transfer of positions and staff in December 2015 based on the new portfolios. In rationalizing government accommodation, Government was able to maintain its commitment to the completion of the Government Campus Plaza which was fully furnished, outfitted and ready for occupation by the third quarter of 2016.

Madam President, the completion and occupation at the Government Campus Plaza allowed for the optimization of public service delivery by providing public officers and the wider public with modern, clean and OSHA compliant office accommodation. An interministerial committee comprising representatives from key stakeholder agencies was established to develop an accommodation policy aimed at improving long-standing issues of government accommodation including allocation and maintenance of properties.

Madam President, I will now look at reviewing arrangements for the management of contract employment in the public service.

Madam President: Sen. Baksh.

Sen. Baksh: Yeah.

Madam President: At this stage, hon. Senators, we will suspend for the tea break. So this session is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Sen. A. Baksh: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I will now look at the reviewing of contract employment in the public service. As you are aware, contract employees make up a substantial percentage of the Government's workforce. There is a need to review the administrative arrangements to recruit, compensate and generally manage these employees. A committee was established to review the existing policy arrangements inclusive of short-term contracts and contract for service. The committee provided a report on its findings and recommendations in 2016, and this report is being reviewed with the view of implementation of the recommendations.

With respect to the guidelines on the allocation of the use of the government vehicles, guidelines to address the use of the allocation of government vehicles, inefficient use of government assets. The new guidelines were developed with the advice of the Law Reform Commission and the information on the stock of government vehicles. This will create more efficient, disciplined and less risky use of government vehicles, as well determine appropriate reallocation of surplus vehicles following the reduction of ministerial portfolios.

5.05 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to the operationalization of the centre of government, this initiative aims to enhance collaboration and coordination among central government agencies so that the state resources are effectively and efficiently applied to attain optimum value for money.

Mr. Vice-President, strengthening governance in the public service will ultimately lead to the delivery of high quality public services, the elimination of current compartmentalization of the public sector in terms of accessibility and utilization of government services, the establishment of necessary partnership with all other sectors in the economy, and the creation of seamless high quality standards nationally.

I will now turn to the free island wide public broadband wireless network. One of the special initiatives articulated in the official policy framework of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is the establishment of a network of free public Wi-Fi hotspots distributed at locations throughout the country. This initiative is geared towards providing additional opportunities for improved productivity and online engagement of citizens as they undergo their daily lives.

It will also function in conjunction with other existing channels provided by both the Government and other Internet service providers to enhance the means by which our citizens access the Internet and available online services. A pilot commenced in the first quarter of 2016 with benefits first seen by commuters along major thoroughfares. [*Desk thumping*] Thereafter, the network expanded to enhance citizens' experience in accessing Internet-based services in a wide array of public areas.

Mr. Vice-President, on the issue of communications in 2016, the focus of the Ministry continue to be a coordinating, monitoring and guiding policies and standards that facilitate access to public information for citizens and the media. In addition, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications continues to exercise responsibility for the development of ICT policy and strategy.

Mr. Vice-President, I conclude my contribution in this honourable House and the main premise of my contention, with respect to the Bill at hand, it is really quite simple, namely:

1. it ensures that sums already budget for under one Head is being transferred to another Head;
2. it allows for flexibility, which is important for proper governmental economic planning.

With respect to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications alone, the reallocation represents moneys well spent. Given these arguments, I fully support the Bill at hand and I invite my colleagues on the Opposition and Independent Benches to do the same.

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

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to rise this afternoon to contribute on the Variation of Appropriation Bill of 2016.

Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Minister of Finance in the beginning of this debate indicated that this is a very simple Bill. From the various speakers on the three benches, the Government, the Opposition and the Independent Benches, it is clear that there are

a multitude of issues that we have to consider when, particularly, issues in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services come before the Parliament, and as it has been said, I want to reiterate, that this Ministry is responsible for those most vulnerable in our society

The hon. Minister of Finance indicated that the $370,497,277 under Head 78, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, was brought about due to mainly, one, a change in government policy surrounding pensions, and this of course, he indicated, allowed more pensioners to qualify, and those who qualify to receive a greater sum. Secondly, he indicated an increase in the number of persons who now qualify for pension. Even though the Minister indicated that, several speakers, even on the Government Bench gave varying explanations as to the justification or the reason for this increase.

Mr. Vice-President, all of the speakers in this debate have focused on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and I really think that is partly due to the fact that there has been no explanation for the $120,781,446 increase under Head 31, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. And, apart from the different explanations we have had from those on the opposite side—we had one explanation from the hon. Minister of Finance that this was simply to deal with pensions; we had another Member indicating that a number of social programmes; that this would impact positively, of course, on those social programmes. And, because of this one-sided information, I suppose the rest of us are a bit constrained as to what we can speak of under the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I want to say that Public Administration is the backbone of every service delivered in Trinidad and Tobago. Communications, the responsibility of Communications has been added to this Ministry. And in this era of social media and technology, communication is very critical. There has been a lot of speculations about the state of the state media in the Trinidad and Tobago, and we do not know if this increase has anything to do with the failures of the state communications agencies

I thought that we would have had some explanation. Earlier there was a dispute as to a document that was circulated, which I thought offered us, as Members, explanation or details as to how you came up with these sums. Unfortunately, though, what we have is a huge sum before us with no explanation, except, as I said before, different stories from different Members, different Ministers from the Government Bench. But, Mr. Vice-President, if there are several stories all cannot be true. The Ministry of Social Development and Family

Services has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society are kept from slipping through the cracks. Who are the most vulnerable in our society? Where are they located? What factors in their environment make them so vulnerable? What are their numbers? The policies to reach those most vulnerable in our society must be based on the most current and well-researched data.

Mr. Vice-President, I endorse the point made earlier, and it was made by several speakers, about numbers being available at the Central Statistical Office to provide Ministries, and this is not necessarily an indictment on the current office holder. It is a method of public administration that uses data, real data, as opposed to "guesstimation", and that is what we have had, poor "guesstimation", an allocation that would have been approved by the Parliament, based on the recommendation of a technocrat, because that is the way it is usually done. But I do not think that is what people expect their representatives to do, to continue to do things the way it was usually done.

When I heard the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry speak about bringing relief to those most in need, she mentioned, Mr. Vice-President, the disability grants, the public assistance grants, and I got from her contribution—I am subject to correction—that the $370 million was sort of to cover that. I was not very clear. But, in any case she spoke about her party's attention to those most in need, the social services sector, to reduce poverty. She spoke about social justice, and that is exactly what this Government—all of the things—sorry, Mr. Vice-President—that she spoke are the opposite of what the PNM is doing to this country at this present time.

Mr. Vice-President, I work with people who are considered most vulnerable, most of them do not even consider these labels that you have for them. But I want to tell you that whereas previously a person who was the recipient of a disability grant was sort of prequalified to receive a food card based on the household income and so on, that has been changed by the present Government, and they talk about reducing poverty and social justice. People who received public assistance grants are no longer getting their food cards. Mr. Vice-President, there was—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: On a point of order, please, Mr. Vice-President, 46(1). This relates to 2016 fiscal year, that is the matter under debate, not the current year.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen, could you bring it back to the fiscal year in question as in relation to the Bill? Continue.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, I was responding to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry who indicated in her contribution her party's position to pay attention to those most in need, which is very much opposite to what is presently being done.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to put on record that there was a big hullabaloo, accusing the former People's Partnership Government of corruption and so on when it came to the distribution of food cards. Members who were elected, Members of Parliament on both sides of the political fence, were allowed to make recommendations to persons because they represent people. And quite frankly there are many Members of the then Opposition who distributed food cards from their own offices. Mr. Vice-President, at present even the elected Members of Parliament, Government and Opposition, do not seem to be clear as to what is the policy to apply for or to receive a food card. We are told that the entire system of administrating food cards is in total disarray, to the effect where we had advanced—and I say we as a country, as a state, as a nation—from giving recipients a cheque to giving them a card, in the form of a debit card, and then to the biometric system, which, when this Government took over they were supposed to continue to improve on, and because of poor management, poor public administration, poor policy direction, that system is crashing, and I have good information that recipients are now getting a cheque which takes you way back.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ameen, I have been listening very carefully to the point that you are making, could you bring it back in a little tighter to the Bill at hand in relation to that point that you are making in regard to the food card.

Sen. K. Ameen: Mr. Vice-President, considering that the Members opposite mentioned 13 grants, several of which were named, and considering that the Bill before us does not specify what the $370 million is for, under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, if I am to take the word of the Minister of Finance it is for pensions, if I am to take the word of the Minister of Trade and Industry it is to ensure that attention is given to those in need, and she spoke about the 13 grants, and I have mentioned some of them.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Could you give way? Thank you, Sen. Ameen, for allowing me to give clarity. During my contribution I was very clear and I gave a breakdown of the $370 million, if you would recall, that it was for pensions, disability grants and public assistance as well. So, I made it very clear, thank you.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and I am very happy that the hon. Minister clarified what she indicated earlier. Because I said that sitting here listening it provided a bit of confusion because the Minister of Finance indicated one thing, but the Minister of Trade and Industry seemed to have more of a breakdown. If this $370 million concerns pensions, disability grants, public assistance grants, I would like to think that if we are bringing to our attention the increase of such a sum, we must talk about the efficiency or lack therefore of these programmes.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I want to say that in spite of what was said on the opposite side, the 13 grants mentioned in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services are not intact. It is unfortunate that one Minister could be allowed by her colleagues, who I am sure know better, to give information like that. And I heard on the other side as well, Mr. Vice-President, that there were cuts of expenditure not for the actual grants, but for things like seminars and so on. I do not know if the seminars and so on referred to the empowerment and education of recipients to lift them out of that dependency. Because there was a lot of educating and empowering of—for instance, people who received the baby grants, the public assistance, to make them independent so that they would not have to depend on this handout, and if that is the case then it really—it is a retrograde step in my opinion. The fact that recipients of these grants are now getting a cheque from the Ministry, which can be used to purchase anything as opposed to those mechanisms that allowed checks and balances to stay to prevent the purchase of alcohol, for example, and so on, those checks and balances must be maintained, and you always have to weigh the delivery against the result, and if the result is to improve the lives of those most vulnerable in our society then we cannot simply say that cutting empowerment seminars is cutting expense—

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

—it may also increase your expenses in the long run. Madam Vice-President—

Sen. Solomon: Madam President.

Sen. K. Ameen: Sorry. Madam President, the Members on the other side spoke about a development strategy, they indicated that in keeping with the Government's development strategy, you know, a number of measures were mentioned, but, Madam President, I want to lament that while this Bill before us is about the exact figure in terms of what is to be increased under the various Heads and where it is coming from, what is still absent is a guiding policy to treat with those that ought to be reached who are always labelled the most vulnerable in society.

Madam President, as far as I understand from newspaper articles, there is a poverty report before Cabinet, and if I could be allowed to read just one line.—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Madam President, point of order, please, 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, continue.

Sen. Mark: For what?

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: You let Allyson Baksh talk, reading a whole speech—

Madam President: Sen. Mark!

Sen. K. Ameen: Madam President, if this Government does not see the connection between the poverty report in Trinidad and Tobago and the $370 million indifference in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, then it is missing the point completely and they should go home. [*Desk thumping*]

The poverty report, Madam President, is very relevant to the delivery of social services in this country, and it should provide background information into any policy position if the Government decides to have one. And I quote Mr. Winford James, political analyst, who commented on the poverty report, from the *Daily Express*, Wednesday 19 October, 2016, where he said:

> "It is a serious matter if it was available to the Government"—"It" referring to the poverty report—"since last November and it was not significantly addressed in the budget,"

And it comes back to the point made earlier by Sen. Mark, that if this is the situation where you have a poverty report with good, solid data before Cabinet, and that is not being considered, you have a situation of poor planning, and if you do not even know the number of pensioners that you are catering for in the upcoming financial year then, really, I mean, where are you going? And simply attacking the former administration on its social services policies is not going to help the most vulnerable. The people who are lined up in the Port of Spain office, as referred to by Sen. Ramdeen earlier, they really "doh" business who in Government. When they face the hardships that they face, there are many people who qualify for some of these grants but they do not go, because the bureaucracy makes it more difficult for the real people to benefit. [*Desk thumping*]

What I have seen, Madam President, contrary to what was said by Members opposite, is that these social services, these grants, whatever you wish to call them, have become less and less accessible since this Government took office. [*Desk thumping*] Sitting Members of Parliament, both on the Government and the Opposition side are not clear as to how the application process is, and quite frankly, we run the risk of making these programmes inaccessible to those who need it most.

So, I want to take the opportunity, Madam President, to ask the Government, at some point—Members who sit here are Ministers in Cabinet—to give the poverty report real consideration, have that report published, and I think it will guide us much better in terms of making policy decisions. I am of the belief that had the Ministry of

Social Development and Family Services really been doing what it should be doing, because I indicated earlier in my contribution that the Ministry is falling apart; we are restricted because we do not have the breakdown that perhaps, maybe the Government Members may be privy to, as to where this $370 million really comes up, where it adds up from, we did not get it. We did not get anything. [*Interruption*]

So, Madam President, we would have been in a better position to debate today, but because we are restricted, I really would have liked for us to touch on those areas in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services now, that are falling apart. That entire food card unit, the unit that deals with—not the pensioners, the public assistance, the disability grants as well, it is really, really falling apart, and this Government is responsible, and you can only know this if you are on the ground and connected to real people, [*Desk thumping*] and I am offering to take Members opposite to real situations in this country where people are living below poverty lines, and where these programmes are no longer accessible to them. [*Desk thumping*]

The entire biometric system has failed under the PNM, and, Madam President, I really, as I indicated in this debate, this House has not been, in my humble opinion, provided with sufficient information as to an explanation for us to—well, I know, I am told we are not required to vote. Really? So, it is just for us to note, but it really is an insufficient—there is no explanation, for what? We are just to presume. So, no Member on the other side could fault me or any Member in this House for making any presumption, because there is no explanation whatsoever.

Madam President, with those few words, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam President: Hon. Members, with your leave I would like to revert to Item 8 on the Order Paper.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Environmental Management Authority (Measures taken)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of Planning and Development: What urgent measures are being implemented by the Environmental Management Authority to reduce the negative environmental effects of Sunday's oil spill in La Brea?

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you. The Environmental Management Authority has confirmed that with the assistance of the La Brea community, the oil spill and its effects which occurred on Saturday 21 January in the La Brea area has been completely cleared, and was so done by the following day, Sunday 22 January 2017. No negative impact was observed on the environment. It is to be noted that Richardson Dhalai in today's newspaper—*Newsday*—indicated that the La Brea community is satisfied with the clean-up operation. The Environmental Management Authority will continue to collaborate with the key stakeholders, including the community and operators to ensure a quick response to any future incidence.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, if I may, in light of your reference to what appeared in the *Newsday* today, would you be kind enough to inform this honourable Senate, what was the basis for this particular position advanced by the *Newsday* that you have embraced?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that is not going to be allowed as a supplemental question. No. Do you have another supplemental question? Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: To the hon. Minister of Education. Is the Minister of Education here, Madam President?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, direct your question.

Sen. Mark: No, I am asking you, because, remember, you deferred because we were told that the Ministers were far away and therefore they would have come, so now I am hearing the Ministers—so, I am just asking you if the Ministers—

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I did not say that.

Sen. Mark: Okay.

Madam President: So, either you ask the question—

Sen. Mark: Thank you very much, Madam, I apologize.

Security at San Fernando SDA Primary School (Steps taken re Parents' Concerns)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of Education: What steps are being taken to deal with the concerns of parents about security at the San Fernando SDA Primary School, after the recent attack on several female students?

5.35 p.m.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Firstly, it was confirmed via interviews with the students and their parents/guardians, that no form of exposure by the intruder took place. This was also provided in writing by the students who saw the intruder. The following measures were instituted and are being put in place to address the concerns of parents at the San Fernando SDA Primary School. Razor wire was purchased and placed on the walls around the school's perimeter. This work was funded by the school, the parents and the SDA Education Board of Management.

Counselling sessions were arranged with the Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education for the students who witnessed and saw the intruder. The PTA indicated that it will assist the school in sourcing and funding an extra security officer. School resumed normal operations on January 24, 2017. The school supervisors of the Victoria Education District will continue to monitor the situation.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, could the hon. Minister indicate how long these counselling services will continue for those students and pupils at the primary school, what period of time?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. I could not tell you precisely how long, but I will be guided by the Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education who I am certain will ensure that the counselling services will be carried out for as long as it is necessary.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Madam President.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2017

Sen. Stephen Creese: Thank you, Madam President. I rise, of course, to speak on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017. And I think it was Sen. Small who raised the question about priority. And, of course, that leads to the question as to why the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, as the major recipient of the funds that are being varied here. I think, perhaps, the Minister of Trade and Industry gave us the answer when she indicated that the manifesto is now Government policy. Because it is clear to me that the priority is politics and that the choice of this Ministry has to do, not with what we normally expect the budget to do, which is play some role in stimulating the economy, in recovering our past situation, but really in that more distributive function of redistributing funds rather than stimulating growth.

It is not that I am averse to the benefits and I think the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Acting Leader of Government Business here has indicated that the Heads under which those moneys were disbursed at the Ministry, but the bottom line is that the quantum, over 200 million, is really going into what I call "consumerables" into a consumption sector rather than a developmental sector. And I have a concern with that, with the heading being priority. How do we prioritize?

I think it is Sen. Small, so I have debated with my colleague here, I think it is Sen. Small who argued that it should have gone in the direction of oil, or his favourite word, energy as the priority and he targeted, suggested that the upgrade of Petrotrin should be the direction any available sums at this stage, any sums that are unspent or that could be reallocated should go in that direction. And the jury is still out on that. The jury is still out on whether Petrotrin, energy sector, oil, gas, should be the recipient of whatever sums the State could put its hand on.

The concern I have with that is that the disaggregation of Petrotrin, as Sen. Small has been known to put it, which is really a big nice word for saying, in my view, do to Petrotrin what was done to Caroni. And that is not necessarily a negative statement, in that, if Prime Minister Manning's place in history was having the courage and the conviction to "disaggregate" Caroni, then per chance, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley's place in history may be rising to the challenge of disaggregating Petrotrin. And there are a lot of possibilities when you look at it from that perspective and I shall return to some of the implications of disaggregating Petrotrin in the context of this debate.

But I would like to suggest that if we are talking in terms of priority and where these sums that are subject of the variation, where else they could have been put, the question as to agriculture and the agricultural Ministry and that overall issue of food production, vis-à-vis, our large food import Bill, vis-à-vis our foreign exchange issues and the need for Forex and generating foreign exchange, then whether these sums should have gone into the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, gone into food production initiatives is a valid question.

So it is really at the end of the day a question of competing priorities and how do we choose? What is the frame of reference that should guide the decision as to where, whatever sums are available, where they should be placed. And that brings up the question really and those of us who are inclined to accept that, yes, social development, yes, dealing with those who are displaced, those who are in need of the various grants that this Ministry makes available, whether it is the food card system, whether it is the assistance to the aged, whether it is nutrition grant, because all of this has to do with the fallout from the decline in the revenues from oil and gas, the decline in the performance of the energy sector.

But the thing about all of that is we have to be a little more discerning because again as Sen. Small has pointed out to us, there are subsidies that are in the system that we are not treating with and if we treat with them then the question of where the moneys would come from to assist those that are being targeted at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, that question could be answered and therefore the choices available to us as to where to place that $270 million could be different.

So what is the hidden subsidy and what are the questionable subsidies that we are carrying and could be made available to social development or any other sector that from our prioritization of our situation we will want to divert moneys to. I am here referring to the subsidy that is inherent in the price paid for energy, for gas between the commission and PowerGen. There is a subsidy in there that is yet to be touched. And the thing about that, it winds up in the fuel bill and everybody's T&TEC bill. So that the man who has a light bulb on each French post and has an acre of beautiful concrete architecture around his holding and the man who has no fence or a chain-link fence with no light bulbs on the post; the man who has air conditioning systems and a pump at his swimming pool and all kinds of heating systems for the water in his house and the man who just has a few naked bulbs dangling from his ceiling. They all receive that subsidy, every manjack. And I keep saying in this Senate someone seems to be unwilling or afraid to touch that subsidy, but these are moneys that could end up being varied if we were to attend to this problem.

And then there is the question of some of the facilities we provide and I cannot remember which other speaker referred to the question that we are an aging society so we have to be careful—yes, Sen. Mahabir—and that we have to be careful about the provisions being made purely on the basis of age or the subsidies or the grants, purely on the basis of age, because at the end of the day that bill is climbing higher and higher and we really do not have a plan to get ourselves out of that trap. And it is a trap. And I am here referring to, like the bus pass and things like that, for the aging in society, whether we ought not to be more discriminatory in terms of how that facility is provided. Again, whether the person who has a pension of $10,000 a month, $15,000 a month, the person whose receipt from his interest on his deposits, dividends and so on, of sums over $40,000 or $50,000 should be in receipt of the same bus pass as the person who barely has a minimum pension.

And those are the issues that need to be addressed from the point of view of priority. And in that sense, there is need to be a little more discriminating in the way in which we make these facilities available across the board. But the thing is, how did we arrive here? How did we arrive at this funny curious turn? And I think we arrived here

because there is a failure in our national budgeting system that brings us into this unique situation and brings us into this whole question of variation. And the failure has to do with the fact that when we do the national budget presentation we really do not use it as an opportunity to review what took place in the past year and therefore say, listen, in area X, in area Y, in social development, public grants, in agriculture, in industry we have not met the targets we set and therefore we are going to take steps X and Y to correct that, to address that.

So that if we have to do a variation it will be against the background of recognizing what were the shortcomings in the past financial year and focusing on that and not the question of fulfilling cheap issues that relate to other political agendas as opposed to really seeing the budgeters, the place in which we, to use Sen. Mahabir's term, re-plan the economy and we have a planning scenario that we are following and reviewing and making adjustments accordingly.

So that, that shortcoming in the national budgetary approach leads us into this predicament. And it is that shortcoming that brings me to my next point. There is the need for us to see the budgetary exercise as a creation, as a point from which the creation of new revenue streams are being generated as opposed to, so it is a question really of positive activity as opposed to punitive fiscal or tax measures. So like, you know—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Creese, Sen. Creese, I understand, you have set a context, you have spoken about the priorities but I think we need to get back, specifically, to this Bill and to the different sections of this Bill, okay.

Sen. S. Creese: Thank you, Madam President. So that what this Bill has done is kept us in a narrow focus and in a trap and it has not accepted the range of priorities, or it has opted for a priority with which very many of us disagree. What this Bill is doing is sending $270 million purely into an area that is distributive and not productive and that the priority ought to have been productive. And that is the problem I have with the reallocation proposed here. I think we have missed an opportunity to focus on a more developmental approach that would carry us forward and allow us to climb out of the barrel that we are in. I thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Daniel Solomon: [*Desk thumping*] Much obliged, Madam President, for the opportunity to make a contribution on The Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017. And this is a Bill which:

> "…seeks to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2015…and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2016…and to authorize

the utilisation of any sums accruing from a reduction in expenditure under certain Heads of Expenditure for the purpose of meeting liability incurred through the increase in expenditure under other Heads."

That is the Explanatory Note given to us.

Madam President, I do not anticipate to be very long in my contribution but what we have here is the Bill articulating movements of moneys and in the first instance in the Schedule, Part I and Part II is Head 40, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the movement of $370,497,277 to Head 78, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. And then we have under Part II, Item 70, Ministry of Communications $120,781,446 moving to Head 31, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Now in the hon. Minister of Finance's opening submissions, he explained very briefly the reasoning behind these movements of moneys and the Ministry of Communications basically, he explained, that was because the two Ministries, that is, the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Communications had become one and were fused and therefore $120,781,000 was now attributed to this larger Ministry. Now the questions that we have, is it that these moneys were actually allocated and these moneys have already been spent and fused? I anticipate that the answer is, yes.

However, what we need is more details as to how these moneys actually—were there any savings? For instance, I imagine if you fused two Ministries you would have savings in terms of premises, you may have less rent; if you abandon one building to fuse into a larger building, you may have more rent. There is no explanation whatsoever as to how these moneys and these savings may have accumulated, or more expenditure. For instance, the staffing and the structuring of the organization, as a simple example one would imagine perhaps you do not need two Permanent Secretaries any longer. Perhaps it is only one Permanent Secretary. And these are the issues which I think need further explanation, further description so that we can have an understanding or is it that these two figures were just lumped into one and we would like to believe and expect that that is the new figure and that is how the two Ministries are now going to operate under that same budget.

One would anticipate that if this Government, as it purports to be, is a responsible one that the fusing of these two Ministries would have some sort of explanation and there would be some sort of accompanying savings and some sort of restructuring to create a more efficient and streamline organization. [*Desk thumping*] And this brings me to the next point.

There is a lot of anxiety, lack of transparency, misunderstanding in terms of what is happening with the State broadcasting institutions of CNMG and GISL. Now, there was said to be a report being prepared, there was supposed to be hearings in terms of it, public enquiry. Are these agencies actually going to be restructured? Because this is a very serious matter. It is a matter of the people's jobs, people's livelihood, a matter of state broadcasting. What is the Government's policy on state broadcasting? What is their intention in relation to these organizations? We have had the pleasure and honour of serving in this Senate with the hon. Independent Senator, Madam Helen Drayton. She provided explanations, she provided great insight and leadership in those regards. Where are these things leading too? And the Government needs to explain to the public, what is the plan, what is the intention, what is the policy in relation to these items? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, if I may move along to the energy sector. I heard my learned friend Sen. Small and Sen. Creese and it really does beg the question, the movement of the moneys of the $370-odd million from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. It seems to me as though these moneys are being moved once again after the fact, if we are to believe what we are told, to pay for pensions. Yet still why is it that this money was removed from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries when we do not know exactly what that money could have been used or should have been used for in the energy sector.

And furthermore, why is it that was not anticipated beforehand, because it was the Government's clear manifesto, Madam President, that they would increase the pension allowance and they would be able to anticipate, calculate and know what moneys would have to be paid out in that regard, yet this was not done. And now we are asked at this august Chamber to come and approve this Bill in order to further advance those payments from the energy sector. And, Madam President, the energy sector as we know is perhaps one of the most important revenue earners for our country.

Now, Petrotrin has been on the brink, the OWTU has been under tremendous pressure and we have listened to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, actually addressed the nation, advising the nation and warning the nation that in fact this is not the end in relation to Petrotrin. Now, could that $370 million have been spent perhaps to refurbish equipment, perhaps to generate further income, perhaps keep people's job safe, increase revenues, we are none the wiser but we are asked to rationalize this Bill.

Now, Madam President, if it was that we could say that the delivery of the services of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services was to be of a level that one could be satisfied with, but it is widely known that pensioners have been complaining about these pensions not being received, the delivery of pensions is poor and a number of other services that people on the ground have been complaining about.

My learned friend had mentioned food cards and these are things that are key to our social development and as my comrade, Sen. Creese said, we need to consider our priorities in this country. And we need to expect better performance, more streamlining and better efficiency for the services for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We see that there are a lot of oil spills that are happening now. Can these moneys be allocated within the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs to assist with the people who have been affected by these oil spills? And we are talking, children, families, health, income, housing, a range of people, fisherfolk have lost their income, the environment has been damaged, yet still we are taking money out of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industry and allocating it elsewhere, not that we have a problem with where it is being allocated—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Solomon, I am allowing Senators a little leeway as they begin their contributions, but you are basically repeating what has been said by numerous previous speakers. So I would ask you to, in making your contribution, to try now to bring up your new points that you want to add to the debate, okay, but let us not go into that tedious repetition at this stage. Okay?

Sen. D. Solomon: Much obliged, Madam President. Madam President, we are looking at the economy, we are looking at a $7.5 billion deficit; we are looking at joblessness in the country; we are looking at the spiralling crime situation which is way out of hand and what we need from this Government very plainly, we beseech this Government to give us some hope, some light, some way forward and some plan out of this economic strife that we find ourselves. And we want some sort of guidance and inspirational leadership to take us forward out of this recession/depression that we find ourselves. That is my humble submission, Madam President. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wayne Sturge: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to join this very restricted and constricted debate. Madam President, there is not much to say since the Chair has ruled on our ability to go into—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge—

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes.

Madam President: Please do not question the decisions that have been made today, okay. Make your contribution, okay. If you begin to question the decisions, you are going to be showing disrespect to the Chair. All right.

Sen. W. Sturge: I am guided but far from that, I had no intention of questioning the rulings except to say that because of the ruling we are now very restricted and thankfully so.

Now, if I can perhaps refer to the very narrow confines of the Bill and to deal with an issue which was raised both by the mover and the Leader of Government Business with respect to the money being allocated mainly to pensions and so on, I got the very clear impression when they spoke and I am quite certain that a reasonable bystander may get the impression that they were actually doing people a favour, pensioners in particular. It seems as though they are seeking some sort of kudos and as though pensioners should somehow be grateful for this.

6.05 p.m.

Well, whilst they ought to be grateful—because truth be told, the priorities of the Government makes one wonder what really are their priorities. So that whilst it is all well and good to say we have shifted this money from this place to that place and pensioners would benefit, I believe it is wrong, in principle, to give anyone the impression that a pension is a hand-out when, in reality, a pension is an entitlement. [*Desk thumping*] So that is the first point I wish to make.

But the second point I wish to make on the issue of this money being moved from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries into the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and therefore to the benefit of pensioners, whether you think it is something that they should be grateful for when it is, in fact, an entitlement, the reality is, although it is an entitlement, the value of the money the pensioners receive is negligible and that is why I think there was no other place—no other division—to shift to but Social Services.

Because if we look at what happened in 2016 and the fiscal package and how it affected those and that is why it is necessary to make this shift, a pension, in essence, is fixed—it is a fixed form of income. It is a fixed form of income for persons who cannot work for a variety of reasons. Age might be one of them, but we are seeing now—because the real value of money has fallen substantially, we are seeing situations where persons who are of the age of pension are actually having to go out and seek employment, because the grant that we are giving to them, this entitlement, simply is not enough. And it is not enough because it was whittled away by several things.

And I heard mention being made today about when we realize more money then there was really no need to, in essence, put so much money in fuel subsidies, and so on, and the subsidy had dropped, and so on. I sometimes wonder why, if that is the case, the motoring public, those who pay at the pump and who are losing the subsidy, whether it cannot come back and accrue to our benefit. But be that as it may, the short point is, by the increase in fuel subsidies—and we had three in the last year—the value of this pension has been whittled down significantly. [*Desk thumping*]

So when the pensioner goes to the grocery, he not only has to pay for the increase in fuel cost, and so on, he has to pay increased VAT because he is not exempt from VAT, and that is something that came in the last fiscal year: business levy, Green Fund levy, and so on. And we have had so much that has whittled down the real value of the money being given to these pensioners. So that, in essence, they are getting nothing.

So to say that you have allocated $370 million from Energy to pension, maybe it is that you have staved off a scenario where you may not have been able to give them what they are entitled to. Because the reality is, sometimes when I speak with the pensioners I know of, sometimes they are complaining, they wonder if very soon they will get nothing because every time they go, the cheque is not there. It is always some sort of delay and they are wondering if the Government is buying time because they do not have money. I see for the first time in the debate the Minister of Finance is writing. [*Laughter*] He is writing a love letter. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Take some notes. Taking some notes.

Sen. W. Sturge: He is making notes, yes.

Now, the other issue I wish to raise in this debate, which has been circumscribed to just this one page, I see there is a movement which I understand is from an amalgamation of two Ministries, and there is something I wish to raise with respect to that. I believe most of the points with respect to that movement would have been made by my learned friend and my colleague, Sen. Solomon, but at the risk of tedious repetition—and there is no Standing Order against it. But at the risk of sounding repetitious I have to wonder: this $120 million increase that we see in this new Ministry, going forward, or 2016, what really was the policy of the Government with respect to the Ministry of Communications and certain entities which fell under the Ministry of Communications? And I speak, really, of GISL and CNMG which is also called "PNMG" nowadays. But the issue is—not a repetition—the issue really is, whilst we have seen that amalgamation, we do not know whether the Government is—what is the Government's policy because we do not know what former Sen. Drayton had in her report. I understand there is a report.

So when the Minister of Finance decides to wrap up, I am wondering if we can get some indication, because this $120 million increase, I am sure could have been sent elsewhere, maybe in the same direction as the pensioners and so on. I say that because we have conflicting signals and conflicting reports as to what was to happen mainly with CNMG and with $120 million increase. I do not know if it is $120 million more to spend on propaganda, or I do not know if the policy of the Government is simply to—as we are hearing—run down CNMG until it has to be sold in a fire sale. We do not know. But this is an entity—and because jobs are at stake and people's futures are at stake and so on, with respect to this entity, I am wondering if when the Minister stands up, if he can give some indication as to what we should expect with respect to, in particular, CNMG under this new merged ministry.

Well, unless there is anything further, I believe those are my submissions on this. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Samuel. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rodger Samuel: Madam President, my input into this debate will be very short because it comes across in the form of questions to the Minister of Finance which, obviously, he has already reiterated he will never answer.

Hon. Senator: Super zero. That is his name.

Sen. R. Samuel: But, Madam President, in the past when Ministries were merged, as it has happened here with the Ministry of Public Administration merging with the Ministry of Communications, when you looked at the allocations in the budget, the budgetary allocations for the ministries that are merged—because what you would find is that the operational cost would have been significantly reduced because of a merging. Recurrent expenditure would be significantly reduced because of the merging. Then you would find that as a result of that, obviously the allocations would be reduced.

What you find in this situation, Madam President, is that though the two Ministries were merged, we find the same allocation being sought after and the transfer of funds from the previous Ministry of Communications just automatically went over to the Ministry of Public Administration. [*Desk thumping*] And based on that, Madam President, the question is clear: Is the Minister in this particular Bill really telling us that though the Ministries were merged it was just that they operated separately? Or is it that they were just merged on paper, but that all of their operational procedures continued as per usual? Which normally will not happen when ministries are merged because now you have a coming together of a lot of functions and a shifting of things under one operation, and as a result of that the cost—

So was this something that was really planned for, or was it just an accidental situation that took place with the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications? And what is happening at this point in time? I know it is a new fiscal year, but what is happening? Is it that the same thing is happening, that the merging has not completely been made solid? And is it continuing that these Ministries are operating as independent Ministries, though on paper they appear to be merging?

Those are the simple questions, Madam President, I would like answered as a result of this particular Bill that is now saying that we are now shifting Heads and 120 million, 700-something thousand dollars, from one Ministry Head that no longer exists to a new Ministry Head that exists. But what is it saying, that there is a possibility that they are still operating as two entities? And if so, why? So the Minister of Finance may just have to give us some kind of answer on that, and I hope that he will as he goes forward. And, basically, Madam President, that is all I want to ask as I stand here today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. I will excuse, Madam President, new Members of Parliament who do not have the experience of a Variation of Appropriation Bill, but I cannot excuse persons such as the last speaker or Sen. Wade Mark—in the case of Sen. Mark, he has been here for 25 years, some long time like that—

Hon. Senator: Too long.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and Sen. Mark would be aware of Act No. 9 of 2015 which was debated in this House and assented to on the 12th of June, 2015 under the UNC Government that preceded us, and he would be aware that in that Variation of Appropriation Bill which was debated in both Houses of Parliament—

Sen. Sturge: 46(1).

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, I was not going to get into the meat of my presentation but what has bothered me is the level of political deception that experienced Members have perpetrated in this House today. They have said that this is something that is unusual. They have made the point that the estimates should be done exactly so that you do not have to come to Parliament to do any variation of appropriation. School children who are listening to them would

believe that when the annual budget is laid in this Parliament, the out-turn for the fiscal year is exact to the last cent and has been so for the last 50 years. Any uninformed person listening to them would think that what we are about today is extraordinary, that it is bizarre, that it is out of this world, that it has never been done before, that no other government has ever had a Variation of Appropriation Bill, that in the past the budget analysts estimated every single Head of Expenditure down to the last dollar and the last cent, so that you would not need to come, when you are closing the accounts, for a variation of appropriation.

That is the sentiment expressed by the Members on the Lower Bench opposite, and that is why I am terribly disappointed in persons like Sen. Mark who has been here for over 20 years and would have remembered—because he was in another office then—that his government, in 2015, passed a Variation of Appropriation Bill. There was no song and dance about it. [*Desk thumping*] You had nobody carrying on and saying. "It is incompetence. You need to get your figures right. You made a mistake. It is an error." There was no song and dance in 2015 when Act No. 9 of 2015 was passed in the place in which Sen. Mark presided and in which they increased the Auditor General by $13 million, the Judiciary by $73 million, the Industrial Court by $2 million, the Parliament by $11 million, the Service Commissions by $16 million—

Sen. Sturge: 46(1).

Hon. C. Imbert:—the Statutory Authorities Service Commission by $2 million—[*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sturge: 46(1).

Hon. C. Imbert:—the Elections and Boundaries Commission by $11 million—

Madam President: Hon. Minister of Finance. Sen. Sturge, if you want to invoke a Standing Order you stand and you say what you are about. You do not just stand up. You have to do it in a certain way so that you can catch the other person's attention as well as mine. Okay? Continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Bill that we are debating today seeks to increase two Heads of Expenditure—two—and decrease two Heads of Expenditure, and I have heard every single one on that side on the Lower Bench scream and carry on about the level of incompetence, the inability of the budget analysts and the Ministry of Finance to make estimates that are accurate—two! We are varying two Heads of Expenditure, and they are draft Estimates of Expenditure. And I have just read out that in 2015 under their government, they increased one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight Heads of Expenditure. But let us hear what they reduced.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Selective memory.

Hon. C. Imbert: They reduced the Registration Recognition and Certification Board by $1 million, the Public Service Appeal Board by $600,000, the Office of the Prime Minister by $15 million—

Madam President: Minister of Finance—

Hon. C. Imbert: What is going on?

Sen. Ramdeen: Madam President, I stand on Standing Order 46(1). The reason why—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Minister of Finance, continue, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, there should be a Standing Order against this kind of interruption. In 2015—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Selective memory.

Hon. C. Imbert:—the UNC, Minister of Finance, came in this place and reduced 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21—23 Heads of Expenditure!

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Shame, shame, shame. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: So assuming—Madam President, I am being interrupted.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, can we listen to the Minister in silence, please?

Hon. C. Imbert: So if it is incompetence to vary two Heads of Expenditure, what is it to vary 23 Heads of Expenditure? What is that, incompetence to the highest power? Madam President, this is traditional. This is ordinary. This is routine. It has been done in this Parliament since 1962 and before. [*Desk thumping*] It is the height of political dishonesty for Senators on the Lower Bench to—[*Interruption*] I said political dishonesty. Go and learn. Political dishonesty; that is what it is, to come here and assert that this is something out of the ordinary.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Remind them. Remind them.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is ridiculous! When one does Estimates of Expenditure, things change throughout the year. Nothing is static. This is a dynamic situation. There are different demands on the public purse. There are savings; there are increases; there are reductions. Who on earth could predict what the price of oil would have done in 2015? Who on earth could do that?

If one bothered to go and do some research, Madam President, look at the graph for crude oil prices from 2009 to 2015. From 2011—and that is how they carried the budget up to so high, an increase of almost 65 per cent in terms of annual expenditure. That is why we are in the jam we are in today. That is why we have to come and appropriate an additional $370 million for the payment of pensions.

The price of oil in 2011, Madam President, cost $120 and remained at that level until 2014. So the good times were rolling and that is why you had increases in all of these benefits in disability grant, in senior citizens pension, because the good times were rolling. And then in 2014, from the middle of 2014, the price of oil just collapsed from $107 down to $29 in 2016. Madam President, who could predict that? They had nobody in OPEC, nobody in the US International Energy Agency, nobody in the EU Oil Research Unit—nobody. Nobody in the OECD, nobody in the World Bank, nobody in the IMF would have been able to predict in June of 2014 that oil prices would collapse from $107 down to $29 in 2016. Nobody could predict that, the same way nobody could predict that it would go from $29 back up to the current $53. Nobody can predict oil prices anymore. There are so many variables in the world today. There are so many variables. And I do wish, instead of what I hear—complete irrelevancy from the UNC Opposition; complete irrelevancy—they would do some research; try and understand what is going on.

When I listened to Sen. Small, he has an in-depth knowledge of the energy sector. You get something out of his contribution. When I listen to Sen. Mahabir, he makes an effort to deal with the macroeconomic issues. But when I listen to the Lower Bench I hear nothing. I hear nothing, nothing! [*Desk thumping*] All I hear is tedious repetition, inaccuracies and the new thing that is now in America, "alternative facts". Alternative facts—that is what we get from the Lower Bench.

Madam President—and 2015 was not the only year that that happened. I just went back two years. "Ah only had tuh check two." When you go back to Act No. 5 of 2014, Variation of Appropriation: Judiciary, Industrial Court, Parliament, Tobago House of Assembly, Finance, National Security, Attorney General, Legal Affairs, Food Production, Health, Labour, Transport, Tourism, Public Utilities, Energy, Local Government, Trade, People, Tobago Development again, Foreign Affairs, Gender, Planning, Sport, Works, Communications, Environment, Water Resources and Tertiary Education, they vary "all ah dat". They vary the whole budget in 2014. But when that matter came to this honourable place, "yuh didn't" have any PNM Opposition Senator screaming and carry on and saying, "Yuh incompetent, because yuh car get yuh numbers right." It is just childish, Madam President. It is childish.

Now let me deal with the issues because it seems as a misunderstanding. First I deal with your rhetoric, now I will deal with the issues. There is a misunderstanding. I heard people say, "Could that $370 million have been given to Petrotrin instead"? The answer is, no, because we are running a deficit budget. The money is not available. "Yuh doh have a money tree dat yuh go and pluck $370 million out of it." The money does not exist! It does not exist. You have to go and borrow it. It is not revenue.

So we had projected to have a deficit of $7.2 billion based on the shortfall between revenue and expenditure, and because of inescapable expenditure on pensions—you see, they pretend not to understand but they very well understand, Madam President. They know, because they were in government, that pensions and grants are paid on the first day of the month. They know that! So they know that senior citizens pensions, disability grant, public assistance and so on, were due on the 1st of October. But where were we on the 1st of October? We were in the midst, in the heat, of the 2017 budget debate. There was no appropriation, and those cheques have to reach the recipients. The money has to get into the bank accounts of these poor, vulnerable people on the 1st of October.

Now anybody with even are smattering of knowledge of government accounting will know that there is a lead time in order to ensure that money is available, in order to ensure that releases are made, in order to ensure that there is an application made for a credit from the Treasury so that a cheque can be sent to the relevant banks in order to pay the money. Anybody will know the lead time is between one and two weeks. So in order to make pension payments on the 1st of October, the money must be in process at least 10 days before that. That is in the fiscal 2016. That will be September 20th.

We are making a payment outside of the fiscal year but you have to make provision for it because you have to send the money on to all of these people. As Sen. Mahabir correctly said—one of the few persons who had numbers—there are actually 90,800 recipients of senior citizens pension. So you have 90,000 old and vulnerable people who are expecting to get their pension cheque on the 1st of October. The only way you can give it to them is that you make the allocation in the previous fiscal year because the year ends on September 30th.

And in this year, 2016, a number of things happened. We increased the cap so that the amount of money that was paid out—the quantum that was paid out for pensions was more than normal, and then we increased the qualifying income, and a number of persons applied for pension and therefore there was this requirement for an additional $370 million that had to be made available to the Ministry of

Social Development before the 1st of October. It is straightforward. They all know, you know. They all know government accounting. So it is not as if you had this money there that you could give it to Petrotrin. Nonsense, Madam President. Nonsense! It is inescapable expenditure. The Government was faced with two choices. Either you find the money, using Treasury deposits—these are special funds that are available to the Government to make temporary advances which, by law, according to the Exchequer and Audit Act, you must recover within a period of 12 months after the closing of the financial year.

So all governments for the last—if you count from 1962, however many years that is—all governments have had access to Treasury deposits to make advances for extraordinary expenditure. So we had inescapable expenditure of $370 million to be made on the 1st of October, outside of the budget cycle. And what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to say, "too bad," so the old people would not get their pension payments on the 1st of October? Or did we, as any responsible, caring Government would do, we made appropriate arrangements to make sure that these 90,000 persons—and on the other side the public assistance and disability grant, you are talking about another 50,000 people. When you add the two together, you are talking about 140,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And a lot of extended families depend on this money—a lot of people. The only source of income that they have is the grandfather or the grandmother would give them a little part of their pension and so on, at the end of the month. That is how they survive in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reality.

So you are looking at 140,000 direct recipients and several thousand others who would benefit from these payments. And we, as a Government, are supposed to sit down there and say, "Leh we gih de money tuh Petrotrin instead". Does that sound like humanity? Does that sound like sense? It is not money that is there in a pot that you just pull it out. It is part of the deficit.

So what we had to do—in any year there would always be revenue and expenditure that is different to the original estimate because, as I said, we are not static, we are not robots. So, as I said, nobody could predict what the price of oil would be during fiscal 2016. On one side revenue was down because the price was down. On the other side you get a savings in your fuel subsidy. So whenever this thing occurs—and it can occur with anything. It is not just senior citizens pension payments. It is all sorts of inescapable expenditure that you have coming at you at the end of a fiscal year or at the beginning of a fiscal year. All governments face this, and I just showed you we just varied two Heads. They varied 22, and they did it every single year for the five years they were there. Every single year! In fact, sometimes they did it twice a year.

I remember being in this place they would come twice in the year and vary the appropriation and move money from here to there. Nobody would say "Yuh incompetent, yuh cyar do yuh maths, yuh cyar do yuh sums, yuh shoulda estimate it properly, yuh suppose tuh know is $370, 497,277 and zero cents, and if yuh get one cent wrong, oh wow, yuh incompetent." That was never said by anybody in the—I have been here for 25 years. This is the first time I am hearing this. I have participated in 25 budget debates, 13 of them in government, 12 of them in opposition. I have never heard this, that when you come for a Variation of Appropriation, the Opposition is quarrelling and saying, "Oh, yuh cyar get yuh sums right"? Nonsense, Madam President. We must do better in this in Parliament. We must do better than this. There must be more content. There must be more substance in the contributions, otherwise you are just talking for talking sake!

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 57, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

6.35 p.m.

ADJOURMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, January 31, 2017, at 1.30 p.m., at which time we will deal with Private Members' business, Private Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for a matter to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the Senate. Sen. Mark, you have 10 minutes.

National Carnival Commission (Carnival 2017)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you. Madam President, I have been reading with some interest, developments involving Carnival 2017, and it is the reason why I have brought this matter to the attention of the Parliament so that we can get some clarity from the hon.

Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts as to what is taking place with Carnival. I was shocked when I read in the Saturday's *Express* dated the 21st of January, 2017, the following, and this is on page 7. This is De Silva speaking. I think he is the Executive Chairman, Kenny De Silva.

> "He noted that, in 2016, NCC had the responsibility for the mas component of Carnival and that entails the parade—to the Kings and Queens from the semi-finals to the finals and the adjudication of all aspects of that."

He said:

> "This year"—2017—"NCC's responsibilities have widened to include the revenue aspects and ticketing of"—both—"pan and calypso.
>
> 'The management of the shows—all pan shows and all calypso shows will be the responsibility of Pan Trinbago and TUCO, respectively'...
>
> 'We are proposing in Dimanche Gras to have some sort of representation of the Kings and Queens…'"—et cetera.

To consolidate this position, Madam President, in the *Trinidad Guardian* of January 22nd, the Executive Chairman Mr. De Silva, says on page 11:

> "De Silva also said that the NCC will be managing the revenue aspects for all pan and calypso shows. A decision, he said, which was made by the Government.
>
> 'The management of all pan and calypso shows with respect to bands' appearances and calypsonians' appearance will be the responsibility of Pan Trinbago and TUCO. NCC will be handling the tickets, the collection of revenues and the gate controls...'"

Now, Madam President, this is alarming and I will tell you why. I was in the Cabinet of the hon. Basdeo Panday in 1997 and I have a Cabinet Minute—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: For one term.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah, one term. I was proud to be there for one term. You are going to be like me, one term. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam President, may I continue, please? Cabinet Minute No. 207 of August 07, 1997, stated very clearly what was the arrangement for Carnival. We had decided in 1998 that Pan Trinbago, TUCO and the NCBA will be responsible for the autonomy and the management and the administration of Carnival. That was for

1998. This went on until last year when the Government, led by Dr. Rowley the Prime Minister, changed that paradigm and they took over the mas from NCBA and this year they are going a step further. They are taking over pan and they are taking over kaiso from both Pan Trinbago and TUCO.

Madam President, this was a government decision and I want to tell you why. I have a letter dated the 8th of December from the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts addressed to Kenneth De Silva. This was December 8th, 2016. So they have been hatching this plot since then. Hear what some of the recommendations of the Minister, on behalf of the Government, is proposing to De Silva who is the Chairman of the NCC. It reads—it is addressed to Kenneth De Silva.

> Following our meeting held on Monday, the 5th of December, 2016, I have listed below the Ministry's recommendations for Carnival 2017.

I will just read three recommendations coming from the Minister, on behalf of the Cabinet, and on behalf of the Government. No. 3, Madam Chairman. Madam President, rather.

> Whilst the group plans and executes the events of Carnival, according to an NCC approved format and budget, the suppliers and prize winners are paid directly by the NCC.

So they are taking over. It goes on further. Fourth point:

> The NCC controls the sale of tickets at national events.

Madam President, contrary to the Cabinet Note which went into existence in 1998 until 2016, into 2017, it stated very clearly NCC will merely be a facilitator of Carnival. It went on to say that the responsibility of the various interest groups, starting with the National Carnival Bands Association, they would be responsible for ticket sales, for related activity; they are responsible for Junior Carnival, for street parades, King and Queen shows, traditional Carnival shows. These are things that the NCC, the Government at that time rather, provided to the NCBA. It went on:

> Pan Trinbago is responsible for all junior calypso shows—that is the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organization, TUCO. They are responsible for judging competitions and, most importantly, for ticket sales, for related activities.
>
> Pan Trinbago is responsible for all Panorama competition and they are responsible for marketing, ticket sales, for related activities.

So, Madam President, how come all of a sudden, without any discussion with the Parliament, without any discussion with the national community, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, under the distinguished Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, has taken control of Carnival and they have kicked out Pan Trinbago. They say Pan Trinbago will just only be responsible for just managing—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have one minute.

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah—managing this and managing that, but the ticket sales and the revenue aspect. So we are calling on the Minister to tell this country whether they have engaged in a coup d'état, insofar as these three special interest groups are concerned and to come clear—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Madam President, on a point of order, please; 46(6).

Madam President: Sen. Mark, just retract that remark and just put it differently.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, even if it is a coup d'état, I will withdraw it, but whether they have hijacked these organizations. All I am asking, Madam President, is for the Government, through the hon. Minister, to make a clear statement today on this matter so that everyone in this country would be aware of the role of the Government and the NCC as it relates to Pan Trinbago, TUCO and the NCBA.

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

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity of responding in this Senate at this time. I notice Sen. Mark drew attention to the Cabinet Minute No. 207 of August 07, 1997, passed by the Cabinet of which he was a member at that time, and he drew reference to the responsibilities given to the Carnival bodies with respect to the calypso component of the Carnival, the pan component as well as the mas components, and he read out exactly what they were supposed to do. I notice, though, that Sen. Mark did not make reference to the part of the Minutes which is number—it is marked section D, which says:

That based on all of these recommendations, the Attorney General reviewed the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago Act 1991 to give effect to the policy set out at A above.

Why that is significant, Madam President, is because the policy put forward, as espoused by Sen. Mark, was in direct contravention to the NCC Act [*Desk thumping*] and let me just quote some parts of the Act which would point out the discrepancy between the Act and the Minute.

"(4) The objectives of the Commission"—this is the National Carnival Commission—"are as follows:

(a) to make Carnival a viable national, cultural and commercial enterprise;

(b) to provide the necessary managerial and organisational infrastructure for the efficient and effective presentation and marketing of the cultural products…"—from Trinidad and Tobago.

And it continues into that vein.

So basically what I am saying, Madam President, is in order to enact that policy, which was espoused in the Minute of 1997, there needed to be changes to the Act which never were done. So really, the situation that the Carnival ends up in is that you have on the board of the NCC the special interest groups which, of course, have a very valuable role into the Carnival product, and a valuable input into the product. However, because of that discrepancy between the Act and the Minute and, of course, the Act would be superseding the Minute, there is this role confusion of what role the special interest groups should play as well as the NCC should play, and that was never cleared up because the recommendation given in the Cabinet Minute that you just referred to was never completed by the Cabinet that gave the Minute.

So, Madam President, the situation is that the special interest groups do sit on the board of the NCC and they do have valuable input into the Carnival product. And as the Senator would have referred to as well, it is very clear that there is no taking over of the Carnival product by the NCC because the groups are very much involved and have been in the managing of the Carnival product, in the managing of their events and so on. So there is no issue of taking over, there is no issue of pushing out as has been espoused by Sen. Mark. [*Desk thumping*]

If I can just give a word with respect to this management and the issue? We have been looking very closely at different models of festival development because there is a national hue and cry—it happens after every Carnival about the product of Carnival, and then there is also the business of Carnival—two separate issues that we have to deal with. And looking at the governance model of Carnival and how it is managed, it is different from other festivals within the region and internationally, and we have done a study that looks at that difference and identifies very clearly some of the gaps that exist within our festival management that lead to this problem.

One of those very large gaps is exactly the situation as put forward here, the fact that there is role confusion between the special interest groups and between the NCC, and because of that you have these little silos operating where the pan fraternity wants to develop the Carnival very nobly in their own way, the calypso fraternity also wants

to do that, the mas fraternity wants to do it as well, and in addition to that the NCBA has splintered into three mas associations, each of them with substantial membership, and therefore, that creates another issue of the representation on the board, which again we have to deal with and we have taken steps to deal with that.

So you have this situation existing where, because of this Minute and its presence there, in addition to the Act which it contravenes in a substantial way, you have now the pan fraternity trying to do their thing, the mas fraternity doing their thing, as well as the calypso fraternity, and then you have the NCC. So it as though you have this four-headed type of institution that makes it very difficult for a unified position to be put forward for us to work towards the strategic development of the Carnival product. [*Desk thumping*]

This has existed for as long as the Minute has existed and it is just exacerbated because experts look at our Carnival—our local experts as well—and analyze the situation as our Carnival being in a state of maturity in terms of our festival development, and some may even say stagnation as evidenced by the fact that we have declining or very stagnant tourist arrivals, we also have very serious dwindling of the audiences at our state-sponsored events. These are clear indicators that there is a problem and the model we have been using for Carnival governance may not be the model that is destined to take the festival forward in the way that the national community wants it to go. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam President, recognizing the issue, we are taking steps to deal with the very important and fundamental issue of Carnival governance. We are looking at it, we have done some studies on it and we will be ensuring that in consultation with the NCC, in consultation with the special interest groups, we look at a way forward for our national festival that deals very seriously with this fundamental issue of the presence of the Act in contravention to the Minute and that as we go forward, we improve our Carnival product in line with some of the best practices that we see in festival development across the region as well as internationally.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.54 p.m.