

Leave of Absence

Tuesday, October 10, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 10, 2017

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Prakash Ramadhar MP, Member for St. Augustine, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 06, 2017]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to this debate this morning here at this most august House. Let me from the outset extend my sincerest thanks on behalf of my Ministry, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, for what I consider to be yeoman service, by both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development, preparing this budget for 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this budget is most realistic, relevant and required fiscal measures in our time, in our time of our country's development. When one looks at the theme for this budget, "Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path", there is a bit of historical evidence in that theme, "Changing the Paradigm", because there is no other Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, other than a Government led by the People's National Movement, that has instituted significant change in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Whether in the field of sport, whether in the field of education, even infrastructure development, we can always trace the initiative to a People's

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National Movement, and it is no different as we are about to change the paradigm, not only in the area of finance, but along the length and breadth of our social consciousness in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, before I go into—let me just—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, sorry. Madam Speaker, before I go into my contribution, let me just talk a little bit about the contribution by the Leader of the Opposition. I cannot talk much about it because there really was not much to speak about, but one or two areas in which she touched on I want to put on the records. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that robberies, kidnappings, murders, which in fact are classified as serious reported crimes, have been increased over the last two years and that is the last two years of this Government. When I checked the records, Madam Speaker, if I were to compare the serious reported crimes in the first two years of the Government between—I am not counting the election year, of course—2011/2012 compared to 2016/2017, in 2011, the serious reported crimes were 15,877. If you compare that to 2016, it was 11,493. If one were to compare also 2012, 2012 serious reported crime in Trinidad and Tobago was 17,841. If you were to compare that with 2017, we are now at 9,701 reported serious crimes. So when the Leader of the Opposition comes here and paints a certain kind of picture, I think she is short of memory and short of understanding.

The Leader of the Opposition went on to talk about some issues that I do not think she has full knowledge about and she put it on the agenda. She spoke to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Highway Patrol being discontinued. Madam Speaker, that unit has not been discontinued. It is part of the Traffic and Highway Patrol Branch and is operational. I do not know where the Member for Siparia got that information. You know we used to play a game true or false, and one must say true or false? False. Why she wants to put that on the record, I do not know. The Rapid Response Unit, she mentioned that this was discontinued. The Rapid Response Unit has not been discontinued and is highly operational, and I am sure people will see them on the highways and the byways of Trinidad and Tobago. Again, putting some kind of statement outside there to suggest that these two programmes have been discontinued.

She spoke again about the NSOC, which is a detachment that is well trained, and saying that that was discontinued. I put on the records again, that that team, that operational team, is highly operational, very well trained and ready to

respond to any eventuality, and it is still operational. So again, Madam President—Madam Speaker, my apologies. Madam Speaker, I want to put on the records that what we have heard for the long time from the Member of Siparia seems to be disconnected with reality. And so, she spoke for almost three or four hours and one wonders what was said. I stood there and was waiting to write certain comments, but almost a blank slate, almost a blank slate.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to extend on behalf of the Ministry of National Security and, in fact, the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, our deepest condolences to the wife and family of prison officer Sandy, who was shot and killed while in a bar in Gasparillo a couple days ago. I want to extend our deepest condolences because once again we have seen members of national security being killed in situations related to their jobs, and our heart goes out to not only to Sandy and family, but others who have been so faced a similar situation over the last year or so. But I also want to take this opportunity to extend thanks and appreciation to the hard-working members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, [*Desk thumping*] the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, the Immigration Department, the Strategic Services Agency, and those agencies of national security who work tirelessly, continue to work tirelessly to bring a sense of peace and security to the inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has been allocated \$6.237 billion in this year's estimates, 2017/2018, which represent roughly about 12.4 per cent of the national budget, and I want to share with the public of Trinidad and Tobago how that is broken down into so they get a sense of how the budget is appropriated to national security.

Under recurrent expenditure, there is an allocation of \$3.3 billion in national security and \$2.2 billion under Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, giving you a total of 5.6 under recurrent expenditure; development programme, national security, \$394 million, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, \$37 million, a total of \$431 million under the development programme; in the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$81 million under national security, \$57 million under Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, a total of \$138 million; representing a cumulative total of \$6.2 billion for national security. That is a drop. It dropped about \$2 billion from last year's estimate, and we in national security fully understand the economic situation that we are in, not only Trinidad and Tobago, but the entire world. And while we will continue to ensure that the agencies of national security are not wanting for issues of finance to do their job effectively

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and efficiently, we understand that we have to cut and contrive. We understand in national security that we have to adjust, we have to get value for money, we have to be able to understand that there is always a gap between strategy and resources, and therefore, we have to prioritize. And so we must, notwithstanding the decrease in expenditure and allocation, we in national security are prepared to do what we could, the best that we can, with what we have been allocated.

Madam Speaker, the world we live in today is one that is defined by situations that is taking place in Las Vegas recently, in Spain, in the United Kingdom, in France, in Africa. It is a world that is characterized by transnational organized crime, with drugs, and guns and ammunition, kidnapping, terrorism. We are no different in Trinidad and Tobago, we are no different in the region. We suffer the same kind of security characteristics like most countries of the world. We are faced with a similar kind of situation. When one looks in the region, in the region we have seen an increase in criminality, we have seen an increase in the aspects of guns and drugs and ammunition. In Jamaica right now, the murder rate is over 900. We have seen an increase in St. Kitts, we have seen an increase in Barbados, in Antigua and in a number of different countries, throughout the world, throughout the region. Trinidad and Tobago is no different. One thing for sure is that there is no quick fix to this situation. There is no quick fix for this situation. It is one in which we have to understand the phenomenon of crime and criminality, and understand that each and every one of us has a role to play. We must if we are to treat with this issue.

Madam Speaker, we have reached a stage where we have to declare war. We have to declare war on criminality and criminal things in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] because we have seen that those elements who are going against us, they have weapons of war. We have seen assault rifles showing their faces. The police have been able to retrieve some of them, and therefore, I am saying to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and to the country as a whole, we have to declare war on those miscreants. We have to and [*Desk thumping*] if we declare war, it means that we have a common enemy, and if we have a common enemy, ask those on the other side to understand that the enemy is also their enemy. They are also their enemy, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and therefore, we ask them to support the measures that we have adopted to treat with it because if it is not their common enemy, then I suggest that they may be their friends. [*Desk thumping*] But I hope, I hope to a large extent that they also share that common enemy and join us and not be obstructionist to ensure that they are part and parcel of the solution and not the problem.

We do not want talk. We do not want talk, we want action. Let them be patriots. You know something, Madam Speaker? [*Desk thumping*] Time and time again, I hear the other side saying that we are patriots, we are patriots. Former Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher once said, if you are a lady and you have to keep telling people that you are a lady, then you are not [*Desk thumping*] because by your actions you will know that you are a lady. Similarly, if you are a patriot, do not tell us that you are a patriot. Show us that you are a patriot. Show us that you are a patriot. [*Desk thumping*] Show us by your example. National parade, Independent parade, not one; memorial parade, not one; [*Desk thumping*] national events, not one. Where is the patriotism?

Mr. Young: Vote in the Parliament.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Vote in the Parliament. To vote, ha—patriotism is something that is deeper. It is a sense of understanding, a sense of belonging. [*Desk thumping*] You have not heard one person on this side say they are patriots. Do you know why? Because we show it by our actions [*Desk thumping*] by the way we talk, by the Bills we bring to Parliament. We do not have to say it. The people of Trinidad and Tobago can see us and judge us accordingly.

Madam Speaker, French philosopher Voltaire once said, in treating with any phenomena you must first define it. And so, I want to start by defining national security because from that definition will flow the actions. National security is based on identification of the threats and issues faced by this country or any nation, Trinidad and Tobago; it is based on the Government policies, strategies that they develop to treat with those threats that have been identified, and more importantly, it is about the people, the institutions, the finances, the techniques and the tactics that are placed together to treat with those threats. That is the definition that we are talking about. It is coming down from that definition that we treat with national security, understanding that we have to identify the threats, understanding that it is based on Government policy and strategies, understanding that we have to put people, institutions and finances together to treat with those threats, and it is from that standpoint, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has been establishing a kind of strategic direction. This is not new, you know.

When one understands the philosophies of Genghis Khan, of Sun Tzu, of General Montgomery, of Bonaparte, General Patton and so on who went before us, they tell you that if you want sustainability—and this is what we are talking about, the theme of this budget is “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Development”. If we want sustainable in national security, it has

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to be based from a policy and strategy perspective. And so, the Ministry of National Security, Madam Speaker, has been going along the sustainable path and developing the type of strategies, the type of policies that are required. And to this end, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has developed a national security policy for the period 2018—2023, which is a statement of principles that establish a national understanding of the risks, the threats and challenges to the security of the State and the public and personal safety.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of this national security policy is to identify Trinidad and Tobago's national interest, the strategic priorities and goals, and prescribe how resources can be best allocated especially in this economic time to address these and related areas of national development. The national security policy has been completed and is being prepared for submission to the National Security Council. Along the same policy strategic lines, the Ministry is also in its final stages of development of a strategic plan. This is the Ministry's strategic plan for 2018—2023. This plan is anchored in Government's Vision 2030 and, in particular, the governance pillar. Madam Speaker, this is a whole of Ministry approach, where every single individual in the Ministry had a chance to contribute, horizontal cut, vertical cut, length and breadth of the Ministry, so that they had buy-in in what the Ministry is about to do in this plan towards 2018—2023.

Madam Speaker, the key areas of focus of the Ministry's strategic plan first and foremost is crime prevention and reduction, stakeholder collaboration and partnership, governance, capacity and capability resource optimization, among others. This strategic plan, which is currently being finalised for submission for Cabinet, will be done before the end of this year. The plan also involves a 24-month operational plan which will commence in 2018, and in drilling down from the Ministry's strategic plan, the agencies of national security continue to drill from that which is anchored in Vision 2030. So the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has developed a strategic plan for the period to 2017—2023, which focuses initially on the period 2017—2019 for emphasis. This approach will allow the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to effectively remain current and critical in the developments of this country, to provide a reliable road map for operational planning and performance management within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to establish the basis for effective development and measurement of performance throughout the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force is also on board, drilling down again from the strategic perspective, drilling down from the policy perspective. They have been working together with the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies

based in Washington, to develop the kind of reformative measures, the kind of institutional measures to prepare the defence force in the ever-changing security environment, to change the defence force to understanding to contribute more significantly in the law enforcement environment in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, those are just two of agencies who are along the policy strategy framework. Other agencies are similarly pursuing the same route so it will have the border management through the immigration developing their own strategic plan. The intelligence agencies, the Strategic Service agency also developing their strategic plan. The prisons developing their rehabilitation plan. ODPM developing the disaster plan. So you see, Madam Speaker, there is a connection based on the overarching *Vision 2030* for the national security framework strategic plan and drill down to the police law enforcement plan, the defence and security plan, the border management plan, and this is what you call sustainability. This is not a hit and miss. So that when you develop those kinds of initiatives, you will find that anything can last very long and it is not a hit and miss, not ad hoc in terms of arrangements or response.

The Ministry of National Security continues to work with the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, because we understand quite fully that we cannot do things operationally when we are dealing with the fight of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. There must be a legislative framework within which we operate, and they must work in tandem. And so, the Attorney General and myself, and both Ministries, have been working assiduously together to treat with the issues. We are on the same train. We are probably in separate carriage, but heading in the same direction. One carries is legislation, one carriage is operation, but we are on the same train. Just a small example of this Government working together.

Madam Speaker, I will touch on some of the issues but I know the Attorney General will definitely be at length in his contribution. But just by example, I will touch on some of the Bills that have been brought to this House that works with a nexus with us in the operational environment in national security: The Anti-Terrorism (Amdt.) Bill, 2017; the Bail (Bail to Assess) Bill, 2017; the Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion Plea Agreement) Bill, 2017; the Cybercrime Bill, 2017; the Fire Service (Amdt.) Bill, 2017; the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill; the Indictable Offences (Pre-trial Procedure); the Miscellaneous Provisions (Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, Proceeds of Crime, Financial Intelligence Unit Trinidad and Tobago, Customs and Exchange Control); Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2017; the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill; Strategic Services Agency (Amdt.) Bill. These are

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just about a few to indicate their contributions and the nexus between what the AG is doing and what Ministry of National Security is doing. As I said, a two-pronged approach, legislative and operation, and we continue to do that.

Within recent times, the Ministry of National Security has also looked at a review of the private security industry because we feel that there is an untapped resource there that we can tap into. So we are revisiting that and right now it is before the Finance and General Purpose Committee, looking at the private security in terms of regulating that industry right now. So we are pursuing such initiative at this point in time.

Another area that is going to be a sort of a game change and is already started is the Administrative of Justice (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) Act of 2014. This was passed in 2012 with subsequent amendment in 2014. After that, nothing happened. 2014, 2015, 2016, nothing happened. It was this Government which commenced the operationalization of this Act. This Government that did this. We are a Government of action. We are not a Government of talk. [*Desk thumping*] Through the Attorney General working together with national security, we have drafted the DNA Regulations which is before the Cabinet for approval. You see, Madam Speaker, the regulations must be in place to give effect to this Act. It was never done between 2014 to 2015. We have done that.

You see, the regulations treat with a number of key issues because it brings sort of legal clarity to the better administration of some of the areas such as the distinction between reference samples and crime scene material, further expanding on the role and responsibilities of DNA Custodian, the creation of standards to govern the technical requirements of DNA, further guidance on the taking of DNA samples as envisaged by the Act, further guidance on the storing and transportation of DNA samples, restrictions on privacy, enforcement and security measures, and access, among others. We are ahead of the game. This is going to be a game changer to the effect that we have already hired the Custodian. We are doing the procurement right now with the buccal swabs and so on, right now. In 2018, we are going to see the effect of DNA Regulations, DNA database and the DNA Custodian, Madam Speaker. I can assure you that.

Another area that we have done in 2017 heading into 2018 is the whole question of the electronic monitoring regulations. The Administration of Justice (Electronic Monitoring) Act was passed in 2012. 2012, Madam Speaker. Once again, 2013, nothing happened; 2014, nothing happened; 2015, nothing happened. Once again, it is left to this Government, this actionable PNM Government again to operationalize this EMA system. [*Desk thumping*] It is left to us.

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Madam Speaker, we are in fact dealing with the regulations which are required and that is being done again in tandem with the Ministry of National Security and the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, working together to treat with this issue. Again, this will be another game changer because it gives the alternative sentencing measures whereby persons who are convicted by the court can be allowed to work within a geographic, what you call a geo-fence area, with their bracelets on their ankles and monitored, and if they move from the geo-fence area, they have a response. If they break the chain then they are sent back to prison, and that will reduce to a large extent the amount of people we have incarcerated in our prison system. Again, another game changer. This again will be effected in 2018.

Madam Speaker, we continue again with our legislative framework and building security net. We deal with the issues of the Child Rehabilitation Centre Regulations, 2017. These regulations were made by the Ministry of National Security on May 15, 2017, together with the Attorney General and Legal Affairs office, and it governs the operations of rehabilitation centres such as the Youth Training Centre (YTC) which has been designated as a rehabilitation centre for the purpose of the child rehabilitation centres Act. We are also treating right now for females, for the young girls, as part of the St. Jude's School for Girls has been also been designated as a rehabilitation centre. So we are looking at all facets, all areas of concern, because you see the areas of crime and criminality, they are far-reaching. They are far-reaching, they touch from the young to the old. And so, therefore, we have to be conscious of all this.

The Prison Rules is another area and I know the AG will amplify that. I will not go into any detail with that, but he will amplify that. Again, that will cause a number of things to happen in development of our prison system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, crime is a multidimensional aspect. Crime and criminality is multidimensional. It is multidimensional in scope and intent, and any attempt to treat it, must also be multidimensional, it must be multifunctional.

Madam Speaker, we continue here to treat with the issues of crime, and so we cannot do it alone. We employ international agencies to assist us. Countries that have been working alongside with us, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan, Mexico. In our region, we have been speaking to Colombia, to Venezuela, to Chile, and this Government has in fact established itself so there is a good rapport between us and the international community, something that was lost in the last administration, something that was lost. Even regionally it was lost to us

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when we insulted our Caricom partners. We have re-established our international connections, we have re-established international ties to treat with issues of crime and criminality that surrounds all of us, whether Trinidad and Tobago, United States or Canada. So we are dealing with that, getting exchanges not in terms of best practices, but also in terms of training opportunities and exposure to treat with issues that confront us. We will continue to do so.

Madam Speaker, in the national security we continue to look at areas that are of focus. One such area is in fact strengthening our border management system, enhancing law enforcement readiness and capabilities, establishing strong strategic direction, strengthening the legal and regulatory framework, building critical partnerships, as mentioned. When we look at what is happening in our country today, there is a whole question of our value system being lost, our value system being denigrated. I remember as a young boy if there was a death in the country—and I grew up in the Point Fortin area—whether by accident or otherwise, explosion or otherwise, the first thing that used to happen, you go to the nearest house and you get a white sheet and you cover that dead body. Now, what is happening, the first thing happen is that you are pulling out your cell phone and you are taking a picture and putting it on the media. There is no respect. We have lost some of our value systems, and so we have to bring back that. And that is why I see this Government has placed—and I am not envying the Minister of Education at all, the highest allocation to education. We have to start with the minds of the young ones. We have to spend some money and involve in the minds of the young people of this country to bring back that whole value system, otherwise we will be challenged to deal with crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

And so, as we talk about the crime being multidimensional, I can use an analogy, Henry Ford is the fella who developed the conveyor belt for vehicles and he said that in making that vehicle, they have different interventions, somebody made the chassis, the car and so on. Let us do the same thing. Let us do the same thing with our generation, with our young people. Let us use the conveyor belt system and different interventions. From the time that child is born, intervention from the home, from the school, from the community, from the church. Let us do this kind of intervention that will guide those individuals to develop as patriotic disciplined young people.

We have to use that, where each and every one of us, Opposition or Government, have a part to play at different interventions because you see law enforcement and the defence force and so on, they are the tail end of that spectrum you know. When the minds are already developed, when the criminal

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minds are already developed, we have to stop it from the factory, we have to stop it from growth. So I say, let us work together, let us work together to treat with of issues of crime and criminality.

10.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, throughout the year 2017, we have had some acquisition within the national security landscape. As a caring and responsible Government, when we talk about border management, we did not get rid of the Damen vessels, which was rushed to purchase. The last Government did nothing: 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014. In 2015, they rushed and purchased Damen vessels. We end up at least receiving two of them later on in 2015. “Ah mad rush. The mad rush and we still paying fuh dem.” They rushed and bought a vessel from China off the shelf.

Dr. Rowley: Take them on credit.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Yeah, on credit. Not only that, they did not take the offshore patrol vessel because one gun on one vessel, which was automatic—as it frames the target, it swings one time to it—did not work. One gun but yet they bought a vessel from China that came thousands of nautical miles with no weapon, not a single weapon. I prayed that God was with my sailors “dem days”. I prayed that God was with my sailors. “Wa’ is de rationale?” What was the rationale when you did not take three offshore patrol vessels because one gun on one vessel was not working? Yet “yuh buy ah vessel” with no guns, no weapons, coming from China to Trinidad and Tobago. “One pirate with ah slingshot coulda capture da boat, with ah big stone.” What was the rationale?

You see, during the last, between 2011 and 2014, the border was left opened. Open sepulchre. “We suffering” that fate up to today but yet you come and talking about crime and crime has increased and so on, putting false measures here for us. This Government is a responsible Government. And we see some of the effects because when we look at the strategic imperatives that I, as Minister, have given to our agencies—prediction, deterrence, detection, prosecution, rehabilitation—we are seeing measures being taken by all the agencies, and those are my strategic imperatives that I have given to them, something that they can measure in terms of prediction, in terms of deterrence, in terms of prosecution, rehabilitation and detection.

We have seen results coming out because to date, during the last year, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard has, in fact, been able to take off the seas a total monetary cost of \$860,223,000 with respect to narcotics off the seas of

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Trinidad and Tobago. It is the highest seizure that has taken place in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and again, it is based on strategy, it is based on directions that we were able to do that, Madam Speaker. We continue, we continue, Madam Speaker.

Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard continues to do its search and rescue operations and so on. We have had to give, based on cost implications, to revisit the whole question of the rotary rigs up there and we have to. We have to because we are a Government that is concerned. We had to take certain—and that is being reviewed at this point in time.

Another game changer is an agreement that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has entered with the United States of America called the PISCES agreement. PISCES is a Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System which would be part of our border management system to treat with travellers' identity coming and going out of Trinidad and Tobago. It will link up to domestic and international databases and in so doing, allow officials to more definitely identify the individuals who might pose a threat to the security of Trinidad and Tobago. That will be a game changer. That will be a game changer because it will tell us, almost in a moment's notice, who have entered into Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to enhance the border capabilities, Madam Speaker.

And so, to that effect, we have continued to even develop the individuals. We continue to ensure that they are well trained. So that immigration officers and customs and excise persons have been exposed to a number of training opportunities to develop their competency to treating with this same thing, the border management aspect. Because we have to understand that the border is a very important aspect of the security blanket: our ports, our sea ports, our ports of entry, our airports. Those are the points at which people penetrate our borders, legally or otherwise. And so we are, in fact, developing that by a system by the United States Customs and Border Protection Agency who have been here and passed on some kind of training.

Another game changer is the AFIS system, the Automated Fingerprint Identification System. Again, that AFIS system would allow for integration on the security watch list between Interpol and the Police Traffic Index. That would allow us to track personnel by tracing their fingerprint, having it on a database, so anyone coming or leaving Trinidad and Tobago would, of course, be tracked and they can be placed on a watch list accordingly. Again, Madam Speaker, another game changer.

Madam Speaker, we continue to advance the work of the Counter Trafficking Unit. The Counter Trafficking Unit of the Ministry of National Security is the designated agency for human trafficking and we have seen by their remit. To date, there have been 24 persons who have been charged for human trafficking offences including trafficking of children. Currently, there are nine matters of human trafficking for which persons are committed to stand trial. While most of the 15 matters are before the Magistrates' Court, it is based on these activities by the Counter Trafficking Unit that the Government's success increases a number of prosecution against human trafficking incidents, which has, in fact, contributed to Trinidad and Tobago being elevated to Tier 2 in the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report 2017. [*Desk thumping*] This is something that has reversed because we were in Tier 2 watch list for the longest while and we have elevated that based on the actions of the Counter Trafficking Unit.

Madam Speaker, we continue, again, with our border protection and you would recall that we had mentioned some time ago about the joint border protection agency. The team that was placed to study that has looked at it and what they have recommended is that we do not go at the agency framework but look at developing a task force. And so, we are in the process right now of developing a joint border protection task force that will include members of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Customs division, Immigration division, Airport Authority and Port Authority. Again, to put that sort of blanket security dealing with our ports and sea ports around Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we continue to develop the capabilities and capacities of the agencies of national security. The Forensic Science Centre was recently exposed to firearms forensic ballistic training to deal, again, with the whole issue of firearm. And as we know, firearm is the weapon of choice and therefore, we have to use technology to treat with the detection. We have to use technology to treat with dealing with the issues of firearm committed offences and so, the Forensic Science Centre has been instrumental in developing that capacity with the assistance of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament, (UNREC), within recent times.

Madam Speaker, we continue to develop the prison service by developing the capacity. We have had personnel at a senior level exposed to a one-month training in Kingston, Canada, where nine senior officers benefited from the training Operations Management System with Correctional Service Canada with a view to implementing some of their initiatives, because as we move to correction philosophy, therefore, we would use Canada who have had that experience, to

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engage with us. To that effect, a charter of commitment will be signed between the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service and the Correctional Service Canada tomorrow, October 11th. Madam Speaker, that is to show you that this Government is one that looks at best practice including to improve our prison management system.

Madam Speaker, that charter would allow us: to develop offender intake and case management framework; develop actual tools and an offender classification system; develop correctional programmes to address specific criminogenic issues such as substance abuse, violence, sex offending, et cetera; share research with us and Canadians; programme delivery of officer training and, of course, education training, among others. We also involved—our prison officers were exposed to what you called Mock Prison Riot training to expose how you treat with riot within prisons and so on. Another exposure to develop the capacity in case there is such an eventuality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we have also increased the capacity in terms of crime scene investigators. This year, Cabinet approved an additional 60 crime scene investigators bringing it to a total of 75 to deal with the police service. [*Desk thumping*] You see, I have gone back to my definition. The Ministry and the Government is about policy strategy. The Opposition keeps talking about where is the plan. Anti-crime plan is the remit of the Commissioner of Police based on the policies and strategies of the Government. The Minister “doh” make anti-crime plan. The Ministers give the policies and the strategies based on the Government’s remit and the Commissioner of Police deals with that supported by the Defence Force.

Madam Speaker, we have also seen an increase or in fact an allocation for the acquisition of modern digital public safety communication system for Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, moving to digital radio across the board, across national security, including the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Updated technology that allows communication across all platforms. The introduction of the videoconferencing centre, it is about 70, 75 per cent completed at Golden Grove. While there has been slowness in that project, we are trying to speed that process so by 2018, that videoconferencing centre will be ready and operating. Again, it will change the way we do business. Again, a paradigm shift in keeping with the theme. A paradigm shift in the way prisoners attend courts throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Our manpower audit committee continues to work assiduously and it is expected that they will deliver that report to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago by the end of this year.

Madam Speaker, the Government continues to provide an enabling environment. We continue to provide an enabling environment to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Defence Force and others agencies. To this remit, we have completed—three police stations were opened in this year: St Joseph, Maracas St Joseph and Besson Street, and on-going: Old Grange, Roxborough, St. Clair and Carenage for this fiscal year. We continue to do improvement works. [*Desk thumping*] We continue to do improvement works throughout the length and breadth of the police throughout Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that they have the necessary environment to work effectively and efficiently.

The Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service: construction of the Penal Fire Station is earmarked to be completed this year. Design for the Arouca Fire Station was completed and again, due to start in the next fiscal 2018. The Point Fortin Fire Station—one that is dear to my heart—is also earmarked as we do land acquisition to start the design for that fire station. The Roxborough Fire Station and the Crown Point Fire Station are also there, earmarked for this year. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, upgrading of the electrical and mechanical systems at Remand Yard, Golden Grove, at a cost of \$53.6 million have been passed by Cabinet and is due to kick off in the next fiscal year. Again, changing that age-old structure that we know that was there in days of the airmen after World War II. The Government has decided to put some money into that to deal with the overcrowding which, again, has an effect on crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. We continue to work at the Maximum Security Prison.

The Defence Force, Madam Speaker, construction of an army learning centre/training building is one of the priority areas that would allow for training of individuals within the Defence Force, to develop their capacity to do their job effectively and efficiently, especially in the changing environment, the law enforcement support.

The Immigration Division have moved to the ten-storeyed building located in Richmond Street and therefore, they, too, are in the process of moving the passport from Frederick Street into that new building. Again, to create the kind of space to treat with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in an expeditious manner. Madam Speaker, we continue to develop and provide the wherewithal for our agencies of national security to do their job effectively and efficiently.

We continue to strengthen the disaster management framework. And again, at this point, I want to extend, on behalf of the Government, the effort and the hard

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work done by members of the Defence Force, NHSL, Caribbean Airlines and ODPM in their relief efforts to Dominica. [*Desk thumping*] Yeoman service, yeoman service, recognized and thanked by the people of Dominica and so on. We continue to strengthen that area.

Madam Speaker, we continue to strengthen the national response to terrorism by exposing our teams, our elite teams and so on to cross-sectional training. To training and exposure by our international partners, develop the capacity to treat with the eventuality with respect to response to terrorism. We continue to build.

You would have seen recently that the police had a pilot project on body-worn cameras. By all reports, the Commissioner is quite pleased with what is happening and I am sure that that is going to be extended in the next fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*] We are also in the procurement, right now, for additional speed guns, Madam Speaker. That too, but again, those are game changers that we are looking at. We are in the process of procuring additional speed guns right now and as far I understand, I think that some of them have already arrived in the country. Again, you are going to see some game changer attitudes and behaviour. Trinidad and Tobago, this is what I am talking about. So that those are things that are going to happen in the national security environment for this year.

Madam Speaker, we are going to see the increase of the complement of the municipal police that was promised. The recruitment has already taken; almost 4,000 applicants for those jobs. About 130 were shortlisted and they are in the process of being vetted and evaluated and commence training soon, Madam Speaker. That, again, would allow us to treat with the issues that confront us.

Madam Speaker, we continue. If we look at the police service reports for 2017, crime fell in terms of reported serious crime. It fell slightly to 11,568 compared to 2016. So there is a reduction in terms of serious crimes but that is not something we hit our chest on because we are still grappling with the murder rate which is the barometer by which we are measured, and we continue to treat with those, Madam Speaker, effectively and efficiently, putting all the resources, all the resources that we can put in our economic situation to treat with that.

We continue with our firearm violence reduction strategy and to date, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has removed 573 weapons off the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. Last year, there was a total of 765. We continue to aggressively pursue that. Drug seizures by Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has continued effectively and efficiently, Madam Speaker. We are continuing with all the agencies of national security.

Madam Speaker, I want to go quickly to some new initiatives and this is not all but two I am going to be mentioning right now. New initiatives, Madam Speaker, to treat with crime and criminality. One of such initiatives is what has been referred to in the budget statement, the National Crime Prevention Programme. The National Crime Prevention Programme is a different way of looking at crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. It is one which would incorporate a multi-stakeholder environment empowering the communities. It is based on a concept where the 14 corporations and the Tobago House of Assembly will be involved in treating with crime and criminal entities within their jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, there would be a system where there is an overarching body, which is an inter-ministerial committee, consisting of representation from the Ministry of National Security, which is the Chair, the Office of Prime Minister, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Point Fortin, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself. Please, proceed.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the NCPP, as it is referred to, would empower the communities to bring to the fore issues that affect them with respect to crime and criminality at the municipal level, at the corporation level and the Tobago House of Assembly level because at those levels, you have what you call community crime councils. They will report by way of facilitators into the inter-ministerial team. So the issues that cannot be handled at those levels would be brought to the various agencies of national security. The inter-ministerial committee that will bring the certain kind of remedy.

Madam Speaker, for instance, one might be one of a social development intervention. It might be one of a sport and youth affairs intervention. It might be a public utilities intervention. This is what we are talking about when we talk about a whole-of-government approach, one in which we can bring all the resources of Government to treat with issues of crime and criminality in the various communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, time does not permit me to go into any great detail so I will leave it at that, but there are more issues that I can talk about with the NCPP which will, in fact, be launched in the latter part of this year and all would be exposed.

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Madam Speaker, another initiative that took place quite recently was, in fact, the merging of two units of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, through the Commissioner of Police, based on our discussion—and the Minister only gives strategic directions. That is what the Minister is there to do. And based on our discourse and based on my strategic direction, he has, in fact, initiated a new unit, the Organised Crime and Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service by merging the Criminal Gang and Intelligence Unit and the OCNFB, Organised Crime, Narcotics and Firearms Bureau. He merged those units to form the organised crime and intelligence. What that unit is all about is a dedicated, specially trained unit that will deal with crime targets in Trinidad and Tobago. That unit is up and running and we are going to see a difference. We will see a difference in the next couple of months. [*Desk thumping*]

As we continue Madam Speaker, we are also looking at technology and we have done a pilot project in respect of using drone technology in Trinidad and Tobago. The police service has just initiated that. Right now, we have established a new team across the length and breadth of national security to look and see how we can use drone technology across the length and breadth. The police service has already started and they are using that pilot project to give us the kind of report. We have to use technology in today's world to treat with the issues of crime and criminality. Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to invest. We will continue to invest because we have to invest in security, notwithstanding our economic climate, economic situations, we will continue to invest to support law enforcement agencies in the fight against crime and criminality. We will give them the necessary resources to do their job effectively and efficiently.

Madam Speaker, this Government is one that is conscious. This Government is one that understands security. This is a Government that will ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are provided with a safe and secure environment to live. “We gonna pull it back.” It is only the murder rate but “we gonna pull that back”, based on what we have done. A combination of efforts from policy to strategy to plans, operationalization of the legislative framework. Madam Speaker, when we put it together—and they are coming together. They are coming again. As the Prime Minister said, 2018 is an implementation year. [*Desk thumping*] It is an implementation year and, therefore, you are going to see the drive, everything is going to come to the fore in 2018 and we will see the effect.

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Madam Speaker, as I continue with the last minute, let me pay some homage to my constituency of Point Fortin. Let me extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to the constituency of Point Fortin—that stretches from Guapo to Icacos including Buenos Ayres; a very wide area—for their understanding. For at times, I know they long to see their MP and I too long to see them and I do visit them as much as possible but they have an understanding and the patience. And they are getting the results because we can see in fiscal year, next year, we are seeing the effects and I call it the Point Fortin to San Fernando highway. Notice I do not say San Fernando to Point Fortin. The Point Fortin to San Fernando highway is well in progress to bring relief to the people of Point Fortin constituency. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank the Minister of Health for the construction—and the Minister of Finance, of course, for the construction of the Point Fortin hospital. Something that has long been desired that brings relief to the people of Point Fortin. The steel structure is almost completed and I am sure the block work would allow for the people of Point Fortin to be employed in that hospital construction. The Mahaica Oval, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has targeted that for the next fiscal year. So that the people of Point Fortin are benefitting. The Minister of Works and Transport, we visited a couple of weeks ago, landslide in Reservoir Hill, in Coromandel, in Chatham. The work that was left unfinished by the last Government in Bonasse, hurriedly again, just before election. We are treating with all these issues to bring relief to the people of the southern peninsula.

So I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to the people of Point Fortin. The Minister of Housing has been giving us and granting us the housing available in Lake View and to some extent in Hubertstown that we share with the MP for La Brea. We continue to be facilitated by the other Ministries and I want to thank all my colleagues here for supporting the effort with respect to relief to the constituency of Point Fortin.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I want to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that with respect to security, the Government will allocate what is required. The Ministry of National Security is prepared to prioritize, to adjust, not to compromise security by any stretch of the imagination, but to ensure that we continue to do our job effectively and efficiently, to bring relief, to bring a sense of security to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The members, the agencies of national security will continue to work assiduously. Twenty-four hours a day, we will continue to maintain the stability of Trinidad and Tobago. We will bring the resources together, we are going to bring the technology together. As I said,

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Madam Speaker, we are going to make a difference. We are going to bring all those game changers I mentioned to make a difference to this country in 2017.

This Government is one that is caring. This Government is one that is responsible. This Government is one that will ensure that we deal with the security issues paramount in treating with the issues in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, with that, I take my leave. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I listened to my friend, the hon. Member for Point Fortin and all I heard were indications of intent to do, not doing. [*Desk thumping*] You heard comments like preparing to implement, developing plans, in the process of developing, things are being put in place, continue to invest. What we do not hear is concrete actions to solve crime. [*Desk thumping*] If talk could have gotten us into heaven, then we would all be saints on the road to glory, given the utterances of my colleague.

It is fortunate that it is not the hon. Member for Point Fortin who determines who is patriotic or not, [*Desk thumping*] and I wish to remind him that attending award ceremonies do not—or attendance at award ceremonies do not constitute patriotism. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to remind him that when the People's Partnership was in Government, neither the Member for Diego Martin West, neither the MP for San Fernando West nor Diego Martin North/East attended award ceremonies between 2010 and 2015.

He talked about serious crime being down. Serious crime being down, but you see, he cannot fool us with statistics. I think he is the only person in Trinidad and Tobago who believes that serious crime is down. I wish to remind him that as we stand today, we have 374 murders and we do not honour, we are not happy for saying so, but we have 374 of our fellow citizens who are either six feet down or burnt or in the other place, when last year, for the same time, there were 344 murders. We have 30 more of our citizens in just a 12-month period. How many more must die? How many more must die until the people of Trinidad set this country free by electing a People's Partnership Government? [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to congratulate the political leader of the United National Congress [*Desk thumping*] for her excellent contribution. She spoke about this budget being bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of vision and it will lead to the bankruptcy and pauperization of us all. And I went into the dictionary to look for synonyms of bankrupt and they all adequately describe this budget and the presentation of my colleague from Point Fortin: bereft of ideas, bankrupt, vacuous of thought, devoid of vision, completely lacking in financial and other acumen, clueless, exhausted,

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wanting, inadequate, not up to the task. It indicates it is at its wits ends in terms of viable solutions. That is what we have been hearing in this budget presentation.

I wish to deal with three myths before I get into my presentation—three myths of this Government. One, that we left the Government without money. Myth number one. If I only take the \$1.5 billion from the Phoenix Park IPO, the \$3.8 billion from the capital payment from TGU, \$.05 billion dividend from NGC; if I take the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of \$5.6 billion which works out to TT \$37 billion; if I take the \$12.6 billion which we left in net foreign exchange reserves—*[Interruption]* US, the total in TT dollars is \$128.65 billion. *[Desk thumping]* Madam Speaker, if we divide that by the population of 1.3 million, it means we left \$100,000 per man, woman and child in Trinidad and Tobago *[Desk thumping]* and that excludes the \$41 billion in revenues which they collected in 2016.

11.00 a.m.

Madam Speaker, when we came into government in 2010, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was \$3 billion, and when we left it, it was \$5.6 billion. We increased it. *[Desk thumping]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: US.

Mr. R. Charles: US. They have not yet served two years, and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is going down and down. In scriptural terms, if I refer them to Matthew, Chapter 14, where the Lord said the way to Heaven and he gave talents, and he gave five talents to one, based on ability, he gave 10 and he gave two and one; five, two and one. And the first one, increased it from five to 10, and the second one increased it by two, and the third one buried it. And he said: unto him that hath shall be given and unto him that hath not shall be taken away.

If they were to be—if that spiritual injunction were to be applied to this Government, they would not see salvation and not see heaven, because instead of increasing the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, instead of increasing the talents that we left for them, they have gone on a mad rampage to reduce it, and I could only hope that as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, that when they divide the Heritage Fund from the stabilization aspect, that when we take over in 2020, there will be some money left for us, for those that we left for them. *[Desk thumping]*

And I would like to talk to the hon. Prime Minister, who seems to have a problem with information and data. He said on the 20th—and this was a point raised by my political leader. He said, and I quote, on the 27th of September this year, he addressed the nation at Spotlight, an event on the Trinidad and Tobago

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financial circumstances, the way forward. He began with what he said was the basic facts, and I quote, he said, the Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West: after enjoying energy sector revenues taxes and royalties, they only received \$1.6 billion in 2016 and \$2.1 billion in 2017.

My political leader indicated to him that that was not true, because when she looked at the *Review of the Economy*, 2017 page 26, Appendix 20, we saw that, instead of the 1.6 which he said he received, he actually received \$8.3 billion, and in 2017, he said he received \$2.1 billion, but he actually received \$9 billion. So he goes to Piggott's Corner and talks to 36 persons, including all the Cabinet Ministers on that side and he says, I quote:

I was talking about petroleum profit tax. I was not talking about all the revenue from the petroleum sector.

And I am saying, he said after enjoying energy sector revenue taxes on royalties they only received 1.6. You cannot change things in a matter of days, in a matter of months. Facts, Mr. Prime Minister, are stubborn things, they do not go away. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this budget, the budget by the Minister of Finance, is the worst budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to give some examples very quickly, because I want to get into crime. He said, he said, T&TEC—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. R. Charles: He said they were going to—suggested that they were going to—tax or increase the Revenue Authority—sorry, to increase, possibly increase, the payments we had to make to WASA and to T&TEC. But he said T&TEC owed NGC for natural gas supply. But if he wanted to be totally transparent, he would have said what were the accounts receivable for T&TEC from Government Departments and Government Ministries. You see, you cannot owe T&TEC because you are a bad-pay Government, and then say, T&TEC is a failed state enterprise, and therefore we have to do things to increase the revenues, including taxing of the consumers.

He has said, for example, in this budget—why I say it is a fake budget—that they have put money for the building of new schools; money for the building of new schools; \$10 million for the construction of Piccadilly Primary School; \$13.6 million for the Malabar Government Primary School. But Madam Speaker, they owe contractors in my constituency for the Reform Village Hindu School. They

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owe \$10 million. They owe the contractor for the completed, fully completed, Reform Village Early Childhood Centre, and the Ben Lomond Early Childhood Centre. These are fully completed buildings and if you go, Madam Speaker, it will hurt your heart to see vines growing on the buildings and—

Dr. Moonilal: Caraille.

Mr. R. Charles:—caraille and bushes growing on a structure that was paid for, constructed in the interest of the constituents of Naparima.

So the question I would ask: How can you owe money and then allocate money to build new structures? If I am building a house, and I owe money on the house, does it make sense to build two and three other houses or allocate money when sense, good sense, would say that I deal with my current debts?

Madam Speaker, this budget was—the second reason why this budget is the worst ever is because it is a regurgitation of past ideas. And I will give you an example. In the PNM manifesto, they said that they would establish a joint border patrol agency. In their 2016 budget, they said they would move swiftly to establish a joint border patrol agency. In their 2017 budget, they said they were far advanced in establishing the joint border patrol agency. [*Desk thumping*] And the finance manager in this 2018 budget presentation said this PNM Government has signed a memorandum of intent with the United States to establish a joint border patrol agency. [*Desk thumping*] You see why we do not trust them? They talk and they do not realize that words have meaning and words are, that you can test the words subsequently to see if effect was given to them.

The Minister of Finance talked about transfer pricing. Right? We were told in the 2015 budget that they were going to secure our revenue base by dealing with the matter of transfer pricing from multinational corporations. In this budget, we are still in the process of establishing the mechanism to maximize revenues on the sale of LNG.

What the Minister did not tell us was about inflated invoices by local businesses to access increased allocations of foreign exchange. If he understood the concept of transfer pricing he would understand that it does not only work, with respect to the multinational corporations, it works with respect to local organizations that are over invoicing and accessing our scarce foreign exchange.

The third reason why this budget is a waste of time is because he took, the Minister of Finance, 23,700 words to say what could be said in one hour—three hours for what could be said in one hour. The President of the United States addresses the joint sessions of the Congress and Senate and he talks about a

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trillion-dollar economy and he speaks for one hour. Our Minister of Finance comes and talks about our economy and he talks for three hours. I wish, Madam Speaker, that he would—and I would ask my friend the former Minister of Tertiary Education, there is a book that we used in school many years ago *First Aid in English*, by who?

Mr. Karim: Angus Maciver.

Mr. R. Charles: Angus Maciver—that had an excellent section on précis. I would commend that the Minister of Education make that book available to the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

Again, Madam Speaker, the budget lacks architecture. It is about arithmetic, I said this last year. It is about taking money from one space and putting it in another place. You have a deficit and you pick money here and you pick somebody pocket there and you get the money to satisfy the arithmetic requirement of the budget deficit. But he talks about, he talks about—[*Crosstalk*

Hon. Member: The hon. Member.

Mr. R. Charles: The hon. Member, the Minister of Finance, talks about selling our crown jewels to get money to fit the deficit. But he could have done that in the context of a shareholding democracy. So that the country would be owned by not just the 1 per cent, their friends, but controlled by every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, but that requires some thought. It requires the Ministry of Education teaching our citizens about the benefits of acquiring shares.

They talk about taxing the gaming industry. Madam Speaker, they are taxing the gaming industry. They are even taxing the poor people's dreams. If you dream to play a "whe, whe" there is a tax on that. Why can the Minister of Finance not conceive of a Las Vegas model of development, based on the gaming industry that exists in our country? Why, when we are dealing with the elderly, they see it as a problem and they cannot develop the Florida model of development? So, the challenge for this Government, they see problems and they see opportunities to tax. They do not see opportunities to develop the country and develop alternative sources of revenue.

There is no gender sensitivity in this budget. Women are critical to the development of our society, social equity and whatnot. But what is in place for women? All we see is taxes. They have to pay more for food. They have to pay more for transportation, et cetera. Nothing for the elderly, Madam Speaker.

The *Central Bank Economic Bulletin*, September 2017, says that the Senior Citizens Grant fell by 401.8 million, when compared to the 10 months to July 2017 and 2016. In other words, whatever they may say, they have cut from the

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Senior Citizens Grant, 400 million, at a time, Madam Speaker, when life expectancy of our citizens is increasing. The average citizen now lives to 73 years, as compared to 10 years ago when it was 67. We are seeing the murders of elderly citizens, Dr. Broadbridge, Ms. Singh and Ms. Ahee. I do not want to call their names, but we are seeing how they are treated.

There is nothing for the poor in this budget. They are burdened with diesel and super prices, taxes on Lotto, as I say: taxing the poor man's dream. Property taxes to come. WASA and T&TEC to go up, Madam Speaker. This budget favours the 1 per cent. Whatever they may say or do, those demands would be passed on to the consumers. There is hopelessness for youth in this budget. Contract employees sent home at TDC, means testing for GATE, no foreign exchange. It is difficult to access foreign exchange for our students studying abroad. Crime is on the increase and, therefore, for young people the devil finds work for idle hands.

The main problem I have with this budget and with the contribution of the Member for Point Fortin is that there are no measurable outputs in what they are saying. They are just giving you a list of activities. "We will do this. We will do that." What they are not saying is that we will decrease the murder rate by 10 per cent annually. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they are not saying. So hear what we have. Hear what we have. He said in this budget, the 2018 budget, national crime prevention programme. Here is what they say about the national crime prevention programme:

"It is a holistic approach to crime fighting. It will impact—what that means I do not know. It will impact crime prevention through community empowerment, which is a key factor to returning safety and security to the national community."

This means nothing, Madam Speaker, 27 words saying nothing.

What—it is a holistic approach. It will impact crime fighting. It will return safety and security to the national community. What do those things mean? It is repetition ad nauseum too. They said in the—this community project that they are—that there is much hue and cry and fanfare about, they mentioned that in the 10-point plan when they talked about municipal police to take policing to the community. They mentioned it in the 2016 fiscal budget when they said community safety partnerships within local government arena will exist. They come back in the 2017 and said the establishment of a municipal community constabulary supporting groups of volunteers, all part of the local government reform. And today we come and we hear the same thing. Let me tell you, my friends opposite, performance beats old talk any time. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot talk and talk and talk your way to salvation.

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I want to get to crime. The Minister of Finance spent 128 minutes, over two hours before he even addressed national security. And then he spent six minutes on national security, 785 words out of 23,765 words; 3.3 per cent of his words on crime. He spent more time asserting blame on previous administrations. Thirteen times in his budget, 13 times he blamed the previous administration.

Madam Speaker, a poll conducted by Louis Bertrand indicated that crime is among the most serious concerns of the population. Crime. Confidence that the Government will be able to solve crime; how many people? Seventy-five per cent said that they had no confidence that this Government could solve crime, and crime was among the major concerns, crime and violence was ranked as the single most pressing problem facing the country by 66 per cent of respondents. So the population is concerned about crime and this Government is giving it 3.3 per cent of its concern. Another poll, the NACTA poll, said that 89 per cent are worried that the country was not moving in the right direction and 96 per cent of them were concerned about crime.

But, Madam Speaker, a study done, the cost of crime, by Holder and Mutota in 2006, entitled *Guns and Criminality: A Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago*, estimated that the cost of crime in Trinidad and Tobago, in 2003, amounted to TT \$1.098 billion or 1.6 per cent of GDP. Using this same 1.6 per cent of 2016 GDP, it amounts to \$2.3 billion.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Considering the increase in crime rates from 2016 to 2017, current cost of crime can be estimated at close to \$2.5 billion, but that does not include the cost of public security and other elements of the criminal justice system.

Let us look at macro cost, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The national security budget this year is \$6.2 billion. The health cost associated with crime has to be factored in. The loss of external investments, where people are saying they are not going to come to Trinidad or not going to invest in Trinidad because they cannot guarantee the safety of their employees. What about tourism cost, estimated at \$200 million in revenue because of crime? Canada, the United States and Britain, they are telling their citizens do not come to Trinidad. The safety cannot be guaranteed by the State.

But that is the macro cost of crime. In that, we need to include the business cost: security guards, CCTV. You can go to any parlour in Trinidad and there are steel bars to prevent criminals from attacking the businesses. But there are individual costs. Burglar proof has been estimated to cost this country about \$10

million. It is calculated 30,000 per household and you take 80 per cent of the total households in Trinidad. That is a cost that we bear. CCTV, estimated cost, \$93.6 million, \$6,000 per household at 40 per cent of the households in the country. Blink estimated at \$936 million. GPS alarm systems for cars cost \$840 million and the calculation is \$3,500 per car for two hundred and forty-one point eight thousand cars or 50 per cent of the cars in Trinidad.

And then we have the insurance cost on stolen vehicles. And then we have the psychological cost of crime. At this point, I would like to extend condolences from the UNC to the wife and family of the slain prison officer Richard Sandy. But the President of the Prisons Association said:

There is need for the State to take deliberate and decisive action to deter persons from threatening or killing law enforcement officials in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The source of your quote, please.

Mr. R. Charles: Oh, the source of the quote is the *Trinidad Express*, page 3, Monday 9th.

Hon. Member: What year?

Mr. R. Charles: And then we have the loss of breadwinners in homes, significant cost. So when you total all these costs, some of them are one-time costs like burglar proofing. Others are monthly costs like Blink. When we total all this cost, the cost of crime in this country is estimated at \$10 billion annually. And the study that I referred to, Crime Violence and Development, Trends, Cost and Policy Options in the Caribbean—a Joint Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes on Latin America. They said, looking at the Jamaican situation:

If cross-country panel data suggests that Haiti and Jamaica could boost economic growth per capita by 5.4 per cent per year, if they were to bring homicide rates down to the levels of Costa Rica.

In other words, they are saying that this is costing us; our situation replicates the Jamaican situation. And they are saying that that could cost the economy 5.4 per cent economic growth annually. But yet we get 3.3 per cent of the time on this budget to crime.

What does the Minister of Finance say about crime? He talks about cuts in the budget. National Security and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, cuts in salary expenditure, \$520 million. Although they talk about recruiting staff for the

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local government bodies and municipalities, but they cut it by \$520 million. There is an increase of \$130 million for goods and services and minor equipment, as if the emphasis is on equipment and not on bodies.

But community programmes, they hailed this great programme, this community involvement programme that was designed, I am told by the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, community-oriented programme. But they cut MiLAT by \$4 million. They cut Civilian Conservation Corps by \$13 million. The mentoring programme for youth at risk, nothing allocated. The National Youth Service, nothing allocated. The National Security Training Academy, nothing allocated. The Community Comfort Patrol programme disbanded.

But yet in the papers today, in today's *Express*, four suspended students from Siparia West Secondary School. And we have the CEO of the Ministry of Education, Mr. Harrilal Seecharan saying that the four suspended students will be sent either to the MiLAT, which was cut by \$4 million, MYPART, which was not given the kind of resources that it was supposed to get, or the Civilian Conservation Corps, which got a \$13 million cut. So here we have the—and they talk about whole-of-government approach. We have the Ministry of Education seeing a problem, identifying a solution and the Minister of Finance cutting allocations to that institution. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. [*Desk thumping*]

I looked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at fire stations, and in Tobago they have allocated—there are four stations: Crown Point Fire Station, Scarborough Fire Station, Roxborough Fire Station, a new one to be built in Moriah in Tobago and Roxborough to be refurbished. I have nothing, no problems with Tobago. I wish they could get all that they require. But I am the representative and the MP for Naparima and we are folks too. In Naparima, we have no fire stations. We have to depend on the Princes Town Fire Station that has not been refurbished in 50 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So that, if there is a fire in Moruga, the Princes Town appliance will take an hour and a half to get to Marac in Moruga, and the international benchmark says that if you do not get there in five minutes it is a waste of time. So we have a fire station in Princes Town that is for decoration. One appliance to cover 55,000 persons, and Tobago has four. I am not saying we are not jealous of Tobago. All we are saying if you get four give us two because we are people too.

They talk about a whole-of-government approach to crime and I want to show that they say that only in words. They do not mean it. How could the Ministry of

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Education—the part of the problem with crime is our young men, that missing generation of men who end up in prison. We know about that problem. But we have an education system in which—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, please.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. We have an education system in which women are out-performing the men significantly. And seeing that 90 per cent of our criminals are men, in UWI's enrolment in 2015/2016, there were 63 per cent females and 37 per cent males. Total enrolment on the campus was 16,320. The ratio of females to males, two to one. If you want to solve crime, the Ministry of Education, as part of this whole-of-government approach, has to understand what the data is telling us. There is a problem in our education system that puts our men at a disadvantage and if we do not deal with that problem we will have brilliant women.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I saw a brilliant woman from the powerful ladies of Trinidad and Tobago, dealing with a powerful gentleman of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Finance, and guess who won. And I could have said that from the data, that the women are out-performing our men in our country and we need to deal with that problem [*Desk thumping*] if we wish to deal with crime.

What about the ambitious young persons, the flower of our nation, the people who my colleague from Chaguanas East educated significantly, and we are now reaping the rewards in the transparency competitive analysis index? Right. We are seeing these bright young children coming out and there is no hope, no job opportunities for them, some with Masters, subjects, 10 O levels, 15 A levels, et cetera, and degrees: Bachelors, Masters; no jobs.

I want to draw attention to a significant problem in the education system that could give us problems down the line. When I went to school, the 1 per cent went to school with us 99 per cent. When I went to Naparima College, there were always members of the 1 per cent seated in the back and we learnt from each other. So now I could pick up the phone and call a member of the 1 per cent and say: “I have a problem. Somebody needs a mattress or whatnot,” and he would help, because we went to school together. Guess what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, right now the 1 per cent are being educated in schools in Trinidad that do have a component of civics and patriotism to our country. I speak of the Maple Leaf schools and the others.

I looked at the curriculum of the—[*Crosstalk*—I am not attacking the school. I am just saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we cannot have citizens of Trinidad

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and Tobago looking at attending schools in which the curriculum—they do not teach Trinidad history. They do not teach Trinidad history. That is a fact. They teach Canadian history and Canadian geography. There is no problem with Canadians learning Canadian geography. I have a problem with my citizens, my fellow citizens, learning Canadian history and Canadian geography at the expense of patriotism. That is patriotism; patriotism to our country.

I wish to indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Education Act, 1966:

“The Minister may make Regulations for the control and management of private schools and in particular in respect of the following matters:

(e) the suitability of the curriculum and courses and methods of instruction;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please name your source.

Mr. R. Charles: This source is the Education Act, 1966.

11.30 a.m.

And I want to make it clear, I am not against Maple Leaf and these schools, eh. That is their position. I am against my citizens getting a Canadian education, and leaving to go to Guelph University or Miami Florida Institute and coming back to be our bosses, and do not have in their curriculum, a modicum of patriotism for Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to make the point about the exam oriented curriculum that we have. How could you, how could you? I went to Mausica Teachers College with the Minister of Education in 1966, 1968, and we learned that you do not have a— *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, each Member of the House will have the opportunity to enter the debate when their time arrive. Right now, the Member for Naparima is on the floor and I would like to hear him please.

Mr. R. Charles: You do not have a situation where you teach to the exams. What they told us is that continuous education was a better means of incurring broader educational principles than one exam alone. In fact, we were told that people can teach to the exam. I taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary level in Trinidad, and when we were teaching children and the students will ask, “Sir, is that coming for exam?” And once you said it was not coming for exam, they did not learn it.

So that, you can teach to an exam and President Obama himself—I tell you they will not understand that—President Obama said, the recommended school districts use no more than 2 per cent of class time to take tests. I quote from former President Obama, learning is about:

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“...so much more than filling in the right bubble;”—so we are going to work with states, school districts, teachers, and parents to make sure that—“we’re not obsessing about testing.”

And they said Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, said the President’s proposal is common sense. What is common sense to the world, is not common sense to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will speak about foreign affairs. Our Prime Minister seems absent in meetings with his peers, probably he cannot tell them to shut up and that is why. He has been absent from the 21st Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC in Paris, absent; absent from the 70th United Nations General Assembly, absent. The 71st UN General Assembly and the 72nd he was absent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a forum where our leaders interact with global leaders to share ideas so that when we approach them at the bilateral level, they have an understanding at the highest levels of the problems we face.

The Prime Minister went to Piggott's Corner, where he called my name and said that this Minister of Foreign Affairs is the best we ever had. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2013 the President of China, when he looked at the Western Hemisphere—Canada, United States, Brazil—when he looked at the Western Hemisphere, he looked at Trinidad and Tobago under my leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and he saw a shining light on the hill and he made it the first stop in the Western Hemisphere and a week after, Vice President Biden, came to Trinidad. That was the level of respect that Trinidad and Tobago had. *[Interruption]*

Last week our Foreign Minister spoke to General Assembly, 75 per cent of the seats empty, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Oh, so far we have gone— *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Charles: I would like to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is the Minister of Foreign Affairs not paying our ex-diplomats who served our country with distinction and who demitted office in 2015, no gratuities, no relocation allowances, no unutilized leave, no hardship allowance where applicable? I know of one ex-diplomat who had to go and borrow money and beg from the 1 per cent to educate her child abroad. Why do you do this to the 99 per cent of us? What is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs doing about the negative advisories? We spent \$550 million on Foreign Affairs in the past two years. For what? The US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia issued travel advisories for Trinidad and Tobago warning about increased levels of crime. The US Travel Guide, Anthony

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Bourdain, in a recent documentary, on Trinidad and Tobago turned out to be more of a crime report on our country instead of an opportunity to showcase local food and our local culture.

In terms of terrorism, we have to learn with terrorism:

“Drugs, Gangs & Radical Islam in a Caribbean Paradise

Trinidad and Tobago just off the north coast...has the dubious distinction of being the country which has sent the greatest number of foreign terrorist fighters in the region to Iraq and Syria on a per capita basis.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Quote your source.

Mr. R. Charles: It is the crimereport.org “Drugs, Gangs & Radical Islam in a Caribbean Paradise”, 2017, July 2017. This is not under the People's Partnership, this is under the current inept, clueless PNM.

Hon. Member: What is the date?

Mr. R. Charles: The date is the 12th of the 9th, 2017. Terrorism. [Interruption] And you know, we spent millions, hundreds of millions of dollars on the SSA and we have to hear about crime in Trinidad from foreign media. We were told two weeks ago that when they captured one of the major cities in Syria, and they captured ISIS fighters, they found Trinidad and Tobago families among those that were ISIS fighters. We had to find that out from abroad, not from our SSA.

I want to deal with Naparima. [Interruption] I would like to deal with Naparima.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, he quoted his source Mr. AG.

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis: On the second part.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On the second part? Is that the same source, Member for Naparima?

Mr. R. Charles: I do not have that source. I will make it available—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. Members, Members, I am on my legs. Member for Naparima, no, have a seat. The last quotation you made, could you quote the source?

Mr. R. Charles: I will give you the source subsequently. [Crosstalk]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. Members, Members, so could we omit it from the *Hansard* please. I need the source or you will have to omit it from the *Hansard*.

Mr. R. Charles: Okay. Okay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So omit it from the *Hansard*.

Mr. R. Charles: I will omit even though it is a fact; I will omit.

Naparima—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, if you do not have the source, I would like you to omit it from the *Hansard* agreed, agreed.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Proceed. [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Charles: I will deal with Naparima. The Education Act, Chap. 39:01, section 13 states that:

“The Minister shall cause to be provided such number of public schools as is in his opinion necessary to secure a sufficient number of school places for children of compulsory school age.”

[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your protection, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, again, Standing Order 53. In silence. Proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: I refer to the *Hansard* dated 2016, 20th of the first month:

“**Barrackpore ASJA Primary School**”—this was question time:

“**Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima):** To the Minister of Education: Could the Minister tell us when will the students of Barrackpore ASJA Primary School, be properly accommodated?”

Mr. Deputy Speaker:”

The Minister of Education response:

“Madam Speaker...Deputy Speaker apologies. The Barrackpore ASJA Primary School is 30 years old and repair was promised by the last Minister in 2012. Nothing was done. The students are in a mosque at a prefab building. The building is condemned, but as a result of land slippage, EFCL advised of the issue that there are lands at Petrotrin and that is being sought so that a new school will be completed within 10 months...”

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial 45 minutes have expired. You an additional 10. Proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: So in ten months he promised a school, the Barrackpore ASJA Primary School in ten months. Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not one brick, not one sod has been turned for the Barrackpore ASJA Primary School. And I spoke about this before, no allocation for the 90 per cent complete Reform Hindu School, but just down the road, the Government found \$90 million to complete the Brian Lara stadium that has been used less than 10 times as we speak.

A school that would have been used almost every day by hundreds of children, hundreds of pupils were not important enough to finish and what hurts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they built a road, from Tarouba Road to enter the Brian Lara stadium, and I have the Guaracara-Williamsville Road, with potholes and people are burning tyres, residents are burning tyres because they are fed up of the inaction of this Government.

The Rochard Douglas Health Care Facility, has been closed down for repairs. They have started repairs, we commend you for that, but it took a demonstration with placards to get action from the Ministry of Health. *[Interruption]* And they have shifted the residents to the Lengua health facility and subsequently, after the demonstration—I have the dates of letter—a letter was written indicating what action had been taken and action had been taken, subsequent to the demonstration. That is a fact.

They complain about CDAP drugs, the elderly, and my friend from Arouca/Maloney says how she, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, she is so enamored with elderly people and she cares about them and she cares about me, because of my age, but at the same time, when you look at the inaction in terms of CDAP drugs and you look at the cuts in the pension, they really do not care by action.

There are landslips, hundreds of landslips in my constituency, on Garth Road, in St. Croix Road, in Papourie Road, in Coryal Road, et cetera. Hundreds of landslips unattended and in my constituency. So the Government is talking about public relations agriculture, \$100,000. You will wait 10 years to get that \$100,000 payment from this bad pay Government.

And in addition, when our political leader asked us to meet constituents and when we met them, they said that the problem they have is with land tenure. They cannot get loans; they cannot access benefits, et cetera. And therefore, all these things that sound nice cannot work in principle. And the diesel cost is going to affect them.

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So what is the way forward? What is way forward? If we were in power, we would reduce all aspects of crime including murders by 10 per cent annually. We will not be thinking about crime, doing this about crime, setting up papers and policies about crime. We will do it. We will get to performance that is measurable and timely and can be assessed at the end of a time. We will reduce murders by 10 per cent. We would implement response time. If you call the police station, we will introduce a time, perhaps 30 minutes or less so that we could respond. And I want—with respect to the fire station, that is the Point Fortin Fire Station. If a fire takes place in Icacos or Cedros, it will take more than an hour for an appliance to get to that, to get to Icacos—with the bad roads. We are going to get actual response time.

11.45 a.m.

I plead with you, Mr. Minister, let us get to specific measurable targets, not a list of things that we intend to do, will do, or are considering. We will take immediate steps to repeal and replace the Justice Protection Act to provide a comprehensive workable and well-resourced witness protection programme. We will fully resource the Forensic Science Centre and take steps to establish a national forensic science institute in collaboration with the University of the West Indies. We will take action.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to read into the records of *Hansard* because we were told that the Opposition Leader never responds to the Prime Minister when he suggested that he needed the Opposition's support with respect to legislation. I wish to place on record that on the 28th of September, 2017, the political leader wrote the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Keith Rowley. It was entitled: Consultations between the Government and the Opposition with respect to proposed legislation. The date is 28th September, 2017. She said:

I write in response to your letter of 17th August 2017 with respect to the captioned matter. [*Crosstalk*]

I do not know who they want the leader to respond to. She has to respond to written communication to her. And she said:

Your letter made reference to a letter written to Sen. Ramdeen by the then Acting Attorney General dated the 4th of August, 2017 in which certain information was provided to the Opposition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that breaks all protocol. You do not have a Minister of everything writing Sen. Ramdeen. This ought to have been addressed to the

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political leader [*Desk thumping*] and the Leader of the Opposition. The letter that was addressed to Sen. Ramdeen indicated that:

The Government would appreciate if a response—[*Crosstalk*]

Thanks, thanks. The letter that was addressed to Sen. Ramdeen indicated that:

The Government would appreciate if a response could be provided before the third week of August 2017.

I was very disappointed and troubled that on the 17th of August, 2017, the Acting Attorney General sought to place this matter in the public domain and make statements critical of the Opposition on this matter.

Such actions do not engender the environment that fosters cooperation between the Government and the Opposition. Such statements were made by the person who, at the time, was holding the office that is vested with the responsibility of guarding the public interest. It is alarming.

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

Mr. R. Charles: Both pieces of legislation require a constitutional majority for their passage.

As indicated on many occasions previously—and I want to repeat this—the Opposition will support legislation that is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and is constitutional. [*Desk thumping*]

I go on. What would we do? We would establish well, immediately, a national centre for the victims of crime to provide, *inter alia*, services to cope with trauma and grief, protection and counselling for victims of crime such as the wife of Prison Officer Sandy. We do not talk. We deal.

We will set time frames for the efficient operations of the Magistracy and the Judiciary and ensure that there are magistrates and judges to give effect to time frames. We will align the education system so that the best and the brightest can enter the police service. We have a GATE programme and they see the GATE programme primarily as to cut rather than to align it to our needs. Our greatest need right now is to get that crime down [*Desk thumping*] and we have to find a way that our best and brightest enter that service.

We will look at the Forensic Science Centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that this Government does not understand the role the forensic pathologist plays in solving crime. It was—and this is a quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Saturday, August 12th. It was Dr. Valery Alexandrov and he said:

An increase in collaboration between homicide detectives and forensic pathologists may assist in improving the country's detection and conviction rate for murder.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your time has expired.

Mr. R. Charles: I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

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

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for so recognizing me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, enough has been said, enough has been done about the state of affairs of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago in the context in which this budget was set for us to understand where we are, and I would submit that my friends on the other side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, simply do not want anything good for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In the context that everyone knows very well when we draw down on the national savings, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, they have a problem. When we impose taxes to raise revenues to carry out the servicing of the country, they have a problem with that too. When we cut expenses, as we must, sensibly, in these circumstances, they also have a problem with that. When we borrow money as we must to service the country, they have a problem with that too. They do not want anything good for this country. [*Desk thumping*]

They talk about diversification. Tourism is one of the ways that we have decided as a nation that we will do that, and yet the Member for Naparima gets up here this morning and does all within his power to sully and tarnish the name of Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism destination and for investment by those whose moneys we need to strengthen this economy. He first tells us that—in fact, sometime ago, his friend from Oropouche East told us boldly and incorrectly that 400 citizens of this country went to fight with ISIS out in the East. That is, of course, completely untrue.

The confirmed statistics in Trinidad supported by our international friends make it clear that we record 180 people. He reached 400. And, of course, all of these persons left Trinidad on that wild and worthless mission between 2013 and 2014 confirmed by our international partners. Confirmed. So I want to correct the record on that for those who are listening as we need foreign investment and we need to improve our tourism effort. That 180 includes women and children, entire families. And they spent time this morning, through the lips of the Member for Naparima, tarnishing the name of this country.

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And, secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sometime ago—well, he quoted this morning that the Leader of the Opposition took objection to us writing to Sen. Ramdeen. The facts are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it was in consultation with the Prime Minister, it was the Leader of the Opposition who identified Sen. Ramdeen as the point of contact and the person to write, and it is for that reason that a letter was directed to him, all letters. So, disingenuous and untruthful. They just would not help it, and that is why I think and I would propose that the Member for Naparima be taken to the Privileges Committee. [*Desk thumping*] He quoted statistics here this morning and when challenged by you for support for that, he had to withdraw it, told this Parliament, like his friend Sen. Wade Mark at another time, a complete fabrication and untruth, and that is the conduct of my friends on the other side. They “doh want nutten good” for Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 48(8).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With actual reference to what, Member?

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member is speaking about a Member of the other place and bringing him into disrepute contrary to 48(8).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: The Minister of Sport will agree with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that cricket, like politics, is a game, a business, of glorious uncertainties. Geoff Boycott, one of England’s most prolific batsmen, describing some of his cricket experience spoke of the most torrid over in the history of cricket. In Barbados, in 1980 I think it was, when Michael Holding delivered an over, six balls to him, the record shows that five of them he did not see one. They pass the bat and the wicket and went to the wicketkeeper. He did not see it. And the last one took the middle stump and cartwheeled it towards our wicketkeeper. It was the most torrid over in the history of cricket. In other words, Mike Holding was unplayable. You see this budget, by our Ministry of Finance, unplayable. [*Desk thumping*]

The Leader of the Opposition got up here for three hours and 30 minutes and she could not respond to a line in the budget with any efficacy or sense, not a line. So in respect of my metaphor, the Minister of Finance was like whispering, financial whispering death and she was like Geoff Boycott, not a ball they could play. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member. Member for Laventille West, the “she” on a constant basis, please try and refrain.

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Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged. Thank you very much. [*Crosstalk*] In 2016, when we came to office, we found ourselves having to pay off a lot of the debt that we met from the previous administration, some \$6 billion of it. A 14 per cent wage negotiation bill we were met. We had to pay back pay to workers and we had to tame this unruly economic horse that they left behind, wild and crazy running hither, thither and yon.

In 2017, we reduced expenditure by close to \$13 billion, from \$64 billion to \$52 billion. The actual figures, the out-turn was 50.5 and, of course, happily, we saw no discernible or appreciable denigration or disruption in the standard of living of the citizens of this country and we thank God for that, proving that that extra \$12 billion ought never to have been there in the first place. That was where the fat and the waste was. That is where the cream was taken out of the economy by those who were so minded, facilitated by those who were facilitators, and now we find ourselves as a nation scraping, scrounging around for revenue, so we must impose taxes.

We have to reach out and take taxes from places we probably did not do before. It is absolutely necessary when revenue is projected at \$35 billion and you have an expenditure of some 50 or so billion dollars. That is the reality and I do not think we need to deliver too much more time on that. Everyone seems to have agreed, from what I have heard, that the reduction or the removal of the fuel subsidy was one of the logical places to go, and we are doing that, reducing expenditure.

One of the things we boldly did is to reach out there. I remember them telling us that they settled the Clico matter once and for all. Clico was owing this country \$15 billion. They told us they settled it once and for all. We boldly went when we saw all the evidence that they did not intend to make good their debt to the taxpayers. On behalf of all the taxpayers, we went to the court where we have some confidence and we recovered—we are in the process of recovering the country's \$15 billion to improve our revenue. [*Desk thumping*] That is how we do it, boldly.

I heard this morning, very quickly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a report on BBC News. In the United States, their deficit is in the region of trillions of dollars. In fact, they made the point this morning, which is what attracted me. For the average American, the figure is so big it has become abstract. They cannot conceive the magnitude of it. And, as a result, they think that a lot of people are not even taking it seriously anymore because it has become so widely abstract.

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On the other hand, we have a country like Norway—my Prime Minister brought this to my attention and I did some research—where one trillion dollars have been saved from their oil and gas activity—a trillion dollars, a fund—and now they have the power to invest that, not only in Europe but in other parts of the world. That is one million million dollars, you know. So Trinidad and Tobago is somewhere between what is now, as I describe, is the American situation and this wonderful experience in Norway. I find from my reading of the newspaper that the Opposition Leader found herself having to explain to the citizens of this country, why and how did she go into NGC and raid the dividends in the matter that my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Quote your source eh, Sir.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am quoting from the *Daily Express*—

Dr. Moonilal: Standing order 48(4). This thing about raiding the Treasury. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, find another word, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: He is quiet, hon. Members. Go ahead.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, he does not want to hear the word “raid”. I withdraw that, but they went in there unjustifiably, without the proper authority and justification, and they depleted a serious saving that the country had in the National Gas Company, \$16 billion. And, of course, very interestingly, from the very article, the Leader of the Opposition is saying:

The dividends that were paid to the Government during this time was spent on the people of this country so as to ensure that while the grass was growing the horse was not starving.

I took note of that. It means that at that time the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, knew that the horse was starving. The Member knew that the grass was growing. They knew something was wrong with the economy, but at that time they were telling us everything was good [*Desk thumping*] and there was a reason why they were telling us that.

The Member went on to say those dividends were used to settle wage negotiations as I tell you, 14 per cent. When the Member knew that the grass was growing and did not want the horse to starve they settled public servants negotiations and other places at 14 per cent. That was imprudent and reckless and irresponsible, and now trying to tell us that that was necessary to pay those bills. Unnecessary, imprudent, reckless, irresponsible.

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And as we know, all of that, I just want to peruse a document here and I am quoting from official UDeCOTT statistics, their project status report as at August 2017. So when the Member for Siparia, the Leader of the Opposition, tells us that they had to go in and raid—sorry pillage, they had to plunder, they had to take and took \$16 billion from NGC—[*Crosstalk*—I withdraw the word “raid”. Yes. Let me, for the benefit of the citizens of this country, explain why and how when the grass—[*Interruption*—I withdraw that “raid”. But what does a raider do? Take. Yes.

The Couva Children’s Hospital, there were people in this country who thought it was a gift from China. We now know it was to cost us \$1.5 billion and \$500 million in fees. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. That is the reality, and I want the citizens to understand that. Before I say anything more, we have completed and we have proposed and we have settled in the Cabinet the construction of a few police stations. I could remember my Prime Minister in the room saying that if we build the St. Joseph Police Station and that cost \$35 million and you use the same architecture and you use it as a blueprint and you do that on flatland wherever you need a police station, the price should be the same, the same drawing. In fact, it should be less because you paying for the drawing only once, generally speaking. Okay?

But hear! Under their administration, the Brasso Seco Station, a station in the country, was to cost—the stations we are building now are \$35 million on average. The Brasso Station, under their administration, \$55.6 million. That Besson Street Police Station, \$70.1 million. The same Maracas Station that we completed for about \$35.8 million, according to them, in their world, \$52 million; Matelot Station, \$50 million; Matura, \$68 million; a station in Manzanilla in this country, \$88 million; Carenage Police Station, \$71 million.

I heard the Member for Naparima talking about fire station. The Mayaro Fire Station was supposed to have cost this country \$112 million; Lady Hailes in San Fernando or Arouca, \$129 million; Wrightson Road, \$402.6 million, no equipment yet; Mon Repos Fire Station, \$345.4 million and to take the crown, a perimeter fence in the prison service, a fence, \$87.7 million. That is how they did it. They dealt with millions and billions and zillions under the Member for Siparia, no equipment.

To fit out the BIR building, where we have now put public servants in, saving millions of dollars a month rent to taxpayers now that the Government has its own

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campus and its own building, to fit out that building according to them was \$341.3 million. To fit out the office where I am now, the Office of the Attorney General, \$380 million. That is how they governed this country and then trying to explain why they went it with their slimy hands—sorry, I withdraw that—into NGC money.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, withdraw.

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that about slimy hands. It might have been dry. The effect was the same, \$16 billion—sticky, sticky.

When I spoke last in this budgetary exercise for the last or the outgoing fiscal year, I spoke here as the Minister of Public Utilities. I heard the Member for Tabaquite yesterday raised the question of PSIP. The average member of the public does not know what PSIP is. That stands for Public Sector Investment Programme. It is the Government's development programme where you spend money on infrastructural and other development. [*Crosstalk*] This is for the public, not for us. We all know that. And a Minister, as a manager of a Ministry, and a Permanent Secretary under the guidance of the Minister of Planning and Development, are largely responsible for stewarding and managing those expenditures to ensure that the country gets, not only value for money, but develops in the way according to the plan for that particular fiscal year.

I am happy to report and, proudly so, the Minister of Planning and Development told me for the time that I spent in public utilities our PSIP performance in percentage terms was 79 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] And that was done, as I told my colleagues, by working very closely with my project implementation team. We met, at least, bi-weekly and we worked this thing to the letter, and that is how the thing was done. And overall, I heard the Member for Tabaquite—our performance in this regard as a team, as a Government, has been exemplary and I am very, very proud about that.

This country needs honest work. This country needs intellect, it needs thought and this country needs serious work in order to stabilize it and to take it off in the direction that we would all like it to go. Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die. This place calls for work and thought and that is what we are giving this country. No poor work ethic with a four and—a three- and four-day weekend. All of us in this country are called upon to be more productive now and give some energy—put your shoulders to the wheel, put your minds to the task—and let us rebuild this country. And we will continue to lead this country as a PNM Government, I expect, for the next 15 years. [*Desk thumping*]

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Let me now move quickly to the issue of criminal justice which is the area of responsibility that I have now. We are, no doubt, in this country under some bit of siege. The criminals are trying to get on top of us, as you heard the Minister of National Security say, they are getting bolder—they are walking in KFC, they are going everywhere without mask—they are just doing it. They went on a prison officer—we heard about that and may his family accept my deepest condolences—Officer Sandy, walked up on him and his colleague, pointed at his colleague. As they scrambled, he got shot in his leg, a major blood vessel struck, he lost blood and the young man lost his life. They are getting bolder.

We are also under siege by our own bureaucratic positions and our lazy approach and our underproduction as a people, because everyone knows we are not working as well and as hard as we should in this country, all of us, and we have to do that. [*Crosstalk*] You know, we have to provide the administrative support systems in order to achieve that.

So you will hear references to the administration of justice, because behind the whole concept of justice, there is a whole administration, a panoply of institutions that make the thing work. When crimes are committed in the society people can reasonably expect—they ought to expect—that there will be an investigation, which is supported by intelligence which is what the SSA is all about. There will be an arrest. There will be charges proffered against those perpetrators or perpetrator. There will be a prosecution through the court and we can expect justice, a fair result, a result we could all accept and live with as fair, and the Constitution makes provision for that too. You expect a sentence to be passed whether it is a fine or some order of the court or whether it is an imprisonment, a term of imprisonment. Once someone goes to be imprisoned, we expect the business of rehabilitation to apply. Hopefully, when they return to the society after their incarceration, they will now mean to do good and not continue to hurt us as recidivists.

This is a very long and sometimes difficult and uncertain road. There are various agencies involved in this process. This involves, obviously, the police and to some extent the defence force because, unfortunately, circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago today makes it necessary for soldiers who should be doing something else to be on the streets aiding the civil powers, so to speak, and that is not an ideal situation. The other day when they had a bombing in London, soldiers came out, but that is a temporary situation. We have had our soldiers and coastguardsmen and women on the streets for a long time. That says something that we have to pay attention to.

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The Forensic Science Centre, another important stakeholder in this. The Office of the DPP—and with the new criminal rules the DPP comes further centre stage playing a greater role in the whole business of the criminal justice system. The courts, obviously, juries, the prisons and NGOs and individuals like Vision on Mission, they play a particular role; churches, faith-based organizations and individuals like Clayton Morris, who work inside of the prison, working with the young men hoping to assist in their rehabilitation. All of these state institutions may not for various reasons be performing optimally. Low productivity and a lack of our commitment to implementation as a nation is also instructive to note as the reasons for this.

The business of crime: I heard my friend—I was about to say “foolishly”—but emptily told us that this Government—hear the statement—this Government only spent three minutes of 2,000-something minutes on crime. But right before him the Minister of National Security whose responsibility is the business of crime management, he spoke for 55 minutes, but the Member for Tabaquite did not hear that. It is just so banal and so empty and embarrassing, and say this Government—the Minister of National Security is a part of this Government and that is his responsibility. The Minister of Finance was delivering a budget. He spent a short time on that knowing that the Minister of National Security will treat with the matter. So empty.

Mr. Imbert: And I said so.

Hon. F. Hinds: Actually he said so. Yes. Other countries, world over, have to deal with the same problems that we are having here. Los Angeles in the United States, a case in point. Brazil, I saw last week in Brazil young men grabbing people’s things and walking away, running away; Kingston Jamaica, London inner cities. This is not about race, this is a cultural kind of thing where you have inner cities in urban dwellings. You have certain kinds of problems. This is why we say it is not about Laventille alone. Laventille is not a place. Laventille is an experience. You will find it all over Trinidad, all over the region, all over the world, because it is a certain kind of experience as a result of inner city living which every country recognizes and treats with.

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And that culture, unfortunately, is now taking a dominant place along the corridor and in other parts of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the dominant culture; you see it playing out in the schools with all of the little issues, and we all have to attend to that in this business of dealing with the criminal justice system. And yet, you heard the Member for Oropouche West yesterday, get up and talk about a

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swimming pool that is proposed for Laventille. Well, I proposed it for Laventille because about four years ago a little boy went into one of the water tanks to bathe, to swim, and he lost his life. That touched me deeply, because I know we could have had another little national swimmer. He probably loved swimming but there is no pool there, and at that time a decision was taken, and I am very happy to know that it has now been budgeted for, and I look forward to it being put to the benefit of the people of Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] My father used to call me tadpole, so if a next little tadpole gets into that swimming pool, maybe we would have another Bovell.

Mr. Karim: “Yuh resemble dat.”

Hon. F. Hinds: That was because I was smooth. That was because I was smooth, yeah, still smooth. Yes. Yes.

You know and when we tried, as we have done in the past, to deal with this urban problem, recognizable by Governments all over the world, they have issues with it, challenging whether Laventille alone getting a swimming pool. Similarly, when we put the special education programme in Laventille to look at the situation with the schools in there, 25 of them, and to give them special attention because of those special circumstances there are those who oppose it, and they even accuse you of racism and discrimination—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Doh say dat. Doh say dat.”

Hon. F. Hinds: They do in this country, they do. But we must do that because special situations require special resolution. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, that was one of the best things you said for the day. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. The police service, about 7,000 members, and there are many highly educated, skilled, trained, experienced persons in the police service. The Minister of National Security provides them with resources, six-point-something billion dollars will be spent on National Security. We criticize the police, but this country will be markedly different without them, notwithstanding the imperfections.

They need motivation, they need training, and I have seen the police service rise to the occasion. With all the bad of the state of emergency, they executed 8,000 warrants in that three-month period, and I saw in that what the police need is a certain mind set that has been waning, and some training about their mind set has to be done, because policing calls for a certain mind set, and that is what we will be focusing on as the Minister of National Security said. And the difference

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between a police officer and a criminal, even with the same weapon, is his training and his discipline. That is why 10 could conquer 100 and 100 could conquer 1,000. It is discipline and training that makes the difference. And that is what the Minister of National Security is attempting to do, and when you have corrupt officers, like the two allegedly caught in Cedros some time ago, they have to be dealt with. They have to be weeded out.

Recently, we implemented a case management system for the Office of the DPP that will assist the Office of the DPP in doing its work on a more streamline basis, as I say, as it comes greater centre stage. So as the matter goes into the Office of the DPP, it goes on a particular database. It is entered in a certain format, and it is managed properly in keeping and in anticipation with the criminal rules that is coming there. That same system has to be implanted into the police service so there will be a symbiotic relationship they can share and make life better as we move towards the Crown prosecutorial model. That is happening at the Office of the Attorney General in collaboration with these institutions, and that will continue, where lawyers can get involved in the investigation from scratch. Again, my Prime Minister, as chairman of the National Security Council, sent a little video for me the other day and he saw someone arrested in England, and from the time they were interviewed, and ideas of prosecuting became real, lawyers got in and a decision was taken, and it went straight through to prosecution and sentence.

We are trying to get lawyers involved from the very start of investigations now in this Crown prosecutorial model style that we want to make happen in Trinidad and Tobago. Forensic experts working from very early to build a watertight case. No silos anymore, sharing information and doing it in a certain way. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that work is taking place and it will continue. I heard the Chief Justice wanting to put a similar case management system in the Magistrates' Court. It became obvious to us that that was non-existent with this 53-case issue, that too has to be replicated in the Magistrates' Court where they deal with 90 per cent of the criminal cases that come through the system on an annual basis. So, as for the Office of the DPP, yes, I agree with the Member for Naparima, adequate staffing, equipment and machinery, training of their officers; they are now specializing their teams to deal with different aspects of the law, and that is happening, commendably so.

We have provided office location for them, including in Tobago to supplement that which they now have in Port of Spain and San Fernando, and that is all happening. Support, provide resources, training, and all of that, and they will do the job that they are supposed to do. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as for the

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Forensic Science Centre, you heard the Minister of National Security truthfully say that the DNA legislation now, which was established in 2005—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Two thousand.

Hon. F. Hinds: In 2000—sorry. I piloted it in that time from the Ministry of National Security, it is now being implemented in its full range and effect. We have drafted the regulations and we have approved them in the Cabinet. As you heard the Minister truthfully say to this Parliament, we are now procuring the necessary consumables so that the police could now start their work as the law permitted all along but was never effected, even during the time when my friends were on the other side. So it is now happening, and we will have the benefit of that to improve crime detection in this country.

It is a sad truth that we do not have sufficient cameras to assist in detecting crime in this country, and where we have cameras some are not functioning effectively, some are not panning 360 degrees, all kinds of folly. Now, we have to apply intellect, we have to apply best practice, and make sure when we spend on a camera, getting value for money, it is able to do the job and assist. In England, by way of an example, they say when you leave your home in the morning by the time you return on evenings you would have been photographed some 54 or 55 times, making any antisocial or criminal behaviour easier to detect. And you would have seen in the United States, in England, the minute there is some terrorism event, within 48 hours they are on to it. It is all possible, we just have to improve our techniques and do those things and get it right. It is not about giving a contract to somebody to provide some bogus or cheap cameras, which seem to have been the ethos of those who have gone before. This is about intellect, this is about best practice, getting value for money, and getting the basis down correctly to help in this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are about. This is not about no contract for no friend and no cushy living, and an extra \$11 billion to play in and to play with, this is real.

The court system, that is the domain of the Judiciary, a line that we must carefully not breach, but the Attorney General is the conduit from the Cabinet and he provides the resources through the Cabinet, liaises with them, wonderful relationship, understanding the importance of building that institution, making it work. Because if the public comes to a point where they lose confidence in the courts or in the administration of justice, which has begun to happen in Trinidad and Tobago for many, many years, something is wrong. Witnesses are afraid to come forward today because they do not trust the system. We have work to do, provide them the with buildings, outfit these buildings, CAT Reporters; we have

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approved more CAT Reporters for the court, repairs to the Hall of Justice, and working closely with the Office of the Attorney General to bring the new children's rules in accordance with our constitutional requirements.

I am sure my friend, the Attorney General, will elaborate on these matters even more fully when he gets to his legs on another occasion in this debate. As for the prisons, again, I want to record my condolences to Officer Sandy who was boldly shot and killed by brazen criminals, but the police are on the job, and I hope that they make swift progress. I understand they have identified the perpetrators, and it is my prayer as a citizen and a Minister of Government that they make swift progress and bring them swiftly to justice. But the job of prison officers is a very dangerous job today, because this is an ex-inmate, "unrehabilitated", if I may say so, going out there with vengeance in his mind to kill a prison officer or two. A very serious business, and, therefore, we need to pay attention to that.

I saw the association, Mr. Richards, the President, he could be a little angry and a little bit dramatic at times, and I see he has been putting the blame for that at the doorstep of the Cabinet, but that, of course, has to be easily rejected because, I mean, you know, they take action inside of there to protect their officers. Officers have been issued, in some cases, in many cases, with personal firearms to protect themselves, and properly so. They have a system in there where they provide security at each other's homes. This is in addition to what the State, through the police, would generally produce, but there is also another dimension that I must speak truthfully about. Sometimes the behaviour of some of us aggravate situations. If prison officers are going to encourage taking drugs into the prison—if prison officers are going to take cell phones inside of the prison to arrange deals to be struck, if prison officers are going to get involved in relationships with prisoners' families on the outside, if prison officers are going to be borrowing money from prisoners' families; these things have happened in the world, and Trinidad is not distant and separate from it.

So, prison officers have to be more professional. They have to be more ethical as well. I mean, so you have the criminals operating, but we have to operate in a manner that does not encourage or fuel that in my way, [*Desk thumping*] so we must fight it. We must resist them, but we must make sure that our own conduct as officers, police, soldier, immigration, customs, because we have issues in all these organizations with persons who are not true to their oaths and endangering the rest. And we must deal with that frontally and very frankly, because a lot that happens cannot happen without the complicity and the support of elements of the State.

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So the question of rehabilitation, I know that there are peace education programmes in there to deal with hostility on the part of individuals and groups. Vision on Mission, as I said earlier, has a programme going on in there for life skills. I want to congratulate Wayne Chance. I have been invited to the inauguration of his board tomorrow, and I would like to be there, if I have the opportunity to do so from this Parliament. There are spiritual development programmes taking place by all the faith-based organizations in Trinidad and Tobago, programmes dealing with anger management and drug abuse programmes, all taking place in there, very good work. As I said, Clayton Morris as an individual doing the Futsal thing in there, and I am happy to note that the Cabinet recently approved about 55 or \$57 million dollars—Yes, the Ministry of National Security—sorry—to do some improvements in the conditions inside of the prison on account of the constitutional challenges about inhumane treatment, and so on, particularly, in a judgment from Madam Justice Gobin sometime ago. So now we are forced to invest more, work harder, do more to meet the constitutional standard so that cases will not fall by reason of any legal, technical challenges. So that work is going on.

As for legislation from the Office of the Attorney General, it is well known to the country, we need parliamentary support in order to do things. We need the support of friends on the other side. So when the Member, for example, for Tabaquite gets up here and talks about 354 murders, nothing irks me more than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It irks me to hear a Member of Parliament talking about how many murders take place under the PNM and under the UNC, as though criminals “does decide” who in Government, to kill. The problem is they have guns and we need to take the guns out of their hands. [*Desk thumping*] Break down door, break their wrist if we have to and take the guns because they are a danger to us. And then to say, “under”, as though there is some implication as though it is somebody on this side who sanctioned it. Even when I was in Opposition, I never sounded so stupid. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. F. Hinds: I would not say that.

The Member for Naparima also talking about the Minister of Finance, talked about the Minister of Finance taxing dreams. Well, I sat here listening to him, I was not dreaming, but by listening to him if I had to take a chance and play Play Whe, I playing number—but I see his number is 26, I would add 10 to that. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] That is it. I heard him as well recommending an English book, the Minister of Education should get some grammar book or some English

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book for the benefit of the Members of this side. Well, I want to tell him, he should start with the Member for Siparia, because reading her speech I heard her say, all and “sun dry”. [*Laughter and Crosstalk*] Yeah, “all raisin”. [*Laughter*] “Oh goosh, all ah de raisin.” And, yes, yes, the Minister of National Security, when he came to office—[*Interruption*] Eh?

Mr. Imbert: What about the “Chinee-ology”?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. It is almost lunchtime, you all will have the opportunity. Proceed, Member for Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly. [*Desk thumping*] Yes, I heard him talking about, you know, the Minister of National Security promised this country a border control agency, and then we say we will do it swiftly, and all of that. What the Member for Tabaquite missed is that that was part of the simple development process we have moved from when we had a concept and an idea to the point today of a MOU, an agreement for it.

Hon. Member: Three years later?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. You did not do it in five years and three months. We are doing it now in two years. [*Desk thumping*] We are doing it. So stop making noise. And when we come here with legislation we need your support. No point complaining about murders and complaining about crime, we need to pass legislation from the Parliament to give the police and law enforcement the teeth and the strength to deal with the criminals. That is why I say you all do not want nothing good for this country, “doh” want nothing good.

Let me quick reference to a Canadian case, because you see we had *Pratt & Morgan* back in 1993, which affects this jurisdiction, where the Privy Council set a five-year limit to carry out the death penalty, from charge to sentence, to execution, actually, the Privy Council set five years. I had no problem. I have no problem with *Pratt & Morgan*, because all they were trying to do was to shake us out of our complacency and sloth and we would quicken the pace of the administration of justice and carry out the sentence of death where applicable; quicken the criminal justice process. Well, recently we were at the opening of the law term and the feature speaker at the church, the former UN Ambassador told us—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Canadian.

Hon. F. Hinds:—Canadian—sorry—told us about a case, so I took the case to take a look at it, a case of Barrett Richard Jordan, the appellant, appealing against

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Her Majesty The Queen, and the Attorney General of Alberta, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, Criminal Lawyers' Association, several interveners. And this matter was a matter where Jordan was charged in December 2008, for his role in a dial-a-dope, a call-up operation for drugs. His trial ended in February 2013, 49½ months later. Jordan brought an application under section 11 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, akin to our Constitution, seeking a stay of proceedings due to the delay.

“In dismissing the application, the trial judge applied the framework set out in *R. v. Morin*...”

—where they had a framework and some principles for speedy trials, and the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, but when it went before the Supreme Court of Canada, their highest court, the Supreme Court held that the appeal of Jordan should be allowed, the conviction set aside and a stay of proceedings was entered.

So what the court effectively told them, and I am quoting from the judgment:

“A new framework is therefore required for applying [s. 11 \(b\)](#)”—of that Charter of freedoms. “This framework is intended to focus the [s. 11 \(b\)](#) analysis on the issues that matter and encourage all participants in the criminal justice system to cooperate...”

“...all participants...”

And the Parliament is a participant. The Supreme Court is saying:

“...all participants in the criminal justice system to cooperate in achieving reasonably prompt justice, with a view to fulfilling”—the—“important objectives.

At the heart of this new framework is a presumptive ceiling beyond which delay—from the charge to the actual or anticipated end of trial—is presumed to be unreasonable, unless exceptional circumstances justify it. The presumptive ceiling is 18 months for cases tried in the provincial court, and 30 months for cases”—tried like in the High Court.”

Provincial more like magistrate in our jurisdiction.

“(or cases tried in the provincial court after a preliminary inquiry). Delay attributable to or waived by the defence does not count towards the presumptive ceiling.”

Essentially, this judgment, what it has done is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your essential 45 minutes has expired. You have an additional 10. You care to avail yourself?

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Hon. F. Hinds: Most certainly.

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

Hon. F. Hinds: What this judgment has done is to impose on the administration of justice, the legislators, the courts, the DPP, everybody, to impose strict timelines, you have to keep them. So Canada now had to invest millions and millions of Canadian dollars to improve the staff, more officers, more lawyers, more courtrooms, all of that. We are stilling struggling with a five-year issue with *Pratt & Morgan*. We did not rise to the challenge of *Pratt & Morgan*, and most of the guys who were intended to face the death penalty are now commuted to life sentences in the prison, and we now have another problem. So the idea here is to quicken the thing and we will all have to play a role in that.

So we have a problem, we have some issues as a nation, and shouting on each other would not help it. It calls for intellect. It calls for reasonableness. It calls for good sense. It calls for a sober Parliament working together in the interest of the people and disregard the “one-manship” and “up-manship”, and foolishness. [*Desk thumping*] There is work to be done everywhere, and this is why as I close, I too would like to join the thousands of citizens of this country, some of whom did not have an opportunity to speak publicly like me, I too would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for grappling with a very, very difficult situation and for delivering, what in the face of the Opposition, is an unplayable budget, unplayable. I would like as well to congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development who I know from the Cabinet has worked closely with the Minister of Finance and all of our Ministries to get the job done, and I would like to congratulate her in that regard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as for my on constituency, in this budget I saw only good for the people of Laventille, [*Desk thumping*] because this is for little people. It is not only in the little ordinary worker who is affected by the tax measures in this. As a matter of fact, any time you are earning \$7,200—sorry—any time in this country you are earning \$6,000 or less dollars a month, you pay no tax at all; that still exists for the benefit of my constituents in Laventille. I have told you we are getting a swimming pool and I am very, very happy about that. All of the health centres are open and functioning, all of the benefits, and I promise them one thing, and I make that pledge and promise here again today on behalf of Laventille West, every single state benefit or opportunity that is available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is my job to ensure that Laventille West, and Laventille, generally, get its fair share and access without deterrence. [*Desk thumping*] That is my job.

So all of the existing youth programmes, whether it is MiLAT, CCC, all, the Laventille Technology Centre where they teach almost everything for young people, right in my constituency, all of these, the schools, the 25 schools; Laventille has four secondary schools, they have access to the university right there on Wrightson Road. They have access to Queen's Royal College, CIC, St. Joseph. They have access to UWI right up the road on the Priority Bus Route. The Priority Bus Route passes through right through Laventille. All of the benefits and opportunities that are available; I know nurses from Laventille, they are applying to the nursing service, police service, the defence force, teaching service, public service, all of the benefits that are available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be available to the people of Laventille.

When we fought and secured the \$15 billion, that is for the benefit of the people of Laventille, and so we continue. I am very happy to have had the opportunity to represent them during this last fiscal. They know and I know that we are working like a tiger in their interest, and we are doing just that. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, and our commitment as a Government to improving the criminal justice system for the benefit of all Trinidad and Tobago, I would like to thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to the work that must be done in the upcoming fiscal year. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 44(8), I am giving Member for Naparima the opportunity to be heard again to offer an explanation for a material part of his speech which he claims has been misrepresented. Member for Naparima, you are not allowed to introduce any new matter. As requested, you have one minute to offer your explanation. Kindly proceed.

Mr. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. When I spoke this morning, I indicated that there were citizens, Trinidad and Tobago citizens, including children and women who were recently captured in Iraq. [*Interruption and Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: That is not true.

Mr. Charles: The source is Iraq/KRG—[*Interruption*—and Syria, “1,400 Women, Children From...”—[*Continuous Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, I have given the Member the opportunity, no new material. Kindly proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: The source is “Iraq/KRG: 1,400 Women, Children From ISIS...Detained” by Bill Van Esveld. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: What Standing Order? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members—have your seat, please. Members, I am on my legs. Member.

Dr. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, pursuant to the Standing Order you just raised, I object on the grounds that the Member is introducing new information. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, with regard to your comments, are you introducing any new information?

Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The *Hansard* will be able to be identified in order to say. So kindly proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: So the source is “Iraq/KRG: 1,400 Women, Children From ISIS...Detained”—[*Interruption*] [*Continuous Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am on my legs. I am on my legs, Members. The Member for Naparima has one minute in order to make a statement. Any new information, the *Hansard* would be verified, and the necessary precautions would be taken accordingly. So kindly proceed. Member, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. R. Charles: The article says:

“The women and international humanitarian agency...”—that is Human Rights Watch—“said they included Afghan, Azerbaijani, Chinese, Chechen, Iranian, Russian, Syrian, Tajik, Trinidadian, and Turkish nationals.”

[*Continuous Crosstalk*] I am referring to Trinidad nationals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, we would now suspend for lunch. We will resume at 2.00 p.m.

12.43 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (Caroni Central): Thank you very, very much, Madam Speaker.

I start by responding to a couple things said by the Member for Laventille West. He used the words “raid” and “plunder”, and I wanted to ask him, through you, Madam Speaker, whether that would also apply to the *Cabo Star*, [*Desk*

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thumping] the *Ocean Flower*, the over-invoicing by a friend of the Prime Minister from Petrotrin?

You know, he said also that we on this side did not want the country to do well, but I want to tell him that we brought in between 2011 and 2015, US \$5 billion of investments. [*Desk thumping*] I want to let him know that we created 56,000 jobs. [*Desk thumping*] I want to let him know that we had the lowest unemployment rate of 3.7 in the history of the country. [*Desk thumping*] I want to let him know also that we took the participation rate for tertiary education to 65 per cent, which allows them now to talk about the improved competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to let him know that after they languished for more than a decade, coming to Parliament and then going back out and never, never getting to the point of Cabinet decision and to legislation in the House of Representatives, we brought and passed the Procurement Bill [*Desk thumping*] and the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill, none of which, by the way, have been proclaimed so far by this Government. We did those things because we care about this country and we love this country, and we want this country to be a sustainable nation.

I want to say a few words to the Minister of National Security. I want to say that instead of declaring war or saying that you are going to declare war or making any kind of declaration at all, let us bring the murders down and bring the crime under control. [*Desk thumping*] You say you want us to work together to deal with a common enemy, but I think sometimes from the other side, from the Prime Minister down, it seems like the focus is to tell the population that we in the Opposition are the enemy. [*Desk thumping*] You talk about policies and strategies that you are working on, and I have no doubt that you are being diligent about it, but are those policies and strategies working? Are we getting results from them? You talk about the whole-government approach; perhaps a more effective government approach might be more appropriate.

You talk about empowering the communities. Maybe we should protect them and make them feel safe first before we try to empower them, because that is necessary. You talk about a government of action not of talk. I think if you walk in the streets of Port of Spain or any other place and you ask people randomly, you would find broad agreement that what you are saying is not in fact true, that it is more talk than it is action.

So how to begin? We listened to the Minister of Finance make his presentation for three hours or so, and we listened intently, because he said there

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was going to be a paradigm shift. But the political intent of the budget was clear, but there was no economic strategy, or if there was, it was very confusing. I thought the Leader of the Opposition who spoke after the Minister of Finance, did a very, very good job, an excellent job, [*Desk thumping*] of basically showing that the end result of that three and a half hour presentation—three hours and 22 minutes presentation—and the end result of the measures would be no advance whatsoever for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

My colleagues spoke on the budget, and they spoke so well. I listened; some of them were passionate, some of them were very sincere in the issues that they addressed. Some of them expressed deep, deep concern in a very pragmatic and practical way about what was going to happen to the householder, the ordinary person who had children to feed and a household to look after. And I think there was generally a critical appraisal of the budget in a serious way by the Opposition.

This is being dismissed by the Government because it does not carry with the chord that they are pulling on the population. It does not carry with the narrative that they are presenting to the population. But that is the job of the Opposition, to come here, to make a critical assessment, to make alternatives possible, as some of the Members did, and more than that to speak on behalf of their constituents, to speak on behalf of the population, because we give voice to the cries of the population when we come here.

We had a consultation called by the Government, and in that consultation there was attendance by significant members of the community who contributed. And I thought that after that exposure and that interaction, when the Minister of Finance came here that he would come here with some solutions. But he did not come with any solutions at all. In fact, listening to the Minister of Finance one would swear that the problem we had in Trinidad and Tobago was a temporary reduction in oil and gas revenue, that the solution is revenue generation through taxation, and that apart from that the economic situation was very much intact and that all we had to do was spread the economic burden around and wait for Juniper to produce. That is basically one side of the budget presentation.

The Prime Minister has also said that the Government spent the last two years stabilizing the economy, and that he would now address growth. I wonder if the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance know that every sector of the economy—according to the *Review of the Economy* 2015 and the *Review of the Economy* 2016 and 2017, covering the 2015 and 2016 years—apart from finance, are in very, very steep decline.

The Minister never mentioned that there was a total lack of confidence in the economic management of the country, a fact borne out by recent national polls that have been duly published. He did not even hint at the fact that citizens were in total dismay at the state of governance in Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is the *Cabo Star*, the *Ocean Flower*, the Petrotrin fake oil plunder of taxpayers' money. The Minister of Finance did not even try to explain where close to \$110 billion had gone over the last two years and why there was so little to show for it. And he did not mention one single thing that he would do that would make a decisive, positive difference in our current reality of stress, distress, uncertainty and loss of hope for almost every single citizen of this country that we love so dearly.

Yet he glibly spoke of a paradigm shift, while advocating tired, worn-out, uninspiring policy prescriptions. Where would the confidence come from, with an anti-business budget like this? [*Desk thumping*] Where would the investment come from if both foreign and local private sectors are assaulted with taxes? If you kill investment with bad policies and hostile pronouncements, how would the economy grow, Madam Speaker?

The Minister comes here in Parliament and attempts to blackmail and intimidate the oil companies, in one particular case especially bp. I hope he has read bp's terse, very measured press release issued two days after his statement here. He drops a 5 per cent additional tax on business and a 10 per cent additional tax on the banks, because he considers them easy targets, and then he goes to the business community and tells them that business is the problem in the country and they could take that if they so desire.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is in full support of the Minister of Finance's posture. In the language of a gangster of 1960s vintage— [*Desk thumping*]

[*Minister Imbert rises*]

Hon. Member: He said "in the language of".

Madam Speaker: Just change the language.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Not him, in the language of a gangster of 1960s vintage he says he "doh afraid nobody", and with disrespect for the process of negotiation he screams:

"No corporation will hold a gun to the head of"—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6).

Hon. Member: What is that?

Mr. Imbert: 48(6).

Madam Speaker: This is in terms of the language?

Mr. Imbert: Where did I say that?

Madam Speaker: This is imputing improper motives that you are talking about, and you corrected it by saying likened to the language of?

Dr. B. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, he did say that. I have a quote:

“No corporation will hold a gun to the head of this Government.”

He issues a public warning to the Managing Director of Republic Bank. [*Desk thumping*] He declares war on former Minister Mariano Browne. He threatens the Member for Oropouche East and former Energy Minister Mr. Kevin Ramnarine. He pours scorn on the fact that the San Juan Businessmen Association invited Kevin and myself and some other people to speak to them. This is after this Minister—that is to say the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—went to Japan and cussed out Mitsubishi upside down.

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6). That is a ridiculous statement.

Madam Speaker: Member, I will ask you to withdraw that word. I know you can say it in another way.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Well, he went to Japan and was unkind to the members of the Mitsubishi Group who are major investors here.

Now, I want to ask a question of the general population, Madam Speaker, through you: What problem does this Government have with business? Why the hostile stance and the threatening language? Does this Government feel that they have plenty power, and that they can use it to abuse and humiliate at will? Are you seeking to terrorize the population, one segment at a time?

Yesterday, the Minister in the Ministry of National Security told us that people were happy that the Government hit everybody, and that gave her a sense of people feeling that the measures in the budget were equitable. If the economy does not grow, how will we create jobs? Or is Government’s time to be spent trying to prevent job losses, and will this not cause the economy to contract further? Will this not deepen the recession and intensify the decline in the economic growth, which, based on the *Review of the Economy* is now minus six in 2016 and optimistically projected at 2.3 per cent in 2017? Will this not demoralize further an already brutalized population that is now giving up hope,

and will this not create the conditions to stimulate more crime and violence, taking Trinidad and Tobago into an unmanageable, uninhabitable direction?

When the dust settles, the end result of this budget will be an increase in the cost of living. None shall escape. There will be an increased cost of doing business which will further undermine competitiveness. The ripple effect of these two measures, these two results will trigger a loss of jobs, that is inevitable. There will probably be an increase in crime, and I say this because the UNODC report, the UN department that deals with drugs and crime dealt wrote a report recently on crime and failing economies. The authors are Stephen Mulvey and Phillip Davis, and that report talks about what happens to crime in declining economies. Also, this will have caused the national economy to contract further, and we are already in contraction. There will be even greater damage to an already low confidence level. This is very, very bad for the country, and I am sorry to say that after 760 days, this is where the Minister of Finance has taken us.

The Government identifies housing as a priority for action. Let us remind you though, Madam Speaker, honourable citizens, that the Government has not built houses for anybody in the last two years, although they have provided some houses for people. And from our point of view, it will be a good thing for the private sector to build homes. We have no problem with that, because there is an opportunity for the private sector and an opportunity for the Government because they do not have the funding.

The idea is to deal with the gap in housing for about 150,000 people, and the incentive is that the developers will get either \$100,000, or a piece of state land. Now, what is the catch? For a developer to be successful, he has to be approved by a ministerial oversight committee chaired by the Prime Minister no less. What an astounding precedent to establish in any country, in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* The Minister of Finance did not say that?

Mr. Mitchell: No, he said the approvals.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes—is this really necessary? Under my tenure as Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, we had all the regulatory agencies meet in committee to address development projects, and this was called a Complex Developments Committee. The new Minister would have met it there when she went in. Private sector housing projects were approved in the west, they were approved for developments in the south. The C3 Mall was approved by that committee, the Courts Freeport complex was approved by that committee. There was no Minister involved, only public service and state employed technical professionals. *[Desk thumping]*

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This one is chaired by the Prime Minister with other Ministers, as well as technocrats present. Why? I heard the Prime Minister say it had to do with bottlenecks. There are incentives in this for everybody, and I want to acknowledge that. But I want to say why are the public servants and the officials of these state entities not being allowed to do their work? Are such officers not being paid for that? Are there no functioning institutions in the country? This decision therefore in my view is not an assertion of political will, this is political interference, [*Desk thumping*] and it could lead—one never knows for sure in these situation—to political patronage and corruption, pure and simple. If the objective is to deal with bottlenecks, why does the Prime Minister and his Ministers in the National Security Council not deal with the bottlenecks in national security to cause a reduction in murders and crime?

The entire thrust of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill was to depoliticize the planning, development and approval process. No wonder this Bill has not been proclaimed. Now, it is being deeply politicized again. Where is the distinction between public officials and political directorate? Where is the distinction between government and politics; between governance, direction and policy on the one hand and administration, mechanics and operations on the other? This is an unhealthy development, Madam Speaker, inimical to good governance and my advice to the Government is to abandon that route. I join the call of the hon. Leader of the Opposition to put a stop to this. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us look at the pattern that is being established for agriculture, tourism and small to medium enterprise. I notice they did not say small and medium, so I guess they are dealing with small businesses only. Again, in agriculture you have a ministerial committee for the decision on page 53 of the budget that was circulated. What happened to the expertise in the Agricultural Development Bank? In the case of small businesses, an average of \$500,000 per person based on the numbers mentioned in the budget, and here too, to distribute this \$500,000 a ministerial committee will decide.

In the case of tourism I suppose Sandals will decide, and in the case of the concessions for Sandals—it does not say so in the budget—but I suppose a ministerial committee will also decide. This is madness. This Government is going loco. [*Laughter*] When you add the sea bridge fiasco, the Petrotrin scandal identified in the internal audit report commissioned by Petrotrin, one begins to see that the tentacles of the Government are in everything and in a very negative way.

What are the criteria for these so-called incentives? Where is the transparency? Where is the framework? Where are the standards? Where is the

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competition? Where is the meritocracy? Where is the innovation? Why does the Government have to put its heavy hand in everything? Why this prime ministerial patronage? Why this ministerial sponsorship?

Adam Smith wrote in the 18th Century—wrote about the invisible hand in a seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations*, talking about the invisible hand that works in efficient economies. Why this heavy hand of government interference in the Trinidad and Tobago economy, which so requires creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation, and not political patronage at all? An economy in which the State is overextended in economic involvement and where the State is inefficient almost everywhere. If the Government insists on pursuing this path, we can expect very little in the realm of new business creation and diversification.

What the Government is doing is hostile to entrepreneurship. It is inimical to innovation and is a direct assault on meritorious business development and growth, and will undermine the diversification process by pure politicization. [*Desk thumping*] Indeed, this entire budget is hostile to development. It is against people development. It is against new business creation. It is contemptuous of the local private sector and it is antagonistic to foreign investment.

The budget will drive the last nail in the coffin of dead confidence which this Government has been killing from day one for the last two years, with its lack of direction, its absence of clarity, its failure to identify priorities, its incapacity to present a coherent plan of action, its inability to make decisions and to share a coherent view of sustainable development strategy for our country.

What is a budget for anyway? Is a budget statement not a funded implementation plan for priorities aligned to a development strategy, Madam Speaker? And do not tell me it is contained in Vision 2030 which is a loose assembly of unassimilated random thoughts about things in general, and which in this incarnation it was laid here and referred to the Joint Select Committee some time ago, and is accompanied by a monitoring and evaluation framework that has few targets to measure. Moreover, none of the documents has any bearing or alignment with the 2015 manifesto of the PNM, nor is there any connection between Vision 2030 and the 2018 Budget Statement. It talks sustainable development, but the Government has not absorbed, in my view, the meaning of sustainable development enough yet.

On page 20 of the budget statement, if you pay attention to the Minister, you discover, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Finance, in his mind, is still very dependent on fossil fuel energy and energy income. This is what he said. I quote from him:

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“...it is now safe to say that the rebound in oil and gas production over the medium term will be stronger than originally anticipated.”

On page 27, the Minister of Finance asserts:

“The medium-term recovery will again be driven by the energy sector.”

And on pages 28 to 30 of the budget statement, a rosy picture of energy turnaround to 4.3 billion cubic standard feet is painted. In the Minister’s mind, energy is still king of the economy. So the Minister is still depending on the rebound and gas production from the Juniper, TROC, Angelin, Sercan and Macadamia and so on. This suggests that he is waiting on Juniper and the others to solve the revenue and budget deficit problem. He is not as concerned with the expenditure side of the equation, as indeed he should be.

The Minister is very enterprising in seeking out sources of revenue, but not so adept in addressing expenditure or rethinking expenditure patterns. The Auditor General’s report for fiscal year 2016 breaks down expenditure as follows: Current transfers to statutory boards and similar bodies, 12 per cent; debt servicing, 15 per cent; transfers and subsidies, 40 per cent; personnel expenditure, 17 per cent; goods and services, 11 per cent; development programmes, 4 per cent; minor equipment, 1 per cent. The pattern continued in 2017 and continues now for 2018. No real change in the pattern of expenditure, except that we can expect from what is going on, on the debt side a highest cost of debt servicing over the coming years, and certainly in 2018.

This raises an important question—it is a national question. What are the Minister of Finance and the Government going to do with the revenue from new oil and gas, which in any case is going to be reduced because of carried-forward losses taken by the companies, because the oil and gas producing companies lost income and did not make a profit when the price of oil was less? But what the Minister of Finance is going to do with the newfound revenue is very important. Is he going to save it and put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund or is he going to spend it? Will it serve productive investment or be eaten up in recurrent expenditure?

This is a critical development question at this juncture of our history. I would be interested in a considered response from the Minister on this particular question, because the answer to that question will determine whether the Minister of Finance is willing to have Trinidad and Tobago live within our means and to manage on this basis going forward, and this has implications for our sustainability as a nation.

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There are many disconnects in the budget. One of the problems in the 2018 Budget Statement is that there are many disconnects. One of these disconnects is the overemphasis on the accounting side which is necessary, important and urgent, but this is emphasized to the detriment of any sensible appreciation of the sustainable development process, so much so that a vision and framework for development are absent. Yet another disconnect is the lack of alignment between monetary policy, fiscal policy linked to priorities and an economic strategy linked to sustainable development which the Vision 2030 document talks about.

The Minister of Finance talks about medium fiscal framework, but the alignment of this to development agenda is not discernible at all. A major disconnect consists of the ideological and philosophical contradictions evident in the budget. Another is the glaring gap between talk and promises on the one hand, and action and implementation on the other.

If the Minister was not so obsessed with the accounting aspect of the budget, he might have considered the fact that unmanageable crime and the escalating murder rate is not just crime or safety and security issues, but a psychological issue for the citizenry. My colleague, the Member for Naparima mentioned that this morning. But he would have also considered that is a cost for business issue. It is an investment issue for the entrepreneur or businessman. It is an economic issue for the country, a confidence issue for the entire nation and ultimately a development issue for Trinidad and Tobago.

He may then have been prompted to ask the question, how many developing countries have been able to come back from the abyss of intensely escalating crime, especially since we have now surpassed Jamaica as the most dangerous country in the region, and are approaching this year 400 murders now, and it is possible, and I hope this does not happen, that we could get beyond the 400?

2.30 p.m.

As a Minister of Finance he may have considered if he thought about national security and the murder issue in this way, he may have considered not only the fact that capital for investment goes where returns on investment are most lucrative, but also the corresponding fact that capital is a coward and, therefore, does not journey to where it feels itself constantly under threat. [*Desk thumping*] Capital is smart, but it is also a coward, and I want the Prime Minister to take that into account when he is talking about the issue of foreign exchange hoarding and what are the implications for it. It is a psychological issue, tonnes of literature has been written about this.

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With such reflections, the Minister might have appreciated how big an economic development issue crime is and what a trigger unmanaged crime is to underdevelopment. With the crime situation hanging like a cloud over the country, Madam Speaker, it will be difficult to get confidence up, investment going and entrepreneurship energized. These are necessary for growth, job creation, commercial activity, economic buoyancy and sustainability. The effective containment of crime I want to emphasize, Madam Speaker, and the restoration of confidence in the general state of governance and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago are key prerequisites for getting out of the recession and beginning the process of growth. [*Desk thumping*]

A word on the crime situation, intelligence and the application of intelligence requires a concentrated effort. The best use of intelligence is to prevent crime from happening. When a crime is already committed, the best that you can do is to hope to solve it. Surgical precision is required for the application of intelligence in addition to concentrated effort. If you lockdown hot-spot communities as the Minister of National Security has done, and I know he has done that with some effect, you have to follow up on the consequent streamflow to other communities. This is not being done now, Madam Speaker, which is why crime is spreading everywhere.

The junior Minister for National Security says that there are less gang-related murders now. How does she know if you cannot detect the crime? Or is it that crime against an ordinary person is increasing in proportion? How to get at concentrated effort and precision from the police? Well the first thing is to motivate them beyond the shift. There is a psychology at work here. If policing is a job where you look forward to time off beyond the shift more than the concentrated effort and precision that is required during the shift, then we have a big problem. This is a situation that has to be tackled across to the police in every station.

The Prime Minister said he called the nine division heads in the country and told them to take charge and that they are now getting results; he said some of them. Well, please, share the results with us because an anxious population is very wary that nothing is happening and nothing is being done.

Most of the crime, Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, is on land. So let us ask the question: which is the better system of management, visually stimulating police and military presence everywhere or roadblocks out at peak hour traffic with pile up and confusion as a result? Police presence, rapid mobility at a moment's notice, communication interconnectivity, geographical control of the routes. This is what is needed, Madam Speaker.

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A lot of things also happen at sea. We have 12 boats now thanks to the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] Are they being effectively deployed with targeted objectives? How can you have Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs each doing their own thing? I heard him talk about strategic plans for each one of these this morning, but are they connected? Is there not a need for a maritime inter-agency task force? Is there not a need for the Coast Guard, Immigration, Customs, police to cover everything, containers, immigration, drugs, human trafficking, other crimes so that they talk to each other, connect with each other and work with each other? Have we charged anyone for the smuggled US currency in the container of ply board yet? What has happened to follow-up for the hand grenade that was dropped in Carli Bay? Has the carrier of the hand grenade escaped into the swamp with a bag on his shoulders? We do not know what was in the bag up to now. Where is that escapee now? What is he up to? Are the leaders of police and military and division leaders within police and military accountable for results? Do they have objectives and targets; who do they account to; are they effective? Why are the results so poor?

The national security budget over the last two years, I am using rough numbers now so do not jump on me, please. The national security budget over the last two years has been \$17 billion. A+ thousand persons have been murdered in the period; I am using rough numbers as I said. Does the citizenry realize that a rough calculation is that it costs \$17 million per murder in this country? You think, Madam Speaker, that this can be explained to a rational mind or bewildered citizen? With a detection rate that is worse than that in terms of proportion, I do not want to sensationalize, but that would make the cost of detection extremely high. So I do not even want to use the numbers because I am not trying to be sensational, but I want something done.

You think that you can explain that we are spending all of this money and not doing the detection to a victim's wife or husband or mother or father? I am not going to be unfair and say that the problem started with this particular Rowley regime, it has been going on for some time, but I will say that you are not doing a good job about it [*Desk thumping*] and we are not getting the results and people are getting no comfort whosoever. In fact, they are very jittery. The entire society now is living in fear; every citizen has to manage fear every day as part of the organization of their life.

And what about the air, Madam Speaker? We grounded four helicopters recently. The maintenance cost is too high they said, but we saw the value of helicopters in Dominica and elsewhere during the hurricane devastation in these countries. Do we not need air, land, sea capability for an interconnected

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capability of mutual reinforcement to deal with crime in the situation that we are in today?

The Minister talked here this morning about drones. Well, let me say that drones will only make sense, in terms of effectiveness, if you have land, sea and air properly covered. Do not go and waste money if you cannot get the basics right. If you cannot get that interconnectivity right, do not give people toys to play with all over the place. [*Desk thumping*]

National security; crime containment; the reduction of murders; the monitoring of gangs; the pursuit of white-collar criminals; the management of potential terrorists and terrorist threats and the effective management of Trinidad and Tobago's reputation as a tourist destination and as an investment opportunity, these things require a holistic approach. Whatever approach you are taking now, whatever you call it, it is not working. Our citizens need relief, our people need to live in peace and love, not in fear.

Not many people will know that there are TT nationals in prisons in other countries, some of them caught on their way to Syria. We know of the incident in Turkey which became a public international matter, but there are others. When people like that who are imprisoned in other countries, sometimes mobilizing the prisoners in those countries, when they come back to Trinidad and Tobago, what system do we have for monitoring them? How are we monitoring all the others who have come before? If they are good citizens when they come back here and they settle down and they "doh" have a problem and so on, there is no problem. But if we are in the process of all of these things happening, harbouring terrorist cells that nurture terrorists here, how does the Minister of National Security know about it, how does he contain and manage it, and how does he deal with it as a preventative measure? How are we managing a situation which may amount to nothing to worry about, maybe and I hope, but which can also without warning bubble up and explode one day?

I have raised this matter because the budget says little about national security. Vision 2020 does not mention safety and security of citizens with any prominence, not that it ignores it, but it is not as prominent as the five themes and the other things that it mentioned. It does not seem to be on Government's public agenda, they want to kind of, sort of keep it out of the radar so to speak. The Minister spoke about national security for an hour, but not about results.

Now, more than ever, concentrated effort in intelligence, visibility and presence, inter-agency coordination and collaboration and air, land and sea capability of mutual reinforcement and precision application of intelligence are

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necessary. The community collaboration now being proposed by the Government has revealed in the newspapers and elaborated here today by the Minister may be desirable, but only together with the other issues.

If we get some results on these, citizens will become happier and we could also work inter-country and inter-agency internationally to deal with the issues like advisories more effectively which are sent out from time to time. So collaboration is necessary at home in a very, very smart and constructive way, but it is also necessary internationally so that on the basis of progress made at home, we could support a stronger tourism and investment thrust abroad by what other people in other agencies in the world say about us. Yes, crime is a human issue, yes, it is a security issue, but it is a very big economic issue, I want to stress that. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I want to deal a little with the diversification issues. There is no change of paradigm here in the diversification issues. There is nothing to deal with in terms of innovation in this budget. I left an innovation policy that the Cabinet, our Cabinet had approved for the Minister of Planning and Development to action. This Government wants to put their own stamp on it, they sent it back to Cabinet, it has been stuck there somewhere and nothing has happened in terms of decision-making or action or application.

The Eximbank is our idea, it is on page 74 of our 2015 manifesto, but none of these ideas will work unless there is an understanding in tourism, in agriculture, in small business, in medium enterprises that technology is the key and technological innovation and technology-driven businesses are critical. Just one word on the Eximbank, I am sorry the Minister of Finance is not here, I hope he will respond to it. I want to know the practicality of it although we had also proposed it, because we had certain things in mind at the time, but I do not know what he has in mind. I do not know if he is going to roll over the foreign exchange with the manufacturing sector; whether it is going to be an additional foreign exchange dealer in the system; whether it is going to require recapitalization for the delivery of loans to the customers, because it already has a significant loan portfolio, and it is based on its asset based, and therefore, these are things that need to be clarified, so that not just us in the Parliament can understand or the people, but that the manufacturers themselves can understand.

And we had—the reason I talked about technology, we had an “Idea 2 Innovation Programme”. The Member for Laventille East was a beneficiary of that, which is to say you came with a good idea, and when you put the idea before a group of businessmen, et cetera, they made an assessment, and on the basis of

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that, they gave you some money in order to start up and to pursue the innovation. He was a beneficiary of that.

So, that kind of thinking is here now. Now, you have to go before a ministerial committee, a stiff one, on the basis of political patronage, they will then decide. I think this is a mistake, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] it will undermine everything.

The final thing, the other thing I want to say, is that this issue of the foreign exchange and the management of the foreign exchange price, and the price of money generally including the bank rates is a thing that requires real sophistication, and I do not know whose advice the Minister of Finance is taking because I notice all the documents from the Central Bank said a growth rate of minus 2.3 per cent in about nine documents that they produced before the *Review of the Economy* and the IMF was saying minus 5.1 per cent in their last report.

So if you are taking advice from the IMF at minus 5.1 per cent projection and advice from the Central Bank at minus 2.3 per cent projection, then it seems to me that you are going to have a little dissonance. So, I just want to say that he has to be very careful with this business of the exchange rate, and I want to deal with that a little bit because I think in a way they have put the country in a box by their economic policies. I want to say that by raising taxes, not only has the Minister of Finance put extreme pressure on the poor and vulnerable, he has systematically reduced disposable income from everyone. So consumer spending as a way—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if which to available yourself of it.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So consumer spending as a way of getting out of the recession and fuelling growth is dead. Madam Speaker, thank you very much. With the confidence level across the board at an all-time low with the minus 6.0 per cent decrease, decline, we have a real problem in the country.

With the situation going now where we are not yet able to dampen imports except by moral suasion, and we have no real strategies to deal with export, we have a situation really where—so you have no action on consumer confidence; you have no stimulus of investment; little reduction of imports; no big gains in exports; no steps forward out of the recession; no improvement in ease of doing

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business; no prospects for growth. So, in this situation you are giving the country, putting the country in a box and really devaluation becomes an option that you cannot avoid.

And I want to say that the Government should not have managed this in this way because the foreign exchange management question is related to all of those issues that I raised there in a circle, and if they were dealing with people who were giving them good advice, either they have ignored it or they have gone on a path which I cannot understand. And maybe I do not understand it, maybe what they are doing is too sophisticated, I “doh” know, but it does not seem so to me.

But what I will say is this, in that situation where you have a decline in everything, you have no prospects for growth, you have devaluation staring you in the face, what are the saving graces, Madam Speaker? The saving graces are a foreign reserve of 8.7 US dollars; a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of \$5.8 billion; an oil and gas from Juniper Trunk, Angelin, Sercan, Angostura, Macadamia and so.

The bad news is that the Government is 760 days with no plan, bad policies, poor governance, misdirected policies, indecision, incompetence, has led to a total loss of confidence and this has taken us to the brink of a precipice.

The good news; that because the People’s Partnership conserved the foreign exchange reserve and increased it, because the People’s Partnership increased the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and never thought of touching it and because the People’s Partnership changed the incentive system in energy to facilitate investment in 2013, do not forget we got upwards of \$5 million of investment from that particular project. [*Desk thumping*] These three things have given the country a reprieve, and the country can still hope that if citizens can move this Government out before they mash up everything, our country might still have a chance. [*Desk thumping*]

I alert the citizens of this country to the very true reality that they, in fact, do have the power. And, Madam Speaker, I want to close. I hope I will have enough time, but I want to close by talking a little bit about the future. Okay?

I want to share with you, Madam Speaker, a vision for the country and its possibilities. I want to say that we are living in country and a world in which technology is the master, it is driving everything, and knowledge is the absolute critical variable in all of this, [*Desk thumping*] so technology and knowledge. You are dealing with a scientific revolution in which there is a genetics revolution, there is quantum physics revolution which is changing the experience of reality, there is a nano-technology revolution in which you are packing more

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power in a single point of reference than anything else in the world. You have an information revolution including disinformation that is taking place now. And in that kind of world, Madam Speaker, the necessity is for a different approach to business, [*Desk thumping*] a different approach to innovation, a different approach to sustainable development, and sustainable development demands that perpetual innovation is a factor in any country's development and that means transformation of the entire education system.

So, I want to say that we must move in that direction, and that what is proposed here in this budget is very, very backward compared to where we need to be and where we need to go. [*Desk thumping*]

I do want to close in saying that I see \$5 million allocated for the Preysal Government School. I hope this time they will not take it out of the budget as they did last time and that they will build the school for the people of Preysal. They need it badly and I hope that it will be done.

I want to say to the Minister of Education through you, Madam Speaker, and Flanagin Town RC and Longdenville Presbyterian, they also need a school. The Presbyterian school is now housed in a community centre and Flanagin is housed in a church. These children are desperate, they are small schools, but they need to be attended to.

In my constituency the roads and drains are getting to be very horrible as they are all over the country now, and we really do need help and work in this part of the country. It needs attention, people are very hard-working, they are agricultural people, some of them, some in small businesses. There is need for dredging of the water courses. The local government is a necessity. Were it not for local government we would basically have no development in our part of the country, they are now, local government has worked well, but their allocation is lower, they are under severe stress. And if local government reform is to come here as the Government promised, they should bring it together with the Tobago House of Assembly reform that they are bringing to the Parliament of this country [*Desk thumping*] so that we could debate both.

I just want to close and say, Madam Speaker, I “doh” know if I have a minute? [*Crosstalk*] Three minutes. Okay. I would like to close on this note. Trinidad and Tobago is not a basket-case country. All right? We have problems yes, but we have been here before and we have solved the problems, and this country really needs leadership by example in the highest places. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot have this quarrelsome Government that we have here and you expect people to cooperate, it will not happen. All right? People will not cooperate with

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a quarrelsome, dismissive, arrogant government; [*Desk thumping*] they will not do it. And I want to say that we want to go into the future. We want to move into the future that is coming to us at the speed of light with all that scientific revolution that I was talking about having in so many areas.

In genetics research today, Madam Speaker, they can create an egg, they can create eggs, they can choose out of those eggs all the genetic factors within an egg, put it back in the woman and you have a situation in which the woman has choice and ultimately you get the healthiest baby in the world that is possible from your genetic pool with your husband. That is what is possible now.

In quantum physics, what is happening now is that you do not have to go somewhere to get an experience, you put the things on and you go through the experience and it is only after you have gone through that experience and it is almost perfect, that you then go and do the real experience because you have been through it so many times. And the most important of these, Madam Speaker, is artificial intelligence. [*Desk thumping*] The relationship between the way we live, the way we work, the way we operate as human beings and the way we interact with non-human intelligence, that is the future of the world, that is where we are going.

And if that is where we are going in the world and the Leader of the Opposition talked about the Fourth Industrial Revolution because she is on to that and she understands what is involved in that. If we do not take steps to get there, Madam Speaker, by the way we prepare our economy and the way we prepare our education system, we are going to be left back in the world because the rest of the world is moving apace and the future is coming to us at the speed of light. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for La Brea.

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Miss Nicole Olivierre): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to contribute to this Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2018”.

Madam Speaker, first I begin by congratulating our Minister of Finance on a superb presentation. [*Desk thumping*] And to those congratulations, I have to join the Minister of Planning and Development for it was only with their foresight and ensuring that our Vision 2030 was incorporated into this budget. Madam Speaker, transformation does not happen overnight and with this budget

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we begin the process of transforming Trinidad and Tobago from the waste, management and corruption of the previous UNC Government.

Madam Speaker, from taking office in September 2015, this PNM administration has been faced with several crises in the energy sector. We had the continued shortfall in natural gas production down from 4.1 bcf per day in 2012 to currently 3.3 bcf per day in 2016. We were faced with several plant closures in the Point Lisas estate with significant job losses. There was continued fall in oil production down from a high of 83,000 barrels per day in 2012 to 72,000 barrels per day at the end of 2016.

We have experienced a fall in global oil prices from a high of \$93 per barrel in 2014 to what we are presently at about \$49 per barrel today, and Petrotrin, various issues of production and the debt burden. So dealing with these issues at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Miss N. Olivierre:—the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has been preoccupied with dealing with these major issues in the energy sector and they had not been given adequate attention to two areas of the Ministry on which I will choose to focus my contribution today. One of those areas is renewable energy and energy efficiency.

In our Vision 2030, one of the themes deals with placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development. And it is under this theme you will find our goals, our national goals for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

One of the national outcomes under our Vision 2030 theme is to reduce the use of fossil fuels, and we have two clear measurable indicators along that theme. So whereas the previous Government would have just given some glib ideas and their intentions, we have clear measurable outcomes that we are—[*Desk thumping*] So in our effort to reduce fossil fuels, our policy is 10 per cent power generation by renewable energy sources by the year 2021.

3.00 p.m.

In his very first budget presentation as the Minister of Finance under this administration, the Member for Diego Martin North/East specified that policy directive, 10 per cent power generation by renewable energy sources. Another one of our outcomes is to reduce greenhouse emissions by 15 per cent by 2030. That is our nationally determined contribution as assented to in our signing up to the Paris accord. And the theme of improving energy efficiency, you will be

looking at the national outcomes in the number of energy audits concluded, and you are also looking at improving energy efficiency at the generation end, at our power generation facilities, and in our commercial buildings. These are ambitious targets, we must admit, from zero per cent power generation today by renewable energy sources, to move to 10 per cent by 2020. That is an extremely ambitious target. But we are confident that we will get there. What we are talking about is creating 283 megawatts of renewable energy and energy generation.

In an effort to chart our course towards achieving this objective, we have set about developing a roadmap. Now, to work on this we have gotten support from the European Union through their technical assistance facility for the CEF for all initiative. And I was recently pleased to be present and to receive from this technical assistance facility our road maps, which outline exactly the steps that we will be taking to achieve our very ambitious target that this Government identified in our very first budget. So, to attain 283 megawatts of renewable energy generation, we are looking at an optimal mix between photovoltaic, wind energy and waste to energy. So all of you who said that you who have heard no plans coming from this side of the House so far, I am giving you some concrete, definitive plans. [*Desk thumping*]

We have identified an optimal mix of 70 per cent photovoltaic that would be from solar power, 20 per cent wind power and 10 per cent waste to energy. As I continue I will go into details of how we intend to achieve each one of them. So, in moving from our current position to that 10 per cent renewable energy generation, there are various steps that we have to take along this roadmap. One of them is resource assessment, so that is determining what quantity of resource we have available for waste energy, for solar PV and for wind generation. Then, there are several policy initiatives that we have to implement. For example, rationalisation of electricity tariffs. Because each of these generation mechanisms would come with a different cost. There are some institutional arrangements that have to be set up. Do we establish an association of renewable energy generation producers or not? There is a great deal of capacity building that needs to be done, because we currently do not have a lot of the technical resources required to take us there, hence we needed to get that support from the European Union to come up with this road map in the first place.

And there is the legal and regulatory framework that is required, particularly since we will be moving from different sources of energy generation and how do we incorporate those onto the grid. So grid integration is one of the key initial steps from a legislative framework that would allow us to incorporate renewable energy into our energy mix. We have been speaking about getting on board the

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renewable energy train for several years now, but so far we have not been successful in making any headway. Now, the last administration took some steps in this direction, so their Cabinet in 2014 established an inter-agency feeding tariff committee which was chaired by the Ministry to produce a FIT policy, and they made recommendations regarding grid integration. But I want to go into some details about how they approached it. See if you start a process bad the end result could never be good. If you start baking a cake with eggs that are spoiled, the end product would not be palatable. [*Desk thumping*]

So in establishing this committee, the last administration, they gave them the answer that they wanted to come up with. They told them to come up with a feeding tariff policy, but a feeding tariff is not the only mechanism for grid integration, and in fact, the report from our consultants show that feeding tariff is not even the best mechanism, is not suitable for waste to energy, and is not suitable for utility-scale solar PV. So what they asked this committee to do was come up with a policy that could only service small scale solar insulation, and with that policy in place we would never make any headway in being able to attain our 10 per cent target.

And what is curious to note is that the committee did its work. And then in June 2015, the election around the corner, their Cabinet hurriedly went and approved this policy so that they could go on the platform and wave a document and say this is what we have done. But when we came and we reviewed the policy, and we were trying to draft legislation, but the technocrats had certain concerns, and we called the members of the committee back together and showed it to them, and we were surprised when they revealed to us that the final document that went to Cabinet was materially changed from what they had submitted.

Hon. Member: No.

Miss N. Olivierre: Yes, it was. They excluded options for financing renewable energy initiatives. So it is no wonder that we have not made any progress whatsoever in this here. So, in their haste to have something that they could wave at the election platform to say they did something before the election, they have produced something that, for want of a better word, was stillborn because it could progress no further. [*Laughter*]

So this leaves us now, so we have to go back and redo all this work. But I know that we have re-established a team between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Public Utilities, with support from the Attorney General's Office, and we will be relooking that entire policy. We will be reviewing, we would be looking at all the various options for financing renewable

energy. There is competitive tendering which is more suitable for industrial utility-scale solar PV. There is net building and net metering options that they did not consider. So, this time the work that this Government is doing, when we come out with the legislation, it will be something that will prove attractive for use. [*Desk thumping*]

Our other target is 15 per cent greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2030, and we have identified the transportation sector as the main sector—one of the main sectors for achieving that. Now, in our budget you noticed that the Minister of Finance has maintained the incentives for the hybrid vehicles, and we have gone a little bit further—well not just the hybrid vehicles, but electric vehicles—and we are trying to encourage persons to import smaller vehicles. Trinidad is a very small island. We do not need a large vehicle with large fuel capacity to go anywhere. So increasing use of smaller vehicles, smaller CNG vehicles, smaller electric vehicles, this is the way towards achieving our greenhouse gas emission target. This is where we start shifting the paradigm. You see, our ultimate aim is to eliminate the use of fossil fuel vehicles altogether, and this is not just something that we dreamed up in Trinidad and Tobago. The world today, globally we are moving towards zero emission vehicles. [*Desk thumping*] The use of electric cars is growing in countries throughout the world.

In Norway, their Government has a clear target that all new passenger vehicles and vans by 2025 will be zero emission vehicles. In China, they are working on a plan. They do not have a date yet, but they are moving towards electric vehicles as well. Britain, they will ban sales of diesel cars starting in 2040. For France, 2040 again is their target to ban the sales of diesel vehicles. In India, the target is even earlier, 2030. Germany has not given it a date, but they acknowledged that it is only a matter of time before Germany too would move on this zero emission vehicles. And it is not just countries that are making a statement, but the electric vehicle manufacturers they are gearing up their production for this target as well. BMW group, 100,000 electric cars in 2017. They intend that by 2025 20 per cent of their—they are looking to target 25 per cent of the electric vehicle market by 2025. Chevrolet had 30,000 electric vehicles sold in 2017. Chinese manufacturers are looking at 4.5 million electric vehicles by 2020. Chrysler, looking at 100,000 electric vehicles sales by 2024.

So, the world is moving towards electric vehicles. And while I am on the topic of vehicles, I just want to address our increase in fuel prices. Though there are still some elements out there on social media who seem to think that our increase in the diesel price was too draconian and too drastic, but I want to reassure you, and that, yes, we had a bit of an increase, but fuel costs in Trinidad

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and Tobago are by no means excessive. In the entire Western Hemisphere, there are only two countries with fuel prices lower than ours, that is, Venezuela and Ecuador. Prior to the reading of the budget our price of diesel was the ninth cheapest in the world. With that minimal increase we are now number sixteen in the world, but that is globally. So our increase in fuel prices is not an enormous burden for the population to bear.

Earlier you would have heard the Member for Laventille West indicate that Norway managed to save \$1 trillion in their fund, coming out of revenue from their energy sector. If I would inform you that Norway, as a country, it is an oil and gas producer, they have the highest cost of diesel in the world; \$1.84 per litre. That works out to something like \$12.55 per litre compared to our mere \$3.41. So you see what a country like Norway has done. Rather than put their valuable reserves, their valuable resources into fuel subsidies, instead they let their citizens bear the full cost of fuel and they were able to save one trillion dollars in a fund for their sustainability. So that is a more responsible position.

So, Madam Speaker, do not condemn this Government for its action at easing off of the fuel subsidy. This is something that has become necessary at this time, as we recognized that the world is moving away from fossil fuel vehicles. When we look at the case of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia produces 10 million barrels of oil per day. Their reserves are second only to Venezuela, but with the oil price crash of 2015, Saudi Arabia would have suffered a similar fate to Trinidad and Tobago, by seeing a significant and precipitous drop in their revenue. But, Saudi Arabia has decided that they will no longer allow themselves to be vulnerable to the price of crude oil, because they have recognized that they no longer have the power to control the price of crude oil. And not wanting to be vulnerable to oil price shocks, they have started a new strategy, also recognizing that the future is moving away from fossil fuel vehicles, they have started investing in oil refineries, but they are not stopping their refineries at producing vehicular fuels. Their vision 2030—I would quote from their Vision 2030 statement which says:

“We are determined to reinforce and diversify the capabilities of our economy, turning our key strengths into enabling tools for a fully diversified future. As such, we will transform Aramco from an oil producing company into a global industrial conglomerate.”

So what that means is, they are taking their strength, their oil production, but they are not limiting their country's future to the vagaries of spikes in oil prices. What Saudi Arabia has done, is they have started investing in refinery capacity, but they are not stopping at vehicular fuels. They are going into downstream

petrochemicals, so the price of oil will fluctuate, but the price of those downstream petrochemicals they will have a better control over it. So you see this is a clear signal that the world is moving away from fossil fuel, and it is a clear signal to us in Trinidad and Tobago, that we need to start changing our paradigm away from that dependence on oil and gas, and moving away from it towards new initiatives and new ways in which we can control our economy.

Another area of renewable energy growth that will take place in this—that we are well under way in moving along within the Ministry, is the area of waste to energy. At my last budget contribution last year, I would have indicated that we had sent out a request for an expression of interest for a consultant to help us develop our EOI, for a contractor to produce our waste to energy facility. I would like to report that we did indeed complete that process, and now we have even gone further, and we had—a month ago we issued an EOI for a company to build/own/operate/transfer, and to give us a proposal for a build/own/operate/transfer waste to energy facility at the Beetham Landfill.

So, we have gone one step further from where we were at this point last year. Part of the scope of the project would be a waste characterization study to an integrated national waste management programme, and also proposals for project financing. We believe that this project is feasible, because as a nation we produce about 1.5 kilograms of waste per person per day. That is according to data from SWMCOL. So, this is more than adequate to support at least a facility that can take about 23,000 tonnes per month of waste.

And I must add, that the new tax imposed by the Minister of Finance on imported tires, that \$20 cost for tire disposal, this would certainly assist us in being able to adequately ensure that our waste management facilities can be afforded. [*Desk thumping*] All these measures are in place to ensure that our citizens start to think more responsibly. See, gone are the days of wanton consumption and not caring about anything. The wild days of the UNC spend, spend, spend, like there is no tomorrow are over. We have to become more responsible citizens. Each person has to start looking at what is happening.[*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, another area in which the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is going to be placing greater focus, is in the mineral sector. The role of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries with regard the mineral sector is to promote the facilitation of effective and efficient management and development of the mineral resources in general, and the State mineral resources in particular. Now the effective management and monitoring of the mineral sector is very

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important for constituencies such as Toco/Sangre Grande, perhaps Cumuto/Manzanilla. Because when you are flying over Trinidad, if you are low enough, and you look down you can see the pockets of degradation of our Northern Range with wanton illegal quarrying.

So the Ministry continues in its monitoring role to monitor our mining and processing operations to ensure that these operators are compliant with the environmental rehabilitation procedures put into their licences. But, sad to say, I am sure this is no news to many. Any of you who have traversed the Northern Range would be able to tell you that all is not well in this sector. Madam Speaker, there are currently 87 active mining operators, of which the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is aware. And by “is aware” I mean we have some sort of relationship with them, but, unfortunately only seven of these operators currently have valid mining licences. So while we know of 87 operators, and we visit them routinely and take information from them, they are operating without licences. And there is a reason for that. And how did we get to this position? And mind you, I am not speaking about the illegal operators who are the ones where we find them we have the police move in and lock them up. These are the so-called legal operators that are unlicensed.

So, how did we get to a position of so many unlicensed operators by a Ministry that is responsible for monitoring the operations? Well, I will tell you. In the period 2009 to 2011, there were 45 active licences with various tenants from one year to five years. But, the previous administration, as they are wont to do, decided to upgrade the regulations. You see, the mineral sector is governed by the Minerals Act, 61:03. This Act would have replaced the Mines, Borings and Quarries Act of 1907. So when the Minerals Act came in and replaced the old Act, new regulations were not made with it. So, the old regulations were used. And under the old regulations, mining operators would have gotten a licence, and the Ministry would have certain rights, and the operators had their responsibilities to put a rehab plan in place, and do a mining survey design plan and everything.

But, again, as I said, the previous administration designed to update the regulations. And, in a rush to get something passed before the 2015 election, in June 2015, they laid those regulations in the Parliament, with negative resolution. So, we find ourselves in a situation. Similar to what happened with the retail marketing licences, where the previous administration would have changed the form of the licence, and to date the only operator that has a new retail marketing licence would be the one that I opened at St. Christopher two years ago. We find that where we have all these gas stations now currently operating without valid

licences, because of the work of the last administration changing the licence, it is the exact same situation that we find here with the quarry operators. You see, because of the poor quality of the regulations and the onerous and unachievable standards that they have put in place, the operators are finding it very difficult to get the new licence.

Madam Speaker, I am not a legal person, but I know that when you are introducing new legislation to an industry that has been in existence for decades, you would put in some grandfather clauses so that the parties that fell under the old legislation would find a way to come in, in line with the new legislation. But, the new regulations had no such provisions. So, all the old operators were required to reapply afresh, like it is the first time, for their existing businesses. But, Madam Speaker, although that stipulation was put in place, there was no penalty for operators not coming on board.

So, on the one hand, you introduce a new licensing regime that is onerous and almost unachievable, and on the other hand, there is nothing to say that you must come on board. So, we find ourselves in a situation where as licences expire as the years go by, one-year licences expire, five-year licences expire, companies fill in the applications, but because they are so much stringent regulations being put on to them, they are unable to obtain the new licence, but at the same time we do not stop them from operating. So, what we have moved from is a situation where all the operators that were known to us had a licence. They came in annually and they renewed that licence, or they came in every five years and renew that licence. Now, we have, with each year that passes, the number of operators operating our quarries without valid licences is growing year by year. And as this continues, we find more and more operators—no licence. So, now there is nothing that the Ministry can use legislatively to enforce any provisions against.

Now, with this type of mismanagement of aspects of the sector has to come to a stop. So this administration, we are now going to start relooking at this process, relooking at the regulations, because the regulations have several flaws. For one thing, a 90-day timeframe was put in for applicants to have all their documents completed. And if the applicants do not put it in within that 90-day period, they have to restart the process all again. But, as part of the approval process, they have to get approvals from other State agencies, but there is no timeframes or no stipulations put in there for the other agencies to fulfil their end of it. So, you find a situation where you have restrictions on the operator in their application process, but at the other end of it the agencies do not act.

When I went into the Ministry in 2015, I became aware of the growing number of unlicensed operators, and I said, look, we need to get this licence

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process going. And one of the steps was, once you received an application, you need to publish it in the newspapers so that anyone who wants to raise an objection to that application can raise an objection. So, when I asked them to publish the list of applications, they gave me a list of over 30-something applications to publish. So I asked them just indicate the date that the applications were made, and there were applications that were made in 2012, 2013 that had never been published. So, in 2015 we finally got the minerals committee to publish a list of applications. But sadly, that is as far as they went.

Now, another key problem with the regulations, another key area that was omitted—and this was done in their haste to have that regulation passed by the Parliament—is that there was absolutely no enforcement provision to deal with illegal mining. Illegal mining has become a growing problem, and these regulations were laid with absolutely no provisions for enforcement. Now, the committee that did the report for the previous administration, they made some recommendations for setting up of a specialized squad that would look at minerals and look at quarry operations. They would have given them powers of arrest, they would have given them the power to search without a warrant, they would have given them the power to forfeit the minerals so illegally obtained, and to forfeit the equipment. But without those provisions being put into the regulations, we are currently struggling now with how to deal with illegal mining operators. And you are well aware of how rampant that problem has become.

So, this Government, with the support of our Attorney General, is currently reviewing mineral regulations which we will be putting into a new miscellaneous provision, illegal mining Bill, which will incorporate all these enforcement procedures.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I drafted it already.

Miss N. Olivierre: It is already drafted. [*Desk thumping*] The Attorney General is right, it was originally drafted. It was originally drafted in 2014. However, we are reviewing it, because what we recognized—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I have redrafted it.

Miss N. Olivierre: Yes. We recognized that. Okay, so he has redrafted it, and what we are now including in it is that the previous draft did not make any provisions for treating with the stockpiling of the materials.

You see, how these illegal operators operate, they just go in in the night—well, they do not even need to go in the night, because it is remote territory. So they go in with their backhoes and their trucks, they excavate the material and

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then they take it to a location somewhere. I am sure the Member for Oropouche East might be familiar with this type of operations, because I understand that a property that he may be related with has been used as a stockpile. [*Laughter*] I understand, I cannot say for sure.

Madam Speaker, so, with the absence in the previous draft, there was no way that we can go to—if an officer of the minerals department, division of the Ministry, sees a stockpile of material at a particular location, there is no provision under which they can approach that person and ask, “Can you show me the receipt where you purchased this material so that I am certain it came from a legal mining site?” So there is currently no way that we can know. So, the way to catch the illegal operators, really, would be to go to where they are stockpiling the material. And once you can identify that the material that is stockpiled—once the person who owns that premises cannot explain how they got that material, whether by way of a receipt for purchase, or showing that they themselves have a quarry somewhere else. Because they cannot show that that material was legally obtained—[*Interruption*]—once they cannot show that that material was legally obtained, then it implies that it may have been obtained from an illegal source. So, in a similar way that we have the “explain your wealth” legislation, the “explain the source of your material wealth”. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, these are two areas of the Ministry of Energy that, as I said, have not been given the detailed focus that was required, because of all the other troubles in the oil and gas sector. But, rest assured that now that there are additional resources within the Ministry, that all aspects of the Ministry’s work will be reviewed with a fine tooth comb. [*Desk thumping*] Now, Madam Speaker, you are aware that I represent the constituency that is often in the news, sometimes for good, sometimes for lesser good. But I would like to spend the bulk of the contribution speaking about what is happening in my constituency. Because, Madam Speaker, the residents of La Brea constituency have always been very strong supporters of this great party, and as such [*Desk thumping*] they require the strongest of representation. So, the bulk of my contribution will deal with issues in La Brea.

One of the main issues that we have had troubling us, but I cannot say over the past few or two—one of the longest standing issues in my constituency has been challenges with water supply. I remember my mom when she first moved into her new house in Santa Flora, back in 1968. I remember then Muriel Donawa Mc Davidson was the election candidate there, and she came to our house during her campaign, and my mom asked her, what will you do for us if you were elected? And Mrs. Muriel Donawa Mc Davidson, she promised that, if

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elected, we would get proper supply of water. Well, my mom voted that year in that election, and she was elected, but a proper supply of water was not forthcoming, and my mom never voted in another election until 2015 when she had to go to the polls and vote for me. [*Desk thumping*] So I am trying to show that challenges with water supply have been going on for decades in the Santa Flora/Palo Seco area. And this year, as the representative—this year we had a particularly bad dry season, and we had some real difficulties with water supply.

3.30 p.m.

But as the representative this year I basically tried to “take in front”. And I went to WASA to find out what their issues were to see how we can deal with this problem going forward. So I would like my residents of La Brea constituency to understand what the water situation is within our constituency, so you can know that your Member of Parliament is looking to solve your long-standing issues.

Now, the La Brea constituency is quite extensive. So it starts off in Aripero and goes all the way down to Guapo where it borders with Point Fortin. On the other end of it, it starts in Quarry where it borders with Fyzabad and Siparia and then heads down to Erin where it again meets back up with Point Fortin.

The areas from Aripero to Rousillac, they are served by the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and they also get some supply from the Point Lisas—well, Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the Point Lisas Desalination Plant. That is water coming south from central area. Areas between La Brea and Point Fortin, La Brea to Guapo, they are served from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant. But in the area where I live, so from Quarry Village to Erin where we have the greatest difficulty, this area is served by the Chatham Water Treatment Plant and what I was able to discover is that the production capacity at the Chatham Water Treatment Plant is 1.5 million gallons per day.

However, the demand for supply from this plant is 1.7 million gallons per day. So ultimately you see we have a mismatch. So, as a result of this, this entire area, from Quarry Village to Erin, is put on a rotating schedule so you get water one or two days per week. Now, I hope the Member for Fyzabad is listening because part of his constituency is served in this area and the Member for Siparia, well I am sure she will—he would take the information back to her.

So we have a situation where the demand in an area is less than the capacity. And earlier this year, I mean during the dry season, there were some challenges with the wells at Chatham so that further reduced their capacity. So this would explain why we had such a difficult time. The water transmission system in the

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area is all connected, it is a ring. So water can conceivably come from any of the available sources and feed into the other sources once there is excess capacity.

So water from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant can be used to supplement the supply for the areas that are fed by the Chatham Water Treatment Plant. Whilst we had problems with the wells at Chatham, we also had a reduced capacity at the Point Fortin Desalination Plant, so that is why we had that issue. But, through my discussions with WASA they were able to indicate to me what we are doing to address these problems.

You see, WASA is currently doing a supply upgrade. They are currently building a 24-inch-diameter pipeline from the South Oropouche Booster to the Union Industrial Estate. This is to bring the additional water that is required for the industrial development in La Brea. So once that is done, that additional water would then displace some of the water that is supplied by the Point Fortin Desalination Plant. So with that displacement, then water from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant can then be transferred over to supplement the supply for areas that are supplied with Chatham. So Member for Fyzabad, you should rest assured that with the increase in the water supply that is coming to my area you will also benefit. So I think you can also thank the Ministry of Public Utilities and WASA for making that intervention. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Construction on that pipeline has already commenced and a number of my constituents have gotten jobs on that project. So, it is not a case of every day is next year, that project is ongoing and I believe [*Desk thumping*] if you look at the budget there is some \$93 million that has been allocated in the budget for this project. [*Desk thumping*] So we could look forward to that completing soon. And there should more or less be an end to water troubles in the area after some 50 years.

Staying with public utilities, there are a number of isolated areas within my constituency that are without a supply of electricity. They are not very far from a mains, but there is minimal capital cost that is involved by the residents. So some of these areas are: Stewell Road; there is Pangola; there is Francis Trace, Santa Flora; Alexander Village, Santa Flora.

So, T&TEC has been very responsible with us and with the Utilities Assistance Programme under the Ministry of Public Utilities for which I see there has been a nice allocation of \$3.5 million, can rest assured that persons who cannot afford to make their capital contribution to get their electricity supply that you will be getting support and you will be getting a new supply of electricity. [*Desk thumping*]

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On the issue of streetlights. Well, it seems as though most of the lights in the country were probably installed around the same time because throughout Trinidad we see there are streetlights that are blowing, that are becoming non functional at the same time. But I can say that in the La Brea constituency, T&TEC has been working very fast and they are—as soon as my office reports any areas where there are a number of streetlights that are blown T&TEC has been very responsive. Very, very responsive. [*Crosstalk*] I do not know if it is luck or maybe it is because I take the time to make representation on behalf of my constituents. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure if other Members of Parliament make that extra effort, you know, drive around their constituencies, meet with their constituents, identify the problems that they have, go in—I can tell you another instance. [*Crosstalk*]

Earlier this year when we had—

Hon. Members: “Oooh.”

Madam Speaker: Order.

Miss N. Olivierre: Madam Speaker, some of you may recall, we had one of our conversations with that—Point Fortin had the pleasure of hosting the Prime Minister in a conversation at Point Fortin and I had the pleasure of moderating that session. And I received a question that came from a viewer on TV, which was given to me on a piece of paper and it was a woman called Sandra Singh who asked: When will the residents of Pangola Road get electricity? Now, I did not read that question out at the forum because I felt this was something that I could deal with quietly, without bringing it to the national attention.

So, following that meeting, I sent my team into Pangola Road to meet with the residents. But I did not go in alone, I called T&TEC and asked them to send a representative with me. And we went into Pangola Road with T&TEC and they took down all the information. They identified what is required and I can rest assured that the residents of Pangola Road after—who have not had electricity up to this point— T&TEC has become aware of their situation and T&TEC is doing the necessary work that we will be able to finally bring electricity supply to the residents of Pangola Road. [*Desk thumping*] And this is because, you know, this young lady from Pangola Road looked at the conversation. You see, she took the opportunity to pay attention to the conversation with the Prime Minister. She followed our advice. She was not there present, but she did send in her question.

So I want you all to know that when this Government makes a commitment, when we are doing a show and we say the persons who are not present you can

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send in your questions, rest assured that we do take note of it, we do take it seriously because this a caring Government. [*Desk thumping*] Pay attention to the needs so—even if you do not get a personal response right away, rest assured that someone took note of your concern and it is being addressed. [*Interruption*] A caring Government, yes. On that note, you know, with all this support, this wealth of support that La Brea constituency has been getting from WASA and T&TEC, I really have to thank the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Members: Which one?

Miss N. Olivierre: Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure, in time, those on the opposite side will get a chance to meet him in this House because I am sure one of you will quickly have a question to ask him. You know, Sen. Le Hunte, for his very first public appearance, his very first public event as Minister of Public Utilities, he came to my constituency in Palo Seco to commission the lights on, not one but two recreation grounds. And for those of you who are concerned about his heritage, let me tell you something. The people of Palo Seco welcomed him with open arms. You know why, because he was returning home to his birth place. [*Desk thumping*] For those of you who are not aware, Sen. Le Hunte was born in my constituency in Daly Village, Santa Flora. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Tell them, tell them.

Miss N. Olivierre: Shortly thereafter he moved to Crest Camp, Fyzabad. So the Member for Fyzabad should be careful because who knows if he may wish to come into this House in the next term. Take note. He moved to Fyzabad, eh, take note.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for La Brea, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish. Please proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss N. Olivierre: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are a number of other projects that are earmarked for my constituency in this budget. Along the lines of infrastructure, there is a \$1.8 million in the Infrastructure Development Fund for the stabilization of the La Brea shoreline. And I must add that I have to also thank the Minister of Works and Transport because, following his tour of my area on the 19th of August, within two weeks work started on resurfacing a stretch of the road from Quarry Village to Santa Flora which is one of the areas that is started. So we thank the Minister of Works and Transport for his work in La Brea. I also have to thank the Minister of Community

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Development, Culture and the Arts for the sod-turning that was done at the Quarry Village Community Centre.

Now, Quarry Village has been trying to get a community centre for the last 60 years and finally under this PNM Government, [*Desk thumping*] I can attest that last week UDeCOTT handed over the site to the contractor for work to begin. So thank you Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. And I have to say thanks to the Ministers of Education, because \$10.5 million has been put in the budget to repair primary schools in my constituency. And to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, many of my constituents have received keys to new homes. In Pierre Road, Hubertstown, Lake View. So I have to thank the Minister of Housing and Urban Development. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is something that weighs very heavily on my heart. Now—was it yesterday?—two days ago the Member for Arima spoke about the initiatives that are being done at the primary and secondary school levels to address literacy challenges. He spoke about the student monitoring programme which is being done at the primary level and I have to compliment the Minister for that.

Now, at the 2017 SEA examination the student that score the highest, Lexi Balchan, is a student from my constituency. And we were all very proud of that, but that prompted me to take a look at the performance of the primary schools throughout my constituency and I even incorporated some that are in Fyzabad and some that are in Point Fortin, because my constituents attend schools in neighbouring constituencies. And you will be shocked to know that of the 24 schools that I looked at, 80 per cent of these schools performed below the national average at the SEA level. This is in maths, language and essay; 80 per cent of the schools in my constituency are underperforming. I view this as a crisis. And as the Member for Laventille West earlier said, those special situations require special attention.

So as MP, I called all the principals together to a meeting so I could get to the bottom of what is really happening in our primary schools. And we discovered what are some of the causes of this poor performance. Lack of parental support was number one at the top, but also administrative challenges, teachers/student competencies were identified as key causes. But I did not just stop at having a meeting to identify the problems. So working with the principals I came up with a quite comprehensive plan to address this underperformance issue.

Now the plan encompasses six phases: diagnostic phase, to identify the hindrances to learning; remedial phase, to provide remedial training; increase

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motivation levels; satisfy social needs; increase stakeholder involvement; and raising the competencies of staff levels. Now, I want to say something. Yesterday, the Member for Princes Town was very critical of the Government for spending money on a golf course and said instead that we could have taken that money and send three students to university. I want to disagree fundamentally with that, because it is well known that for a child to be successful, they need to have a holistic development and sports and cultural participation is a very critical part of it. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, underperformance at the primary school level is not new. It did not happen this year because I checked it out. And it is not unique to the La Brea constituency. If you look at the statistics for 2017, 12.3 per cent of the students who wrote the SEA exam in 2017, that is a total of 2,236 kids, scored below 30 per cent. All right? And, Madam Speaker, I want you to tie that back with the growing trend of violence in secondary schools. Over the last two days, we have all been assailed with these disturbing videos of violent acts taking place at the Siparia West Secondary School. Madam Speaker, that disturbed me greatly. Now, the school is in the constituency of the Member for Fyzabad, but many of my constituents, their kids attend that school. And I would like to say that the young men who perpetrated these acts of violence—bullying, obscenities—that these young men are victims of UNC education policy. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: “Wheyyy!”

Hon. Member: “Whappen to you?”

Miss N. Olivierre: Madam Speaker, I place this squarely at the feet of the Member for Siparia. Madam Speaker, when the Member for Siparia was the Minister of Education, she piloted the legislation—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Miss N. Olivierre: She piloted the legislation.

Madam Speaker: Please continue, continue.

Miss N. Olivierre: When the Member for Siparia was Minister of Education, she piloted legislation to stop corporal punishment in schools without putting in place any alternate measures to instil discipline in schools. And fast-forward that to when the Member for Siparia was Prime Minister and then decided—and they had this wonderful education policy, “No child left behind”, send each child writing SEA to secondary school whether or not they are prepared. So what you are seeing today is the manifestation of UNC education policy. You send kids into the secondary schools system who cannot cope at that level. If you look at the

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revised *Social Sector Investment Programme* it reveals that the Ministry of Education now has to implement a new programme, “Penmanship with a purpose”. Why? Because the last administration focused on giving laptops to students but did not take the time to figure out if they could read or write. So now in this administration we have to start teaching penmanship at the Form 1 level. That is a failure of the UNC’s education policy that has us in this position today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, Pleasantville Secondary School. They had just over 100 students wrote CSEC examinations this year. You know how many students left that school with five O level passes?—four students. Four students out of just over 100 kids, Pleasantville Secondary School. Four students out of just over 100 kids leave the school with five CSEC passes. Clearly, it means that those children went into the secondary school ill-equipped; maybe they were not prepared. Madam Speaker, in 2006 under the Education Minister, Hazel Manning, there was a practice of keeping kids back in the primary school until they reached a minimum level to do the SEA exam. But when the Member for Siparia became Prime Minister, they did away with that practice. They just sent you to secondary school, whether you got 10 or you got nought in SEA. And that is the harvest that we are reaping today. Seeds that were sown by that administration. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, at least this Government with two ably qualified Ministers in the Ministry of Education, we have had to put into place now a Form 1 programme to try to adjust these literacy challenges that we have currently. So thankfully—for all the parents of Trinidad and Tobago, rest assured that with the PNM Government your children’s education, focus will come back on ensuring that your children are educated.

Madam Speaker, before my time runs out, I just have to make one more point. During my time focusing solely on my constituents, I had the opportunity to interact with what I would like to call our “living ancestors”. Madam Speaker, there are currently nine centenarians in my constituency. That is nine persons over 100 years old and I had the honour earlier this year to interact with them and to celebrate with them. But not only that, I spent a lot of time having conversations with them and I was able to put together a nice appreciation event with them, but the event was not about the appreciation. What I was able to do is do some research into their lives and I was able to produce a nice biography chronicling the lives of the centenarians in my constituency. I raise this point now because I think that as representatives we need to cherish our elderly persons in our community. And I would urge each and every one of our Members—

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Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for La Brea, your speaking time has now expired. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I rise to contribute in this budget debate 2017/2018, let me first start by wishing well my Chinese community in Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] on a very auspicious day for us, we celebrate Double Ten today and I would also like to wish my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, all the best. [*Crosstalk*] Oh, you are Taiwanese. [*Crosstalk*] But I will still give him a pack of my salt prunes later, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Relax, relax.

Madam Speaker, I am having a conversation with you this afternoon, [*Desk thumping*] because you are in charge of this House and my attention is on you this afternoon, Madam Speaker. So if people try to disturb us here this afternoon, I hope you take notice of that. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family of the prison officer who was slain over the weekend. Madam Speaker, I am hearing a conversation disturbance already.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, please proceed.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know they do not like us to talk. [*Crosstalk*] I also would like to congratulate the Opposition Leader, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, SC, [*Desk thumping*] for a fantastic, brilliant response to the budget of 2017/2018. And I would like to also congratulate all my MPs on this side, [*Desk thumping*] and we heard a visionary performance and response by Dr. Bhoe Tewarie, the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central.

Madam Speaker, you know, I was not going to trouble the Member for La Brea. She did well up until 45 minutes in her speech. And I want to say, I will leave the part with the education to be dealt with in a holistic serious way by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East. [*Crosstalk*] But you know it is—you see, I am getting disturbance already in our conversation, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Young: That is the love.

Mr. D. Lee: That is the love. Madam Speaker, you know, I want to welcome back the Member for La Brea, back to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. She was on a sabbatical for about 12 or 15 months and I know if you were there in the Ministry of Energy, Madam Speaker, you see the ghost oil situation that we are having, that would not have happened under her watch. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. D. Lee: I am positive of that.

Hon. Member: Decent woman.

Mr. D. Lee: Because as soon as she left the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is why she got fired.

Mr. D. Lee:—something happened with the oil and the production of oil in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. Something happened, I do not know what.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to leave the MP for Toco/Sangre Grande. I mean, yesterday afternoon when she ended the debate she gave a very passionate and moving about the youths in her constituency and the crime and everything. But you know, Madam Speaker, my colleague behind me, the Member for Chaguanas West, and I must thank him, there is an article in the Sunday *Trinidad Guardian*, 19th of March, 2017.

“Sans Souci project halted: Criminals demanded \$50,000 from contractor”.

So there was a sort of extortion in her—

Mr. Singh: Tax.

Mr. D. Lee: A tax extortion in her constituency. And what is noteworthy in this article, Madam Speaker, that she is talking about the youths and the criminals and she is rehabilitating them, there was a meeting by one Mr. Sinanan, I think, and according to the article, he is the Minister of Works and Transport. And he had a discussion with the same group of men, two Sundays ago, at the office of the Toco/Sangre Grande MP, Glenda Jennings-Smith.

Hon. Members: “Oooh!”

Mr. D. Lee: You know, I am a bit curious why would that happen, but I leave that right there for others to deal with. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed again. I do not know why they do not want our conversation.

Madam Speaker, let me get into my debate here this afternoon. And you know, you must start, go back, when this Government came into, to run this country. In his first budget presentation the Minister of Finance called his budget statement of 2016:

“Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together. Presented by the Honourable Colm Imbert, the Minister of Finance, October 5th, 2015.”

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In that budget presentation, Madam Speaker, and I just give some three sets of numbers here. In his 2015/2016 budget, he budgeted a deficit of \$2.8 billion. Do you know what that deficit ended in 2016? That deficit ended at \$7.9 billion; [*Desk thumping*] \$5.1 billion over the projected budgeted amount.

In his second year, Madam Speaker, he tagged his budget statement:

“Shaping a Brighter Future—A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth. Presented September 30, 2016, by the Minister of Finance.”

In that budget document he budgeted a \$6.0 billion deficit. Do you know what was the actual figure and counting as we speak today? Over \$12.6 billion. [*Desk thumping*] And they want us to say that is performance. They want to tell this country that is performance.

Madam Speaker, in his 2017/2018 budget statement, he tagged it:

“Changing the Paradigm...” Presented on October 02, 2017, last week, by the Honourable Colm Imbert, Minister of Finance.

He projected a budget deficit of 4.76. Do you know, on Friday at a Belmont meeting that the PNM had, do you know what he said there, Madam Speaker? He said they would be in a deficit of \$10 billion.

So he has already, he came to this Parliament and talked about a budget deficit of 4.76, but on Friday past he is projecting a budgeted deficit of \$10.0 billion. So in three years his deficits have been over, over the amount that he had budgeted. Now, running deficits in an economy sometimes is not bad as we heard the Member for Laventille tried to equate budget deficits with the American economy. But in this kind of situation that we are in and we have to judge their performance and they have not been managing that budget deficit. So if you cannot manage \$2.8 billion in the first year, 6.0 in your second year and 4.76, this country, as the Leader of the Opposition—is really close to the precipice of going over, [*Desk thumping*] and we on this side have to put a stop to that.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the—and I will come to his Mid-Year Review, Budget Review 2017. Madam Speaker, the old people have a saying, that you must be careful when you accuse persons of wrongdoing, because when you point one finger there are four pointing back at you. [*Desk thumping*] This is a parable that I commend to this Government. The sector that has been targeted the most by this Government in this budget and is being asked to share and carry the country’s burden is the gambling industry.

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But I wonder, Madam Speaker, if the Government thought out this measure carefully before it sought to implement the proposed measures announced by the Minister of Finance. I say this, Madam Speaker, because while this Government has noble intentions of seeking to regulate the gambling industry and those persons who fund this industry, the biggest gambler in this country is actually the entity that is seeking to control gambling, that is this Government, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government is the biggest gambler in this country because with each passing day and with each budget presentation, it is clear to every right-thinking Trinidadian and Tobagonian that this Government is gambling with the future of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to agree with the Government that the gambling must stop and it must stop now because this Government is playing Russian roulette with the future of our country. [*Desk thumping*] And by the measures that this Minister of Finance has implemented—and while they want to stop the man in the street from earning a living, from playing Play Whe and Lotto, sometimes to make a living and put a bread on the table, I want to give the assurance that it is the mission of the Opposition, led by the hon. former Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to stop this Government from gambling with the future of our country [*Desk thumping*] and the future of our children and grandchildren. If they are not stopped, Madam Speaker, we will never be forgiven by the future generations, and we will fight this Government to ensure that their future is secured.

This Government has accused the Opposition of being unpatriotic and not caring for this country. Today, I will demonstrate that far from being patriots, this Government is really plundering the resources of this country, and to ensure that it ends up in the bank accounts of their friends and financiers. [*Desk thumping*] This is their mission. But it is a mission that will be cut short by this Opposition, acting on behalf of all right-thinking people and citizens of this country.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: You took a little bit long to get on your legs with respect to that.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Sorry, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: I just ask you to withdraw it and say that in a different way, in terms of imputing improper motives.

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Mr. D. Lee: I withdraw, Madam Speaker. I withdraw.

This Government seeks to chastise the People's Partnership for the spending that took place between 2010 and 2015. You know why, Madam Speaker? Because during that time, more than any other time in the history of this country, wealth of this country was reaching the middle class and the working poor. [*Desk thumping*] For the first time in our country's history, the resources of the country were being distributed in a just and equitable manner and the people of every creed and of every geographical location, and of every income level, rich and poor alike, were enjoying the resources of this country underneath the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, they upset a lot of powerful people in this country. They could not bear to see people finally being empowered, no matter who you voted for, no matter what was your race and no matter where you live. Madam Speaker, Kamla Persad-Bissessar was brave and courageous enough to lead this country and do what no other Prime Minister before dared to do. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I now would like to turn a bit to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West's contribution when he responded to the Opposition Leader. And, you know—and I was able to have his *Hansard* right here and I want to quote from his speech. It has to do with something that is troubling me, Madam Speaker, because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, in his contribution—and I quote from his *Hansard* and it has to do with the bank's corporation tax, Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“I must use this point to just mark a real record of disappointment to have the managing director of one of those banks immediately react. They are making over \$1 billion a year in the net profit consistently, and I would like to remind them that their biggest shareholder now are the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.”

He went on further, Madam Speaker:

“Through the whole CLF deal, 54 per cent of the shares are owned by the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.”

He went on further:

“The first thing that managing director did is run out and say he has other stakeholders including employees. If you are earning over \$1 billion after tax profits, do not threaten a single strand of hair on one of those employees and do not threaten the Government.”

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Madam Speaker, very noble, very noble. But you know, Madam Speaker, when I look at their track record and I looked at the 2018 *State Enterprises Investment Programme*, do you know how many state companies this Government shut down? I will call a few. Caroni Green Limited, 100 per cent State-owned, shut down; Community Improvement Services Limited, State-owned, shut down; Government Information Services Limited, closed; Government Human Resource Services Limited, closed; Seafood Industry Development Company, closed; Tourism Development Company, closed; Caribbean News Media Group Limited, closed; Human Capital Development Facilities, closed. And they want to come and tell us they care about employees? All those workers went down—all. [*Desk thumping*]. So that, you know, I am very surprised at my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Madam Speaker, because you are talking about—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed again.

Madam Speaker: I assure you, you have my undivided attention.

Mr. D. Lee: Yes, I do. Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. So I am very surprised that the Member of Port for Spain North/St. Ann's West could want to threaten—and maybe “threaten” is a strong word. Because I am surprised of his—you know, his background came from the banking industry and I know he cares about the employees, but if he cares about the Republic Bank employees, he should be caring about the public servants. Because you know how many thousands of public servants that they sent home by using the term, “did not renew their contracts”? [*Desk thumping*] Several employees went home under this guise of “We are not renewing their contracts.” So they are not considering it as layoffs. They just did not renew the people's contracts.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Port for Spain North/St. Ann's West—and I know it is a very long constituency name so I hope I do not get into trouble. So maybe I could refer to him as Minister Young. Is that—

Hon. Member: Yes, you can.

Mr. D. Lee: I can? Thank you. So Minister Young, in his response to the Opposition Leader, went on in his contribution and he started off his contribution on the energy sector and he talked about the gas master plan. He made weather on my Opposition Leader that she miscalculated 24 months to 21 months. So, I apologize on her behalf. But he talked about the gas master plan. When they came into power they could not find the gas master plan.

From my information, the gas master plan was completed in August 2015, the third week in August 2015, and if he had asked maybe the Member for La Brea,

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who was the Minister of Energy at the time, or even the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Lashley, he would have been able to get the gas master plan. Because he made weather about not receiving this gas master plan on time. So, again, I do not know. Member for La Brea, you could pass it on to them.

Madam Speaker, he also went on to talk about maintenance, and this is very interesting and I want to quote Minister Young properly, eh, because early in his contribution he used the word “maintenance” eight times, and he was blaming, as if the maintenance issue that happened between 2010 and 2015 was the fault of the past Minister of Energy, Kevin Ramnarine. I want to tell them and I want to tell this country, the best Minister of Energy that this country has ever seen was the past Minister, Kevin Ramnarine. [*Desk thumping*] Because, you see, they kept calling his name. So why do you keep calling his name? So they are obsessed with him, Madam Speaker.

But, Madam Speaker, Minister Young went on to talk about maintenance and blaming it on this side, and he made further weather again about the Opposition Leader, talking about maintenance. Then he went into a document. The document is called, and I refer—that he was referring to—to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. And, again, the chairman of that committee is our colleague, the hon. Wade Mark—Sen. Wade Mark. And it was as if being the chairman of that committee—Sen. Wade Mark—something was wrong with that, because I heard in crosstalk, the Minister of Finance saying “Call Sen. Wade Mark name, he is the Chairman.” So, he used this document to talk about maintenance. But, you know, funny enough, there is another document, another joint select committee that—[*Interruption*] We will get to that—that is chaired by Independent Senator, David Small. And the date of this committee’s report was the 9th of May, 2016. The report that Minister Young referred to was April the 19th, 2017, two separate joint select committees.

But the irony of it, the same NGC came before both committees. So the joint select committee, the chairman is the Independent Senator, David Small. My colleague from Chaguanas East is a member of that committee, right. And it is interesting when you go into that committee—and the individuals from National Gas who came in front of that committee was one: Maria Thorne, acting President at the time, and this is on the 9th of May, 2016. The joint select committee, State Enterprises. NGC came in front of that committee. And the representatives for that committee from National Gas, were the President, Ms. Maria Thorne, who has over nearly 30 years working at NGC; Mr. Ronald Adams, the VP for Gas Transmissions and Distribution; Mr. Narinejit Pariag, the VP, Finance and Information Management; Mr. Frank Look Kin, consultant, who is an expert in

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the energy sector, non-political; Mr. Patrick Bynoe, Senior Manager, Engineering Services; Mr. Danford Mapp, Acting Senior Manager, Construction Services; Ms. Lisa Burkett, Acting Manager, Corporate Communication, and Ms. Reeya Bholia, legal counsel of contracts.

And you know, those were the same players, officials from NGC that also appeared in the report that Minister Young used, which is the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. The only difference between Mr. Young's committee report that he used and the one I am using is the chairman of NGC, one Mr. Brooks. And I will get to Mr. Brooks just now.

So when the committee met on the 9th of May, 2016—the joint select committee—they asked the committee—and Mr. Look Kin is a non-political expert in energy. Mr. Look Kin was asked by the chairman of the committee—I want to read it, Madam Speaker, because, you see, Minister Young blamed the PP Government about maintenance issues constantly. Not only Minister Young, but several others. Mr. Look Kin—let me quote what he says:

“With regard to gas, we are probably about, as the President has said, we are probably about 20 per cent less than the volumes that we are required to service our customers.”

Now this is the 9th of May, 2016, Madam Speaker. Mr. Look Kin goes on:

“A lot of this occurred as a result of what happened probably starting around 2008/2009.”

We came into government on May the 24th, 2010. So Mr. Look Kin, in front of the committee, talked about the issue of maintenance or lack of gas starting back 2008/2009.

“In that particular period of time the NGC had acquired new gas sources, but then what had happened, they acquired gas supplies from three gas producers—BG, EOG and also BHP Billiton—but the projects that were under consideration to use some of that gas, those projects failed to materialize.”

This is 2008/2009:

“Those projects included the steel plant, in addition to a petrochemical facility and the aluminium smelter. So there was a loss of demand at that particular point in time.

So going into 2009 or thereabouts, what we had in Trinidad was a situation whereby there was a lot of extra excess gas capacity, and because the companies recognized we had excess gas capacity, they really started to cut back on the capital investment in terms of producing additional gas.”

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We did not cause that, Madam Speaker. It was under their watch. They failed to materialize the projects that the up-streamers—that they told the up-streamers that they were going to do.

Mr. Young: But you all shut down the smelter.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You all shut down the project.

Mr. D. Lee: Then they went on. I am being disturbed, Madam Speaker. They went on again. I am reading. It is there in black and white. I am not making this up. Madam Speaker, what Mr. Look Kin went on to say:

“But what happened right after that was in fact there was this Macondo event in the Gulf of Mexico and the Macondo event, when it occurred, many companies”—

Now, this is 2010.

“many companies basically started to consider new standards for operating in offshore, and those new standards require upgrades of the existing platform facilities, and so what you had happening right after that in 2010 to about 2013...”

So the maintenance issue is a real issue. It is not Kevin Ramnarine hiding the gas or the Opposition Leader hiding the gas when we were in government, Madam Speaker.

But I have a letter from the bp country Manager, one Norman Christie, August the 28th, 2015. Because, you see, the maintenance issue, they are blaming it on us. All right? August 28, 2015—

Hon. Member: To whom?

Mr. D. Lee: To Mr. Indar Maharaj, who was the President of the National Gas Company at the time. Here is the letter from Norman Christie to the President of the National Gas Company:

We refer to your letter dated August the 18th, 2015 and I have noted buyers account for the reason...In this regard, the seller wishes to remind buyer that its reduced supply has resulted from a combination of factors, including:

1. The requisite maintenance and safety works post the Gulf of Mexico incident in 2010;
2. Notice given to the buyer in early 2010 that it is no longer economical for the seller to continue to make available cushion gas; and

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3. The buyer's indication to the seller in 2010 that it would require a reduced gas supply.

It is there in black and white, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Now, let me go on to what Minister Young in his contribution again—you see, they like to distort the facts and blame other people. He went on again in his contribution, relying on the report from the Public Accounts Committee and the Chairman at the time, Mr. Brooks. At the time when the report that I am referring to, on the 9th of May, 2016, you know where Mr. Brooks was? Mr. Brooks was in Ghana, Madam Speaker. But he was here for this one.

So Minister Young, again, made weather about claims, and he is quoting Mr. Brooks. He is talking about claims that NGC has suffered because of the lack of gas caused by the PP government. That is what he is saying eh—Mr. Brooks. Now, in this report, I want to remind, Madam Speaker, that the President of the company was here. The only person missing was Mr. Brooks. And when the question was asked about gas curtailment and claims, I want to read it for you, Madam Speaker. Mr. Karim, the hon. Member for Chaguanas East, is a member of that committee. He asked Mr. Look Kin:

“Mr. Look Kin, through the President, you indicated that there was a 20 per cent decline in the supply of gas. As a result of maybe NGC’s inability to fulfil its contractual obligation to its customers, have you been sued by any of those customers, and if so, which one or ones?”

Mr. Look Kin says:

“Could I ask the President, because the President has more details on that?”

Ms. Thorne, who is the President of NGC at the time, who has been over 25 years working at NCG, non-political, head of legal, because she went in there as legal—good stock family in the legal fraternity, Madam Speaker. Ms. Thorne’s response is:

“The short answer is no. We have not been sued by any of the customers.”
[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: What date is that?

Mr. D. Lee: The 9th of May. It is in the *Hansard* but I will repeat it again. The 9th of May, 2016. Who was in charge? They were in charge. But you know what is the difference between the report and the question that MP—

Madam Speaker: Remember we ruled against the issue of brandishing.

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Mr. D. Lee: Oh sorry. The only difference between the question that the MP for Chaguanas East asked on the 9th of May, 2016, and the question that was asked in the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee—the difference was Mr. Brooks, Madam Speaker. So the question I have to ask, maybe, when we were in government, 2010 to 2015, we did not get any claims.

Mr. Young: Is that what you are saying?

Mrs. Robinson Regis: You saying that?

Mr. D. Lee: This is what Ms. Thorne said.

Mr. Young: That is what you are saying?

Mr. D. Lee: Ms. Thorne said—based on this report, Ms. Thorne said:

“The short answer is no. We have not been sued by any of the customers.”
[*Desk thumping*]

So if on the 9th of May, 2016, the short answer is no, I can only conclude that between 2010 to 2015—but the question was asked by MP Karim:

“have you been sued by any of these customers”—because of the shortage of gas?

The answer is no, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: The short answer is no.

Mr. D. Lee: The short answer is no, from the President of NGC.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, what is the long answer?

Mr. D. Lee: The long answer is to ask Mr. Brooks. That is the long answer.
[*Desk thumping*] Ask Mr. Gerry Brooks. So, I am only stating the facts, eh. I am not making this thing up. It is here in black and white. Let the facts deal with itself, Madam Speaker.

So, I do not know—I mean, Minister Young is from good stock, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: Who tell you that?

Mr. D. Lee: I know that, I know that. So, I could only state what Minister Young said in his *Hansard*. I want to go on what Minister Young said here. You see, Mr. Young has a penchant for Kevin Ramnarine.

Hon. Member: Jealous.

Mr. D. Lee: And I mean that with all respect. In his response, he mentioned the name Dudley. And I am quoting:

“You should have been speaking to Dudley instead of taking selfies.”

Meaning Kevin or he might have meant the Opposition Leader. But I want to tell you something, Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister at the time, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, on her way back from CHOGM in Perth, Australia in November 2011, she did meet with Mr. Dudley. And you know what she was able to get from Mr. Dudley, Madam Speaker? One billion dollars in back taxes to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. D. Lee: She did meet with Mr. Dudley, the bp Dudley—\$1 billion—the same Dudley. And she did take out a picture with Dudley, Madam Speaker. She did. So that is factual. But I “doh know if was a selfie”. Madam Speaker, I am hearing some disparaging things across the floor.

Hon. Member: That is all they good for.

Mr. D. Lee: I am just talking the facts, you know, Madam Speaker. I am not making this thing up, you know.

Again, Minister Young went on to talk about CGCL. I would call it the Mitsubishi Massy Conglomerate Plan. And he went on and he talked about—I do not want to misquote him, eh, Madam Speaker, I really do not want to misquote Minister Young. He said:

“Within a few days coming into office in September 2015, we had the only project that the former administration signed knocking on our door, the CGCL project telling us they needed an urgent opinion from the hon. Attorney General. We did not rush to sign the opinion, rather we studied it to make sure it was what was best for Trinidad and Tobago.”

Madam Speaker, CGCL is a Mitsubishi Massy Conglomerate and what Minister Young was trying to allude or state—well, he stated the facts—that we relocated gas from the down streamers, the old or matured players, to give Mitsubishi and Massy the comfort of gas. That is it in a nutshell. And the Government of the day would have been suffering claims in billions of dollars, lawsuits from these down streamers. So he jumped on a plane and went to Japan.

Mr. Singh: Where he became a Samurai.

Mr. D. Lee: And in two days’ time he turned around and came back home. And I remember, I think on his trip and bear me—

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Madam Speaker: Who is the hon. Member you are talking about, not the same Member?

Mr. D. Lee: The hon. Member, sorry, the hon. Member, Minister Young. And this is in here. He jumped on a plane and he went to Japan and he had a two-day turnaround, Madam Speaker; the hon. Member, Minister Young. But you know, Madam Speaker, this project is worth about US \$1 billion for the country of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is good money for Trinidad and Tobago. Even now the country needs US \$1 billion in FDI, hard currency.

But I want to go back to what the budget statement tagline is: Changing the Paradigm. He is changing the paradigm. That is the budget speech. So I want to ask, changing the paradigm for me is that they are doing things differently. So that Minister Young went and renegotiated this contract. Because, you see, to have a contract of that sort of magnitude of US \$1 billion or thereabouts, just under \$1 billion, and getting funding from JBIC and other institutions, JBIC had to have a comfort that the conglomerate that they are lending these funds for, would have been able to get a supply of gas.

4.30 p.m.

Now, Minister Young is saying that what we did and how we did our contract, and how we arranged it, was wrong for the country. He has his views, this Government has their views, and he jump on a plane and he was able to renegotiate. Fantastic, Madam Speaker. What I would like, given that it is changing the paradigm, is for Minister Young or the Government, or the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, to come and tell us here in Parliament, and the country, what is this great new renegotiating contract. [*Desk thumping*] Because from what I understand, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] No! From what I understand, Madam Speaker, he did not give a clear—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Every Member who has not as yet spoken will have an opportunity to join the debate in the next couple of days that we have. So I would like to hear the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Please continue.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Quickly, I want to ask Minister Young, or any on that side: this new arrangement has it put further financial risk to NGC? That is what I want to ask. I want them to come here and tell us: what is this new arrangement?

Madam Speaker, I want to go on and I do not want to spend too much time on Minister Young. I want to talk about the NGC dividend payment, because

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again Minister Young goes on about plundering NGC. NGC was started back in August 1975. I do not even think Minister Young was born yet. He is a young fellow and I will give him credit for that. I know the Attorney General would have been. I was born, but I was still in St. Mary's at the time. When you listen to them on that side, you feel that they own NGC. They get on as if they own it, they build it, they take their money. I want to tell them the founding father of this nation built NGC, Dr. Eric Williams. [Crosstalk] That has nothing to do with PNM. That has nothing to do with PNM.

Madam Speaker, but they talk that NGC is theirs. We make no apologies on this side during 2010—2015 for taking 12.something billion dollars out of NGC to, you what, Madam Speaker? To give people schools. [Desk thumping] We gave them pension grants, hospitals, health centres, school meals, and the list goes on and on and on. So we make no apologies at that. But I want to tell, Madam Speaker, the hypocrisy on that side. First, Minister Young came here—[Interruption]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I thought you coming—[Interruption]

Mr. D. Lee: No, no, no. You see, it crosses because listening to Minister Young, Madam Speaker—[Interruption] No, no. Listening to Minister Young when he was giving his response, it sounded like he was doing a second budget and I will come to that just now. [Desk thumping]

Minister Young and others, including the Minister of Finance, at the meeting in Belmont talked about “we came and change the dividend policy in 2015”. Colleagues, “ent yuh keep hearing that”? In 2011, the state enterprises dividend policy—and I will quote. I want to take my time and quote because I have to put this thing to bed:

The Government—“GORTT has agreed that the profitability of the Enterprise, its liquidity, legal restrictions/loan covenants and the replacement cost of essential capital goods are considered in determining the quantum of dividends that a Company would be required to pay. State Enterprises are also required to pay interim dividends based on semi-annual financial results. Actual distributions of profit are to be agreed with the Minister of Finance and appropriately disclosed in the financial statements. State Enterprises with Retained Earnings in excess of Working Capital requirements may be required to pay a Special Dividend”

So as far as the quantum of dividend, the percentage, it is silent. Not so, Dr. Bhoe? Silent.

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Madam Speaker, I want to refer—so this is the 2011 policy. Did not change in 2015. But on January 18, 2017—Wednesday, January 18, 2017—at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Finance Investment Division, held a seminar for State Boards Corporate Governance Seminar 2017, and you know what jumped out at me, 2017? Dividend policy: All profitable state enterprises are required to pay dividends up to 100 per cent of distributary profits. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Read that again.

Mr. D. Lee: State Board Corporate Governance Seminar 2017, Wednesday January 18, 2017, Hyatt Regency Hotel. Dividend policy: All profitable state enterprises are required to pay dividends up to 100 per cent of dis—

Do you know what that means, Madam? They want the 100 per cent dividends. [*Desk thumping*] They have put a policy in place where it was silent in 2011, silent, and they have now put 100 per cent. I am just stating — [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time is up. In fact, you are into your extended time.

Mr. D. Lee: Madam Speaker, I have to rush now. [*Desk thumping*] I have to rush. I now want to turn to state-owned enterprises, and I call it—this Government has made an issue to blame the People's Partnership for its spending, and this was a common theme for the first 25 minutes of the Minister of Finance's presentation. It is as though this Government is obsessed with the period 2010—2015. If you listen to this Government, you would think that Columbus just arrived on May 24, 2010 in this country. They practised rear-view mirror politics. They are so obsessed with the past, that is why they could never take our country forward. [*Desk thumping*] They call themselves patriots, but this administration is really something seeking to plunder all that they can get their hands on.

The Treasury is the target for them. Madam Speaker, on this occasion— [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, withdraw that and say that in a different way please.

Mr. D. Lee: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I withdraw. The Treasury, they have their eyes on the Treasury [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Mitchell: We are protecting it.

Mr. D. Lee: And, Madam Speaker, they have their eyes on a state company called Trinidad Generation Unlimited [*Desk thumping*] because you see, if you go

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to the state-owned enterprises it is self-explanatory. That is a crown jewel for this country. Petrotrin was another crown jewel and “they mash it up”. [*Crosstalk*]

So the new crown jewel for them is TGU. TGU was born by the former Prime Minister, God rest his soul, the late Patrick Manning, but on December 13, 2006, TGU was formed. In 2009 they were having problems, but do you know who built and finished that? The PP Government. [*Desk thumping*] But now, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you today that TGU is one of the crown jewels again that belongs to the people of our country. [*Desk thumping*] The unions of this country will not allow them to sell it—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: To their friends.

Mr. D. Lee:—to their friends. This Government wants to accuse the Opposition in Government of withdrawal dividends from the National Gas Company. I want the Minister of Finance to tell this country how much money was taken out of TGU by them over the last 24 months.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you how much money they plundered from TGU. Over \$6 billion in the past two years. September 2015, US \$222 million; December 2016, US \$55 million; December 2016, US \$600 million in a bond; June 2017, US \$20 million. That equivalence is close to TT \$6.1 billion [*Desk thumping*] and they want to come and tell us and tell the country the Treasury empty. I want to ask what they did with those moneys. Is it the same black hole that Minister Young talked about when we were in Government? He referred to it in his *Hansard*. It is there. TGU is a crown jewel for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but when we ask right here in the Opposition Leader’s speech about a Cabinet Note and a timeline, the new chairman of TGU, one Sandra Jones said, no shares have been sold to Ferrostaal yet, but we have the information. It will come out soon. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in my short limited time—I did not know time went so fast—I want to tell them on energy matters. I want to tell the Member for La Brea—she talked about renewable and energy efficiency. She is talking for the last 26 months—nothing has been done. Nothing they have done in the energy. They came here with no incentives or no discussion about how to increase production in the energy sector. Nothing! I want to ask them about the gambling. The Minister of Finance talked about tax on gambling. Do you know what industry they left out? The horse racing industry, Madam Speaker. Why is that? Is it because it is an elitist sport? A sport for kings that they left it out? I mean, if we are talking about sharing equity and sharing in the burden, the people in the horse racing industry should be taxed. Why not?

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I want to talk about privatization and Petrotrin quickly, Madam Speaker. They have a new chairman, Wilfred Espinet. You know what is his specialty? Selling off assets. [*Desk thumping*] He was in TCL and he sold out TCL to the Mexican CEMEX. What is his role in Petrotrin I ask? Under manufacturing—I have a lot of friends in the manufacturing industry and they are disappointed with this budget because they had very high hopes.

Now, I want to turn quickly to Minister Young again because when he was talking in his contribution, he talked about some development something, a new incentive. Something to do with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, a \$25 million something—\$25 million. I will find it just now because it is something. It was not there. It had to be something because it was not there in the original budget. I looked. I even looked into the heads of Ministry of Trade and Industry, there was no \$25 million allocation. So, I do not know who is the real Minister of Finance. I ask, because Minister Young came up with this—oh, look it here. The Ministry of Trade will have a \$25 million facility that they can distribute via grants up to \$250,000 and it is connected to the Shark Tank concept. Madam Speaker, we all know what is the Shark Tank. I do not know if it is Digicel Rising Star they are coming with next.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I want to say thank you to my constituents of Pointe-a-Pierre, my staff of Pointe-a-Pierre. I have gotten nothing for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Works and Transport visited all our constituencies and promised us the sun. Not even a pothole fixed. Not a pothole fixed, and after I gave the Minister of Works and Transport food that day—I fed him well—he did not give the people of Pointe-a-Pierre nothing. The chairman of WASA lives in my constituency. He drives through Hermitage Main Road. He and all even call me and tell me his car is taking a beating by that road. So I am imploring on the Minister of Works and Transport to fix the Hermitage Main Road, to give us infrastructure in Pointe-a-Pierre, because I listened to the Member for La Brea, she seemed to have gotten everything. Where is the equity? I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Esmond Forde (Tunapuna): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you for that lusty round of applause, man. It gives me the impetus—[*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, for being given the opportunity to enter this debate, and just to ensure that I am covered, Standing Order 44(10) with regard to reading with my speech, just in case of the Members on the other side.

The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you know it is interesting coming after you and saying that La Brea got so many things. I probably will hold back from

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listing what Tunapuna has got just for the record because Tunapuna continues to be on board. I would just like to rebut one or two points made by my colleague, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. He asked the question based on reference to the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, and I would just like to ask these two questions and leave it right there just as how you did it. Do you not entertain Ministers at your MP office at any particular time? And the second question, do you not meet with your Pointe-a-Pierre constituents at your office or is it always closed? I am just asking because you made reference to the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande meeting her constituents [*Desk thumping*] with the Minister at her constituency office. What is the purpose of the constituency office, Madam Speaker?

Secondly, you made mention that you all do not gamble on that side. Under Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister, all we are doing is asking for a paradigm change [*Desk thumping*] as stated in the budget 2018 by the Minister of Finance. What this administration wants is for the gambling/gaming industry to either make its legal obligations, or close up for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We do not gamble on this side. All we would like them to do is to pay their taxation obligations.

The third point I would like to rebut, companies that were closed. You listed a number of companies have were closed during the People's National Movement tenure, but you did not go on to give when they were closed—[*Mr. Lee about to leave the Chamber*] God, at least you could give me the courtesy, man.

Mr. Lee: Oh, sorry, sorry.

Mr. E. Forde: No problem. No problem.

Mr. Lee: For you.

Mr. E. Forde: You did not make mention of these companies that were closed, when they were closed; you gave no statistics as to why they were closed; you did not give any justifications as to why the People's National Movement administration would have closed these particular companies as you listed. What were the overheads of these companies identified that they were closed? What were the budgetary incomes at the end of the financial years for these particular companies as to why they were closed? Those are questions, again, I assure that the Minister of Finance would entertain when he is winding up in the particular debate.

You made mention of the National Gas Company and their gas arrangements, you made reference CGCL and the Mitsubishi/Massy conglomerate, you made mention of TGU, you made mention of TCL and also Petrotrin, and you said let the

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facts deal with itself. All I would say on that is that the hon. Attorney General and also the hon. Minister of Finance will deal with those facts when they enter the debate at a later stage later this week. They would deal with the facts with regard to those particular companies.

And very interestingly—you know it is good to know that you have identified that the father of the nation was and is Dr. Eric Williams, [*Desk thumping*] the first Prime Minister of our country Trinidad and Tobago, and he made the statement that Dr. Williams built the NGC. But what my learned Member for Pointe-a-Pierre did not mention is that Dr. Eric Williams, the father of the nation, was the founding father also of the political party, the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] the political leader of the People's National Movement. Added to that, NGC, the National Gas Company, belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and at this time this People's National Movement party, under the leadership of Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, has the responsibility to govern NGC and its dividends at this time—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: And not plunder.

Mr. E. Forde:—and not plunder. Thank you there my colleague.

Again, before I get into my contribution, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, this PNM administration, under Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, is protecting our country from your party, taking charge of the Treasury. We are the defenders of democracy [*Desk thumping*] and we need to defend you all from the particular thing.

I will probably now move on to what I have prepared for us today. I would like to first extend sincere happy First Peoples National Holiday on Friday the 13th of October. To all the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, coming from on this side, coming from the constituents of Tunapuna, and all my other colleagues, to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago on their holiday on Friday the 13th of October.

And on a totally different note, I know my colleague the Member for La Brea mentioned about her centurions. I do not have as much centurions as her, but I have my oldest constituent which is Mrs. Edna Clarke who will be 107 years old on Monday the 16th of October, 2017. [*Desk thumping*] Edna Clarke from Fairley Street in Tunapuna, and I would just like to extend to her a happy blessed birthday and may God continue to bless her with added health and strength. Mrs. Edna Clarke, a member from the Clarke's legacy in Tunapuna.

Madam Speaker, congratulations are due to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development and their teams for the preparation and

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presentation, even the title which is most appropriate, “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on Sustainable Growth”. In listening to the comments and contributions in honourable House and in the domain of the general public, one of the things that struck me was the manner in which the 2018 Appropriation Bill was being viewed and the express understanding of the purpose and positioning of the budget. It is in this regard, that a definition of the 2018 Appropriation Bill/budget 2018 and its positioning is being put forward.

Madam Speaker, it is generally accepted that a budget is an annual estimate of revenue and expenditure of an entity, whether it be your country, an organization, a family, or a person. However, it must be noted that the budget is a cycle event within a long or longer term framework whose boundaries are defined by the constraints of time, usually longer than a year, resource availability, the existing environmental conditions, the vision, the defined destination and/or the desired outcome.

Albert Einstein, the man who advanced the theory of relativity—please note aspects of this theory are still being proven today—stated and I quote:

If we continue to do the same thing and expect different results, maybe we need to change, maybe we need to get checked.

Madam Speaker, I know this is “mental week”—and I was able to confirm that with my colleague, the Minister of Health—in Trinidad and Tobago, but I am certain no Member of this honourable House—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mental Health Week.

Mr. E. Forde: Mental Health Week. Thanks for the correction—would like to be numbered among this group of persons. Let us be thankful all to God.

Madam Speaker, I recall that the Minister of Finance in his presentation of the 2017 budget mentioned the specific goal of bringing some stability to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago in turbulent times, and the prevailing conditions were one of major resource availability, oil and gas revenue was suddenly reduced with little prospect of near term resurgence to previous levels by the vagaries of world economics environmental conditions. Notwithstanding the Minister referenced the said budget as being grounded in a revised national development framework which we now call *Vision 2030*.

This PNM administration has also enunciated the primacy of the need for improved service delivery across all sectors of the society. The signal has been broadcasted and undertaken by means of institutional reform and strengthening;

development of new and strengthening of structures; building and refocusing of human resource capacity; employment of technology to drive improved productivity; efficiency; general efficacy; and reduction of waste and elimination of duplication where possible. These are the non-tangibles which will be evident in this paradigm shift, or adjustment requested in the Minister of Finance's 2018 budget presentation on October 02, 2017.

A national budget, Madam Speaker, can be viewed as an isolated document or a mere statement of numbers and Ministry allocations. Rather, a budget must be located in a particular context if the prescriptions outlined and the policies articulated are to be understood. To do otherwise, would be to miss the broader picture of Government's intentions and to assume that for all intents and purposes there is no method to the perceived madness.

Madam Speaker, the first task of the Government in 2015 was to stabilize the economy. That was in free fall at the time, and that is what this Dr. Keith Rowley administration did over the last two years. [*Desk thumping*] As the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, I have every confidence in the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that upon objective examination of these measures, they will accept that our administration has laid the foundation for sustainability and eventual growth in Trinidad and Tobago for the future.

When we hear the word "Caura", Madam Speaker, the majority of persons think river lime.

Hon. Member: Curry duck.

Mr. E. Forde: Saying something?

Hon. Member: Curry duck.

Mr. E. Forde: Oh, curry duck. Yeah, you could add that to it, curry duck. Paradoxically, there are some residents in a specific valley of Caura where water is a problem. Not in terms of flooding, but in terms of lack of pipe borne water. This in spite of the fact, one of the tributaries of the Caura/Tacarigua River originates and flows through this said area.

Many years ago, WASA developed a localized water distribution system for these residents. However, change in weather patterns and drastically reduced availability of potable water in the dry season, I know hon. Members might be thinking: what is new? We heard of "Water for all"; my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West, saying that 100 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago have water and things like that, but there are areas in Tunapuna, like the Caura Valley, like in the Maracas/Acono area, where residents still do not have pipe borne water.

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Madam Speaker, the residents of the area, through their Caura Valley Village Council, expressed their need for an improvement in the system by way of developing a storage system to augment and guarantee the availability during the dry season.

We all know WASA, as most, if not, all the public utilities, have funding allocations difficulties. Madam Speaker, to cut—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I think that is a very good point. Hon. Members, it is agreed that at 5.00 we would take the suspension. We will be back here at 5.30 p.m.

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Member for Tunapuna.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I will begin where I left off when we would have suspended for tea and I was just at the point of cut, “yuh know”. Right, Madam Speaker, to cut a long story short [*Laughter*] after tea, a meeting was brokered between the Caura Valley Village Council and NGO, the Digicel Foundation, for an extraordinary project in the community which we called EPIC, which is a community project funded by the Digicel Foundation where we came up with the bright idea of building a storage tank facility consisting of 10 one-thousand gallon water tanks in the Tumbasson area on a WASA facility that already existed but we needed to ensure that the facility was ideally prepared based on the EMA Regulations and based on the safety regulations with regard to WASA and the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation who were involved. It turned out to be an ideal public/private partnership between a lot of stakeholders within the Tunapuna constituency and in the end, the area of Tumbasson now has a water supply consisting of 10,000 gallons of water during the dry season and it will be on a continuous basis as they continue along.

But during the whole process, as the Member of Parliament for the area of Caura, you know it was nice to see all the constituents coming out, all the businesses being a part of. All the businesses that we had approached for assistance in order to clear the area—backhoes, excavators and everything—you know they were able to participate. The hardwares were able to supply materials at discounted prices and we were also even able to go back to Digicel seeking additional funding in order for the project to be completed. And today, the Caura Valley, Tumbasson area to be exact, is really grateful for the efforts of the Digicel Foundation.

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The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation who provided all the construction skills and labour in order to ensure that the job came to completion. We had the engineers and technical skills of the Water and Sewerage Authority in order to ensure that we had the proper gradient, the proper leverage and everything else in order to ensure that the tanks would be filled, as again, it is being filled from a natural tributary coming out of the Caura River. Individuals like the Chairman, Councillor Paul Leacock of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, the councillor for the area of Caura/Paradise/Tacarigua, where the Caura area falls within, were very instrumental in ensuring that the project came to fruition. So, it was officially opened in September 2017 and we must extend sincere thanks to the Digicel Foundation for that particular project. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it would be remiss of me if on behalf of the constituents of Tunapuna and the Caura Valley Village Council if I did not extend gratitude to the Digicel Foundation for all the funding, WASA, Water and Sewerage Authority, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, my Tunapuna constituents, business enterprises within the Tunapuna constituency and of course, my Tunapuna office staff for both the theoretical and practical technical skills that they would have had to play, and for the generous contribution to the successful completion of the Digicel Foundation EPIC community project. Public/private partnership at its best, Madam Speaker.

Another public/private partnership that we will hear a lot of that only recently has been put on the table, again, coming out of the Tunapuna constituency, is the MIC Institute of Technology and the *marcontrader.com* construction company that is due to come on stream. Another public/private partnership that will be coming on stream where individuals again, coming out of graduates of the MIC institute would be set up on a database in order to be given first preference with regard to being hired within the construction industry, and we will hear more of that during the course of the time. The parties involved in this project are presently engaged in documenting all the lessons learnt from this community project at Caura. We, in Tunapuna, are leading the way with the Prime Minister's call for public/private partnerships within the constituency.

Madam Speaker, there are other areas of the constituency where there is need for similar or variance projects. As a matter of fact, currently within the Wharf Trace, Maracas area, the Acono Village, also in Maracas, where residents who live on hilly areas or inclined areas, again, where water is not easily accessible, we are looking at similar arrangements with other business entities, again, along the way of the public/private partnership to ensure that household pipe borne water can be transmitted to these residents.

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Madam Speaker, staying within the Caura area for the moment, many of us may or may be aware of the long heralded Caura Valley Recreational Park development plan. Previous MPs of Tunapuna were privy to this particular plan and now that, under my stewardship, I am looking to see how far this particular plan can be developed. So I am working along very closely with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and also the Ministry of Tourism in order to get some headway with regard to this plan.

During the last fiscal year, 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries completed the payment of the consultants for the plans and indicated a desire to initiate the next phase of this project. This is an interesting development, Madam Speaker. This project represents an abundant supply of possibilities that can lend itself to the development by public/private partnerships. It is the seed for the development of a myriad of eco-tourism development apart from sustainable community environmental development, particularly of a major national watershed and water source which includes the famous poolside 1 and poolside 2 in the Caura Valley. It is said that on a monthly basis, over 30,000 residents of Trinidad visit the Caura Valley. You know, there is a Monday—you would be surprised that it is a weekend. On a Monday, in the Caura Valley, a lot of individuals go up into the Caura Valley, visit poolside 1, visit poolside 2 and you know. But again, as the Member of Parliament and working along with the two Ministries, we are trying to see how best we can develop it in order to be part of the whole sustainable growth and development along the area of diversification.

The Caura Valley Recreation Park represents sustainable high-quality employment opportunities and improved health protection for part of Tunapuna's resident population and present and potential visitors to the area. Madam Speaker, this administration has signalled its recognition of the area's potential, not only by the action vis-à-vis the Caura Valley Recreation Park development plan, but as well as the recent rounds of consultations with regard to the development of a community tourism policy hosted by the Ministry of Tourism.

Madam Speaker, the cry in the town is the need for foreign exchange. Foreign exchange can be gained by generating exports and/or reducing imports or avoiding the use of foreign products. The development of the Caura Valley Recreation Park development plan as the nexus for eco-tourism in the Northern Range would serve to reduce the leakage by vacationing nationals while simultaneously providing international standard facility and security for visitors, nationals and internationals, to engage in the famous "river lime" or as my colleague would have mentioned, "duck lime". This experience will cater for trail

hiking, bird watching, bicycle access to the particular areas, among other social activities in the scenic and tranquil Caura Valley.

In the Caura Valley, we are recognizing the need to change the paradigm as we with specific reference to our appetite for foreign goods and food. The Government or, our Government, has also allocated TT \$20 million in fiscal 2018 for the establishment of an agricultural financial support programme with grants to new and existing farmers of up to TT \$100,000. The financial support will complement the already existing myriad number of agricultural incentives which includes: exemption from income tax for approved agricultural holdings, tax concessions on vehicles, equipment, raw material and other inputs, subsidized loan programmes, purpose-built markets, planting materials, access roads and state land leases. Madam Speaker, the Caura Valley once contributed vastly to the agricultural food basket of Trinidad and Tobago. The Caura Valley farmers can now access these great opportunities to revive their farming exploits on larger scales. Benefits for all in the 2018 budget. Well done, Finance Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the 2018 budget proposal offer incentives for the development of business in general. The fastest growing sector in the world trade is service delivery. Madam Speaker, two years ago on my entry to this House, I have always stressed the great importance of high value, intellectual capacity potential in the area's resident population, and the need to mobilize and utilize same. Our human resource continue to be our main asset. The introduction and success of the Ministry of Education's GATE programme has reduced the situation and created such issues as a reduction in traditional employment opportunities for graduates, underemployment, frustration and low productivity, among other things.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, the 2018 budget proposal, provides opportunities and incentives for all employable and/or entrepreneurially-minded residents of Tunapuna. You can be assured we intend to exploit those opportunities. These incentives include: seed or start-up capital, cash flow support, foreign exchange support, apart from planning and operating advisory services. The opportunity and support now exist for the development and engagement of our young and not so young professional and highly-skilled personnel to engage in the provision of cross-border service delivery in areas such as training, consultancy and hands-on services in the varying industries throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, to the small business owners, our Government has made a provision of TT \$50 million to small businesses to assist with working capital

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and/or seed capital through grant funding to the tune of TT \$100,000 for every successful applicant. For every successful applicant [*Desk thumping*] access to the tune of TT \$100,000. I admonish our greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce to explore all these new initiatives in the 2018 budget.

Madam Speaker, my constituency of Tunapuna and the surrounding region has a population with a large demand for housing accommodation. Most Members of Parliament can ascertain that on a daily basis or on a weekly basis, when they meet with constituents, the highest percentage of individuals who visit our offices is for HDC housing, and they want the Government to provide the housing for them. As the Finance Minister mentioned, we cannot afford housing for each and every individual within Trinidad and Tobago. This administration has signalled the opening of the housing market and the transparent support and reward mechanism, together with some technical support and including the relaxation of Town and Country requirement stipulations.

Madam Speaker, in Tunapuna, there are many skilled tradesmen and entrepreneurs who, I am certain, will avail themselves of any opportunities presented to new perspective housing developers, thus reducing the unemployment rate among the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled individuals. This may even provide an incentive to some persons currently employed with URP and CEPEP programmes but once possessing the requisite skill sets. It is for the above reasons that our Government has now allocated TT \$50 million to provide as cash incentives for approximately 1,000 additional new private sector finance for constructing affordable homes. By incentivizing contractors, both big and small—and you already heard that individuals will be given the opportunity to submit applications. It will be advertised in order for individuals to make the necessary applications. Both big and small contractors. We will revive the construction industry, increase employment in the area and simultaneously reduce Government spending on the provision of our housing stock. Congratulations to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development and the Minister of Finance for these new initiatives for the construction and housing sectors. Tunapuna constituency is on board with these proposals. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, definitely the 2018 budget proposal offers a sustainable opportunity and support for the short, medium and long-term diversification of our economy. I have always alluded to the ability of the residents of the Tunapuna constituency to go beyond the boundary by the use of Lara-type controlled application and precise hitting and placement.

A pressing issue for the residents of Tunapuna, in particular and those of the East-West Corridor between the areas of Curepe and extending to Five Rivers and

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beyond, residents living north of the Eastern Main Road, is the traffic congestion experienced in maximum proportions; in maximum proportions, Madam Speaker. At any given time of the day within that portion of the East-West Corridor, between Five Rivers probably extending to Curepe to Mount Hope by the Mount Hope hospital, there is a serious traffic congestion, especially during the peak hours of both mornings and afternoons. From El Dorado in Tunapuna to St. Augustine and Curepe and Mount Hope—no, my apologies. From El Dorado in Tunapuna to St. Augustine and Curepe is the most densely populated area in Trinidad and Tobago for schools and educational institutions, including the University of the West Indies and of course, the prestigious Hillview College, my alma mater. The University city: Tunapuna, St. Augustine and St. Joseph need to be expounded.

Madam Speaker, residents of Tunapuna, in another demonstration of community willingness to engage in volunteerism of public/private partnerships, have offered their services in the formation of a traffic management committee and have undertaken studies that have identified specific problem areas in terms of impact. This team of qualified, skilled and experienced volunteers in the relevant disciplines have already identified the highest priority and impacting areas and road user practices with possible solutions already. The area and possible solution of highest priority have already been submitted to the Minister of Works and Transport for review. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report the last communication from the Ministry has indicated that they are currently considering designs and cost estimates for the future of a traffic management plan within the Tunapuna constituency and surrounding communities. I must extend congratulations here, again, to the Minister of Works and Transport. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in expressing our gratitude to those persons, we, again, are modelling an approach for solving community and by extension national problems by partnering and partnerships. Our hon. Prime Minister has been speaking much about getting involved in public/private partnerships and the Government is open and willing to accept many of those private entrepreneurs to come on board.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately by our own actions, those of the previous administration and the peculiarities of international economics, oil and gas revenues continue to be decreasing, we have found ourselves in the quarry of life between a rock and a hard place. However, we, the people of Tunapuna, are not prepared or willing to sit upon our laurels, cry and reminisce about yesterday and what have been or what should have been done. No, Madam Speaker. We are

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prepared, and today signal our intent, to carve our own statue of David from the block of marble presented by our Minister of Finance before us in the form of the economic circumstances and environment, our beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it is the intention of the constituents of Tunapuna to employ the chisel of community partnership in producing our own David masterpiece to rival all the naysayers before us, including those on the other side. As we move forward, I can only pray that those of us who have the opportunity to change the paradigm embrace this opportunity for the very survival of Trinidad and Tobago depend on us now. The paradigm has to change if we are to survive, colleagues. To do otherwise is to invite persons to impose on us the medicine we should have applied ourselves. And I will repeat that. The paradigm has to change if we, in Trinidad and Tobago, have to survive in 2018. [*Desk thumping*] To do otherwise is to invite persons to impose on us the medicine we should have applied for ourselves.

At this time, I would just like to identify a couple of projects that would have taken place within my constituency during the period of 2017. Not much and it may not be of big significance or large projects but they would have been projects that would have left an indelible mark within the constituency and this is how I look at it. Right, it is all for the people. In Mohammed Trace, we are presently in the completion exercise of a reconstruction of a roadway that totally collapsed. Mohammed Trace is a street in St. Augustine and it is now being reconstructed, the roadway, with improved drainage infrastructure. We did the lighting of the Eddie Hart football field as would have been identified by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs during 2017. We also had the lighting of the lower Caura Road basketball court, that is the El Dorado Village Council, that area there, lower Caura Road where the lighting of the basketball court transpired.

We would have had the cleaning and desilting of the two main watercourses within the Tunapuna constituency which would be the Caura River in Tacarigua by the St Mary's Children's Home, that would have been desilted and also the St. John's River which exits by Exodus pan theatre in Tunapuna. We would have constructed a retaining wall and drainage base at the St. John's Road River in the vicinity of the UWI residents' apartments. Again, the apartments were being threatened and it is something that had to be done at the time in order to secure the land and also the apartments for the university students at St. John's Road.

We would have done the resurfacing or paving of the Maracas Royal Road between La Seiva Village to La Mango Village. Again, Maracas Royal Road is a very long stretch and we met with the Minister and we would have identified the

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area of the Maracas Royal Road that needed paving or resurfacing critically, and we would have done the area between La Seiva, Wharf Trace going down straight to La Mango Village by the St. Joseph Bridge.

We would have had the opening of the Upper El Dorado Community Centre and I thank the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for the opening of the Upper El Dorado Community Centre, a state-of-the-art facility that is heavily utilized, [*Desk thumping*] not only by the constituents but by a lot of non-constituents, and we would have also had training programmes set up by WAND with regard to computer classes that are taking place. We have cooking classes taking place, dancing taking place, weddings and various functions at this Upper El Dorado Community Centre.

We had drainage infrastructure improvement in Centre Trace, La Seiva Village, Maracas. Again, all these drainage would have been—some of these works would have been completed by the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation under the chairmanship of Councillor Paul Leacock. And I must, at this time, also mention the three hard-working TPRC councillors of the Tunapuna constituency. We have Councillor “Sean” Martin Gonzales in the Maracas/Santa Margarita area; we have Councillor Aaron Thomas in the Caura/Paradise/Tacarigua area and we have Councillor Travis Williams in the Auzonville/Tunapuna area, who are hard-working and have contributed through their development programmes at the regional corporations in order to ensure that some of these infrastructure improvements would have taken place within the constituency. So, I must say hats off to those three councillors at the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Amidst all the talk about gloom and doom on the other side, again, we, in Tunapuna, continue to make best with what we have. Cut and contrive, right, we are able to make best with what we have in the Tunapuna constituency.

We had the resurfacing of roadway paving of Belleview Hill, Acono Road, Riverside Road in Curepe. We had drainage improvement in the San Pedro Road, in Acono, Angawoo Road, El Chorro Road, all in the Maracas area. I must say at this time that the Maracas area is divided into two constituencies. We have the St Ann’s East on the left-hand side when you enter in the Maracas Royal Road and the Tunapuna constituency on the right-hand side. So the constituency is shared by the two Members of Parliament for St Ann’s East and the Tunapuna constituency and we work in tandem to ensure that we—we cannot pave one side of the Maracas Royal Road. “Yuh paving the road, we pave the whole road. We seeing about ah landslip, left-hand side, right-hand side, we deal with the landslips” as we continue to go along.

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We have a disaster management unit within the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation that is doing excellent work under supervisor Ms. Carol Charles, and they have been working round the clock, day and night, in order to ensure that landslips/landslides and areas that would have been flooded out get some sort of assistance.

We can also give thanks to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, T&TEC, for the hard work that they have been doing in the Tunapuna constituency. Again, Members of Parliament, "I talking for my constituency". T&TEC lives up to an excellent reputation within the Tunapuna constituency. *[Desk thumping]* All right and I must extend sincere thanks to the area distribution managers and the senior management at T&TEC for the work that they are doing within the Tunapuna constituency. *[Crosstalk]* You do your part, Sir. "Yuh just hah to do your part, MP. Do yuh part. Do yuh part." Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Resurfacing of the San Gregorio Road in Maracas. We had retaining wall and drainage works in Wharf Trace, Maracas. Construction of box drains with pavement on Richard Street in Tacarigua which is just alongside the St Mary's Children's Home in Tacarigua. We had the pavement over box drain on Gittens Street in Tacarigua, just on the outskirts of the Paradise Gardens. We had box drains, steps and railings at Noel Trace, Extension Number 1, which is off St. John's Road in St. Augustine.

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Retaining wall and driveway at Mohammed Trace, St. Augustine, which was a project completed by self-help. The Self Help Commission provided the funding and the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) provided the labour and skillset, in order to ensure that this retaining wall and driveway at Mohammed Trace was constructed.

We had also the resurfacing of the La Providencia Road in Maracas. We had a box drain also in Wharf Trace and some of these projects, Members and the listening public, were projects that were in situations whereby the various Ministries, both the Ministry of Works and Transport and also the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, had no choice but to ensure that these projects were entertained and were completed. So those are just some of the work that is going on within the Tunapuna constituency.

We would have also done the refurbishment of the hockey centre at the Tacarigua indoor facility where we now have a racquet centre which has been recently renamed and then we would have also assisted in the funding of the

Eddie Hart League for Football which, as we know is now celebrating 50 years [Desk thumping] of existence. As you all know, Mr. Edward 'Eddie' Hart would have been a former Member of this Chamber and we would have done some funding for the two years and also in 2018, in order to ensure that the league continues to run, and it is one of the biggest minor league, well not necessarily, the biggest minor league within the eastern region.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing, and in the words of my boyhood friend, Tunapuna constituency is partnering by partnerships, as against partnering by the pocket. And the pocket here relates to the Ministry of Finance. So, partnering by partnerships, as against partnering by the pocket only.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Tunapuna, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish to avail yourself of it. You may proceed.

Mr. E. Forde: I do not think I would need the full 10, Madam.

We, however, live in faith and hope in the Almighty God and, Madam Speaker, that better days are coming and this too shall pass away. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, better days are coming and this too shall pass away for the survival and the fortune of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago. And with those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to share.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): [Desk thumping] Thank very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to join this proceeding as we debate this Bill entitled an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2018.

Madam Speaker, before I get into my contribution, I just want to address two comments that were made earlier today that I think we should really clear up. Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West made a comment that none of us on this side, that we do not want anything that is good for Trinidad and Tobago, and I just want to tell the Member that the only thing that we do not want from this side is Laventille West. Right, Madam Speaker? So he is not here, but I hope he gets the message.

Hon. Member: Laventille?

Mr. R. Paray: Laventille West. Madam Speaker, my colleague from La Brea, she also mentioned that she was bit disturbed that there were about 12 per cent of children that were failing in the education system because of the UNC and

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their failed education programme. But, Madam Speaker, I want to apologize on behalf of the UNC, but I want to congratulate the Member for Siparia for the 88 per cent that are very successful in the education system in this country, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to congratulate the Member for Siparia for leading the charge that has 66 per cent of our students at tertiary education in this country, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So I think the tradeoff is acceptable.

Madam Speaker, let me congratulate the political leader, the Member for Siparia, the Leader of the Opposition, for a stellar and well-delivered budget response befitting her honourable office.

Madam Speaker, my colleagues from Fyzabad, Couva North, Princes Town, Tabaquite, Oropouche West, Cumuto/Manzanilla, Naparima, Caroni Central and Pointe-a-Pierre, they were all exceptional over the last couple of days, Madam Speaker [*Desk thumping*] in their analysis and their interrogation of the facts versus fiction in this fairy tale of a document called the 2018 budget statement. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, clearly form is temporary, class is permanent. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I must admit, when I came to this Parliament in 2015, I had some doubts, some uneasiness and some apprehension. I am now certain beyond that doubt, Madam Speaker, that this administration has to be most rudderless, myopic, incoherent, [*Desk thumping*] inconsistent team that has sat at the helm of this country, I would say in the last 100 years, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I assure you that after this budget debate is over, there will be no paradigm shift as discussed by the hon. Minister of Finance, neither will there be any rerouting of this economy either in the medium or the long term.

Madam Speaker, this administration is really taking us down a path of economic collapse and ruin. Madam Speaker, it is no wonder that just a day after the hon. Minister of Finance delivered the budget in this House, a mighty wall came crashing down on him, just a day after. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am absolutely disappointed with the quality of contributions from many of my colleagues opposite. You see, reciting what the People's Partnership did or did not do is really irrelevant to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and I will tell you why. They are very much more concerned with going forward, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, they are in Government and they are in charge. Just in case many of them may not have been awake, they have been in charge for the last 24 months. So going and spending the time just discussing what the Partnership did or did not do really has no value

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to the discussion of how are we going to take this country forward in these trying times that we are in, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, and I agree with the Minister of Finance, we need a paradigm shift. But nothing in the details, so far that I have heard, speaks to a paradigm shift. What is a paradigm shift, Madam Speaker? A paradigm shift is when you stop where you are going in one direction and you go somewhere else. Nothing that anybody has presented today, Madam Speaker, speaks to a change in direction. It is more of the same, more of the same strategy, policy, talk. And where is the paradigm shift that the people in this country want? And many are prepared to take the measures that are required. But where is it?

So, Madam Speaker, I really expected each of my colleagues opposite to present an account of their stewardship for the last 24 months and then inform the people of this country. You are policy directors in your various Ministries. Identify to the people where the paradigm shift is. Identify it. That is what you are here to do.

Madam Speaker, all I got over the last couple of days, from many of those opposite was a lot of hot air, a lot of steam, same old, same old. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I think the paradigm shift is stillborn. It is going nowhere. The contributions were a rehash of the same policies, same directions and same outcome.

Madam Speaker, just to give an example. This is what I expected. I expected my colleague from Moruga/Tableland who is not here today, as the junior Minister of Education, to come and tell this House: Ladies and gentlemen, I have discussed with the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, how we can use migration as a diversification tool. How can migration assist me as the Minister of Education to find quality intellectual people from all over the world who may be fleeing their homelands for various reasons because we need the intellectual capacity in Trinidad and Tobago today to put into our research departments in our universities, because we need to build goods and services that the rest of the world wants, Madam Speaker. So I expected that the junior Minister of Education would have come with a paradigm shift in thinking with something like that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Caroni Central, he highlighted the need for technology and innovation. He talks about quantum mechanics and quantum physics and virtual reality. We need to look at how can we get that type of intellectual capacity into our universities, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, my good friend, the hon. Minister of Housing, I too expected him to come to this

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Parliament with some creative ideas. I would have expected the Minister of Housing and Urban Development to come and say: “Look, ladies and gentlemen I have figured out a way to tackle the issues of squatter regularization. How can we take 20-acre parcels of land and build new communities, move 50 squatting families into five-acre plots, with water, sewerage, drainage and power?” This in effect minimizes the social and the health burdens on the State. Then you take five acres, put them to work on short-term crops, five acres with livestock and poultry, and that is used as income generation for the very same squatters.

Madam Speaker, the food and meat can be sold in your local supermarkets, in your local butcher shops, and the money that is earned can go towards building new low-income houses for the very same squatters. So we are building new communities. Madam Speaker, that is the kind of paradigm shift that I expect as policy directors in a Ministry to really come to this Parliament and say: “Look, we have to cut and contrive, but listen, we are taking you down a different path.”

Madam Speaker, I expected the Minister of Social Development and Family Services to tell this Parliament that the hon. Member has come up with an innovative strategy to reduce the grant requirements for victims of storms and flooding. I was hoping that she, the hon. Member, would have spoken to the Minister of Local Government and through the regional corporation, execute projects in communities that are prone to these types of events, and do a project where you can reinforce roofs with hurricane straps, reinforce joints, nail down loose lumber and galvanize. Madam Speaker, these things in the next upcoming rainy season/hurricane season, this would reduce the necessity to replace mattresses, furniture, sheets, linens, appliances, home repair grants, et cetera. Madam Speaker, these are the kind of things that I expect as policy directors, sitting, as policy directors in Ministries, coming up with these paradigm shifts in ideas of how we are going to move, how we are going to stop spending money in certain areas by taking certain actions early on.

Madam Speaker, I was expecting the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to come to this Parliament, and inform us as to new and exciting programmes to be executed by her Ministry, to get our young people involved in a lot of community activities at the very low, basic level. Tell us how these programmes can assist in things that are critical to our society today: anger management, reduction in domestic violence, school violence, gang warfare, women empowerment, small business creation. Imagine the positive impact these things can have on national security, Madam Speaker. Minister, we learnt a lot on our trip to Washington DC on strategies on conquering violence

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extremism. I expected to see some of these things that we learnt during that trip, you know, executed in your planning for this next fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, my hon. friend from Toco/Sangre Grande, I expected the hon. Member to come to this House with a revolutionary way, a paradigm shift in the police service recruitment process, she being a police officer, the hon. Member that is, being a police officer for many, many years.

I would have thought that the hon. Member would have come to this House, and said: "Look, I have spoken to the Minister of Education and I have asked him to create a police sciences programme at the A level for secondary schools." Capture the imagination of our young citizens to desire a career in police sciences. Have UTT establish a three-year associate degree programme where these A level students can study law, forensics, ballistics, investigative techniques, criminal psychology. And in their final year, Madam Speaker, they can specialize in particular areas and get into specific units within the TTPS.

Madam Speaker, this is how we ramp up the quality and quantity of career officers in the TTPS. These are the kind of revolutionary ideas or the paradigm shift in ideas that I expect, as policy directors, that they come to his honourable House and tell us about. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I thought the hon. Minister of National Security was going to introduce a paradigm shift in developing a 21st Century policing unit. Rather than the Police Commissioner being the panacea to solving crime in this country, I thought the hon. Minister was going to tell this Parliament that he has come up with another innovative idea. Let us take 100 academically qualified police officers with 10 to 15 years left in the police service and let us send them and embed them in the New York Police Service, in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for two to three years. When these officers return, Madam Speaker, that is where it becomes important, because those are the ones who become the senior members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they become senior with the knowledge of First World tools and techniques in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Madam Speaker. Imagine the experience or the knowledge transfer that these officers will have on junior officers coming up the rank. Madam Speaker, that is how we create a paradigm shift in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service over the next five to 10 years. Madam Speaker, that is what a paradigm shift really is.

But, Madam Speaker, my focus today is to look on agriculture and test it for the paradigm shift that has been promised by the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, agriculture, in my respectful view, should really be the dominant

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portfolio at this time in the country's crisis state. It is absolutely essential that we are able to feed ourselves as we prepare for a very uncertain future in an unsettled global climate.

It is important though that we take a brief look at the Government's performance in the last 24 months. Madam Speaker, after two years of this PNM Government, they have clearly demonstrated its total neglect and disregard for the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Since this administration took office, Madam Speaker, the sector has witnessed a drastic decline in all areas.

Madam Speaker, let us look quickly at some of the 2017 budget statement, the promises that were made: Restructuring the School Feeding Programme, enhanced market opportunities through an expanded tourism sector. Madam Speaker, the tourism sector has virtually collapsed in this country over the last 24 months.

Drainage upgrades, modernization of land records. Investors and farmers will access low cost credit from the ADB. Irrigation infrastructure, enhanced water resource management systems, access roads improvement, fish landing site upgrades, coconut industry, coconut rehabilitation and replanting programme, 900 acres.

Madam Speaker, I travel the east coast every time to come here and "I still looking for de 900 acres ah coconut. Cannot find it". Madam Speaker, despite all the promises made, nothing tangible has been done to improve the sector. It is really a tale of woe with this Government. Many words, but very little action, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Opposition Leader was quite correct in laying our position that these promises, both in fiscal 2017 and 2018, will go the way of more betrayal and broken promises by the PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on some data that came straight out of the development project booklet that was provided. And something is absolutely wrong with the Ministry or the Minister, and I am not laying blame here on either or, because when you have a Ministry that spends 32 per cent of its allocation in a critical Ministry like agriculture, something is wrong. Something is wrong. Madam Speaker, under the developmental—what we call the DP Consolidated Fund, the Ministry of Agricultural spent 32.5 per cent of the allocation in that Ministry. No allocation, Madam Speaker, was made on the development of the fish processing industry. This is poor planning for a value-added feature in our diversification drive. How can you not look at those areas, and we are talking diversification year after year?

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Madam Speaker, the Minister or the Ministry failed to set up community-based aquaculture programmes. Listen to this, Madam Speaker. They spent \$88,000 out of a \$500,000 allocation. Something is wrong. Diversification is important. We cannot spend it?

Madam Speaker, there was a failure to spend strategically on the conservation and preservation of the buffalypso. That has high export potential and substitution potential. But you know what, Madam Speaker? The Ministry only spent \$150,000 out of a \$1 million allocation. Now, again, Madam Speaker, what is going wrong? You have allocations. You have a strategy. You are in a critical Ministry. Spend the allocation, because we have to move this sector forward.

There was an allocation for agricultural access to targeted commodities and strategic crops. Now, that, to me, is critical in the substitution arena, if we have to substitute locally grown crops rather than having to buy it from away, to save our foreign exchange. But Madam Speaker, would you believe, out of a \$7 million allocation, \$300,000 were spent? How do you, I mean, explain that? And I am not saying that—there may be challenges, eh, but how do you rate the performance and the function of your Ministry or your Minister when you have these types of allocations in critical areas and [*Desk thumping*] you are not spending the allocation? Something is absolutely wrong there.

Drainage and irrigation? Madam Speaker, not a project implemented, and drainage and irrigation—this is food. This is plant. They need water. They need to be irrigated. So, all I am telling the national community is that if we are to measure the performance of the Government, well then this tells the tale. This tells the story.

Madam Speaker, I have been in contact with farmers over the last couple weeks and I continue to have conversations with them, to make sure that, you know, I am kept abreast of challenges whether the Government, through the Minister, and the Ministry is really making any headway, and these are the things that the farmers are telling me, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, agricultural subsidies and payments. The Minister of Agriculture, the farmers want him to know that they have been waiting up to three years to collect their subsidy payments. There is a farmer who said he is trying to collect some subsidies on spray cans for the longest of a while and he cannot get the money.

Madam Speaker, even more detrimental is our rice farmers. Our rice farmers are critical to our food security here in this country. And you know what, Madam

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Speaker? There are rice farmers in Plum Mitan and in Navet who have not been paid in one year and they have to go back to the land and replant. [*Desk thumping*] And these are very low-margin types of operations, and the minute you do not pay these guys, you put them at risk, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, can you imagine farmers having invested in irrigation, digging of ponds, you know, purchasing their equipment and after three/four years still waiting on money?

Madam Speaker, agriculture access roads are critical also to our farmers. And you know what? I can tell you that nothing tangible, I now read for you from the DP that no agricultural roads programmes were initiated. Madam Speaker, as a Member of Parliament for Mayaro, I have written the Minister and the Ministry scores of letters. I have written the hon. Member several times for roads for my farmers in the constituency. And, Madam Speaker, just for the record I want to quickly just call out some of these roads: Legendre Road in Ecclesville, Mahabalsingh Branch 2 Extension, Guppy Hill Extension, Sakeer Trace Extension where all our rice farmers are, Ramkissoon Trace off Mahabalsingh, Mapepire Trace off Pond Road, Rajpaul Trace off Legendre Road, Mac Mohan Road Extension. Madam Speaker, this is where the bulk of our farmers are, and when you do not have access roads, communication, which is critical to get in, get out, get products in, get products to market, when these roads are not fixed it puts pressure on our farmers, Madam Speaker, pressure on the farmers. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, marketing. When the goods are—the challenge to get it out, they come to the market now. It is more pressure for our farmers. Madam Speaker, farmers face a range of marketing challenges. At the local wholesale level, at the Norris Deonarine Northern Wholesale Market, the market has clearly outgrown its capacity and there is persistent problems of overcrowding. Madam Speaker, I am not sure if you ever had to be in traffic on the highway and all these farmers' trucks are backed up onto the highway causing inordinate delays of traffic. Madam Speaker, that is something that we must address for our farmers.

Another issue that the farmers have identified, Madam Speaker, is that foreign produce is saturating the market. Now, I know we cannot prevent our Caricom neighbours from getting their products into our market, but we must find some creative way to give our farmers a competitive advantage at the end of the day. Perhaps it is about time, Madam Speaker, that we start looking at a place for the foreign products to be marketed. Not inside the wholesale market that we have there in Macoya.

Madam Speaker, another big issue that our farmers have been complaining about over the last year or so, I guess it is perennial, is the fluctuation in the produce prices that they are able to access on the local market. A lot of farmers depend on what you call rain-fed or seasonal agricultural production and you tend to have an over-supply of the produce during certain months. Now, this greatly affects the prices and you end up with gluts on the market and then the farmers could lose. They lose their investment. They lose the investment on the crop, because they cannot get a proper return on their investment. This is wreaking havoc on the farmers, especially when they have to repay their loans, and so on.

Madam Speaker, running off the fact of gluts on the market, you have an issue that the agro-processing component of the sector is woefully inadequate, more so that it is even failing. When there is oversupply, the question of lack of storage and agro-processing, it rears its ugly head. The farmers are crying bitterly to have this situation rectified, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the area of export marketing, farmers are concerned that not enough is being done by the relevant state agencies, especially NAMDEVCO to assist the farmers in developing this market to get their agricultural produce outside there. Madam Speaker, I think the king of the problem of the farmers, the main one, is land tenure, renewal of agricultural leases, modernization of land records.

At a recent JSC hearing, Madam Speaker, a lot of these issues were vented, and while not getting into the details of those meetings, what I can tell you is that the state agencies are fully aware of the problems and they know how to fix it because they have done it in the past. But yet, Madam Speaker, the issue still remains unsolved in 2018. There are a couple additional issues that are locked into the issue of land tenure. One, without the land tenure, without the agricultural leases, Madam Speaker, credit from the ADB and commercial financial institutions is absent.

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Madam Speaker, many of these farmers, without these leases, cannot even get the farmer's ID card that allows them to get access to the subsidies, the incentives. High cost of agricultural inputs, feeds, agro-chemicals, fertilizers. There are few companies I am told, Madam Speaker, who import these items and they control these prices and when they control the prices, the farmers have to pay whatever these companies are asking for it.

And, last on that list, Madam Speaker, is the high cost of labour. For years, for the last two years more so, the conversation about having CEPEP and URP

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participate in the agricultural sector that has not materialized. I think it was mentioned in this year's budget too and I suspect that it is going to be another promise that will not materialize either. But Madam Speaker, what in the 2018 budget spoke to all those items? Nothing. Nothing in terms of a paradigm shift spoke to these items to fix it, because why are we creating paradigm shifts if not to fix the problems for the stakeholders. [*Desk thumping*] We have to fix the problems for the stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you what it is that was mentioned in the budget. The Minister of Finance reiterated that the agricultural sector is one of those earmarked after two years, third budget, it is still earmarked for special focus. So let us look at the special focus that the Minister asked to focus on. One: Agriculture, the agricultural sector will boost the health of the nation. Yet, Madam Speaker, nothing in the DP, or the developmental plan, speaks to any strategy or speaks to any programme that is going to allow a bridge or a combination between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture to boost the health of our nation. I would suggest if there is nothing in place that one be put in place soonest, because that is critical to the health of our young people and our elderly.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance also goes on to say that as a special focus, agriculture would contribute to food security and exports. But, Madam Speaker, this administration had the audacity to close down Caroni Green which was generating foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*] It was boosting the supply of hot peppers on the international market so our local farmers will have a steady demand so that they can continue to producing as much as they can. You know what is sad, Madam Speaker? They shut down Caroni Green with peppers on the tree. This is like watching US dollars rotten and fall onto the ground, and you have a shortage on top of that. So, Madam Speaker, I do not understand how the position of the Government and making a claim, make it a focus, but yet just a few months ago you mash-up a whole industry with that pepper.

Madam Speaker, focus No. 3: present spill-offs through agro-processing. Madam Speaker, how exactly are they going to do this? This Government has been treating agriculture like a seesaw. They spoke about agro-processing, making concessions last year and you know, in this year budget Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance admitted, failure in this venture when he said that the agro- processing was extremely low in this country.

Madam Speaker, Focus No. 4 says that in the 2018 budget agriculture, he is hoping to enhance agricultural income. Well, after the first three I do not know

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how the hon. Minister is going to enhance anything. Because two years into this Government, none of their manifesto promises have been fulfilled in the agricultural sector, yet they want to enhance income.

Madam Speaker, we heard a lot of technical jargon in the presentation. He speaks about GDP, speaks about consumption of foreign exchange. But Madam Speaker, it is well to note that agriculture does not fit the typical economic model. Madam Speaker, only when agriculture is viewed in terms of the profit not being dollars and cents, but as long as it becomes food security and a greater access to nutritional foods, then, only then can we say our agricultural sector is successful. And that is the paradigm shift that I am waiting for in the 2018 document.

Madam Speaker, if we leave this sector to the economists and the financial experts, we will not realize anything, because if you are looking at agriculture only in terms of dollars and cents we will go nowhere.

Madam Speaker, focus No. 5 in the budget: agro-processing parks, While I have no problem giving farmers access to modern facilities, I have a problem that there are two packaging houses one in Tabaquite, and one in Couva, that are yet to be utilized after two years Madam Speaker. So how can you talk about processing parks, nothing in the budget for it, and yet you have two sitting down doing nothing.

Madam Speaker, the Minister also spoke about building new shells in Moruga, now we do not have no money, we have two shells sitting down right there and we going to build another one. Madam Speaker, it is not making sense Madam Speaker, I would implore the hon. Minister, the people in his Ministry to look at if you want to build some more shells, build it in Tableland. Because Tableland has our pineapple farmers, who I am absolutely sure could turn their product into export generating products like canned foods, chunks, slices, juices for sale on both the local and international markets.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on what I think is a controversial topic in the budget, that of the agricultural grants. Let me say from the onset also Madam Speaker, that I do not have a problem with financial assistance for any new farmer, any old farmer, but my problem is with the disbursement and how we are going to categorize such.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader was rightfully, she rightfully put it, and I want to repeat it boldly, the \$100,000 agricultural incentive, the \$100,000 incentive listed in this budget is nothing more than another slush fund to compensate for political patronage and favouritism. Madam Speaker the

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Government is the main shareholder in the ADB. This bank is governed by statute, and under section 34(b) of the Act. The ADB has the power to grant or underwrite loans for the development of agriculture, commercial fishing and industries connected to such person.

Madam Speaker, it is either blatant complacency, bordering on hypocrisy on the one hand to talk to citizens about being overly dependent on handouts or subsidies, such as fuel, T&TEC, WASA, while on the other hand you talking about giving grants up to \$100,000. Madam Speaker, what security do the taxpayers of this country have that their money will be handed over to individuals who will put it to good use? Where is the guarantee?

Madam Speaker, why not give an allowance or a loan guarantee for a prolonged period, let us assume ten years, let us assume you get it through the ADB at one per cent the lowest interest rate that you can possibly get. Madam Speaker, when you do it like this, we give the taxpayers two assurances. Firstly, that the farmer or the friend would not take the money and after one crop cycle fold up shop and pocket the rest and go. And that is what is going to happen, Madam Speaker.

And the second item, if we do it through the ADB, the most important thing is that the farmer will stay in the field. Because this principal that he would get it now becomes not an incentive but an investment in Trinidad and Tobago and the food security of this country Madam Speaker. That is the two things that if this grant is routed through the legally constituted body to work with farmers in this country. I wish Madam Speaker, to a totally object to this ministerial committee, that will be deciding on who receives this \$100,000 grant. Because this clearly can be opened up to political favouritism or victimization, and Madam Speaker, political victimization is real. It is absolutely real, and I can tell you, today on social media I read a very interesting story. I read a story, today of a witness who has appeared before a particular JSC and lost her job last night. [*Desk thumping*] And it has me worried that this may have political dots to connect. But I leave that there Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, that is something real and we have to be very concerned about it. I want to echo sentiments of the Opposition Leader again, that if this ministerial committee were to be implemented, because we cannot find the estimates for that anywhere in the existing budget, nor do we trust them to even implement this thing. We will scrutinize it to the point that if required we will file complaints with the Equal Opportunity Tribunal to make sure that it is done fairly and squarely for all people in this country.

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Madam Speaker I will tell this house, this Parliament today, that none of the six focus points, that have been mentioned in the 2018 Budget, are really shifting the paradigm, because it is more of the same, nothing and as I said in my start-up Madam Speaker, I agree that we need a paradigm shift. I am prepared, my constituents are prepared to bear that grind make the shift but it is not being said in the document. Nothing has changed in that paradigm.

Madam Speaker, let me go quickly and offer some suggestions to the Minister of Finance on how we should be shifting the paradigm in agriculture. Madam Speaker, what is in our 10 to 15 year horizon in agriculture? We have no choice other than to make food supply a matter of national security, Madam Speaker. We must be in a position within the next 10 to 15 years to feed ourselves. It cannot, it cannot be last on the national agenda, it has to occupy the first spot and I am particularly glad Madam Speaker that today is the first time in four budget statements that agriculture has been allowed to speak before the seven o'clock news [*Desk thumping*] so I am hoping, that something I say ends up on the news, because of its importance, normally I speak about it 12 o'clock in the night. But anyway—I mean, I am hoping that somebody listens—[*Crosstalk*—]listens at the end of the day.

Madam Speaker, this requires a transformational shift in our thinking, [*Crosstalk*] our planning and the execution of the agricultural sector, Madam Speaker. Let us face the truth, we have been talking economic diversification for years. Who is going to step in to be the entrepreneurial messiahs to save this country in agriculture Madam Speaker? Who is going to do it? Is it the upper class the ones that we now commonly referred to as the one per cent? Madam Speaker, after 50 years it has not happened and I am telling you it is not going to happen. Is it the middle or the working class, Madam Speaker? No because they cannot do it either. They are now being ripped apart at the seams in terms of taxes and the burden in this country. They are being used to support the social network, the social safety net. So they are not the one who are going to be able to be entrepreneurial class to take us forward. So who are we left with, Madam Speaker?

We are left with the task of charting our future and I am telling you, Madam Speaker, it is our farmers, but they cannot do it without the help of the State. If we want to take the country in a particular direction, we must create the pathways for it to happen. So, Madam Speaker, the first suggestion in terms of a paradigm shift in agriculture, I am asking that land tenure reform take a new format. Registered farmers must be given priority in the granting of tenure on state lands, this process should be unburdened from state agencies. Madam Speaker, in a lot

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of First World countries the private sector has councils and NGOs who are trusted, who are given a trusted role to process these applications, so you take it out of the State hands that are really creating the bottlenecks for the farmers, Madam Speaker, that is a paradigm shift in thinking that we must look at.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the second shift that we ought to be looking at is in the infrastructure development of these agriculture lands. In the early days of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, there was much hesitation and procrastination, but today Point Lisas is the heart that keeps pumping blood through this country. We need an agricultural Point Lisas, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The State must take the risk of the cost of developing the land with the necessary infrastructure—water, power, irrigation, ponds and access roads. New and existing farmers must be able to bring to market products within six to eight months of being granted access to these agri-development zones. Madam Speaker, these zones must also fetch preferred utility rates for water and power. Farmers can also be removed if no visible activity or action is taken within a said time frame. Madam Speaker, that is how we change a paradigm in driving up the needs of our food security in this country.

Madam Speaker, paradigm shift number three: guaranteed minimum pricing. Certain basic staples—we talk about price fluctuation and its impact on our farmers—must be given a minimum price. The State should encourage farmers to produce as much as they want, knowing that their minimum price will hold and not collapse because of market gluts—staples such as rice, cassava, tomatoes. Farmers will put their best foot and hand forward to maximize the output from the land, knowing that they will get guaranteed pricing for these products.

Madam Speaker, shift three speaks to shift four: storage and marketing. What do we do with these products when there is oversubscription, when there is overproduction? Madam Speaker, a greater effort by NAMDEVCO to provide storage facilities for when there is oversupply, packaging and processing that is on par with local and international standards. Madam Speaker, these shelves which the Minister referred to in his budget statements, is what we call the packaging houses. They must be staffed with competent people. We must use modern technology, modern technology in storage facilities and in the processing and packaging facilities to make our output, our cost to produce these items as low as possible. NAMDEVCO, Madam Speaker, must now act as a regulator which will adjust the supply based on market demands. All surplus should either be stored or can be exported.

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Madam Speaker, paradigm shift number five: additional credit and financing for farmers. While the ADB has a statutory mandate to provide low-cost financing for agricultural products, I am asking the commercial banking sector to join forces with the State and provide soft loans—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Mayaro, your original 45 minutes is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up.

Mr. R. Paray: Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] I am asking the commercial banking sector to join forces with the State and provide these soft loans. Farmers have been treated as pariahs by the commercial banking sector over years. Commercial banks are unwilling to take the risk with farmers. But, you know, Madam Speaker, perhaps instead of the Minister of Finance bullying the bankers for an extra 10 per cent corporation tax—[*Interruption*—bullying. Yes, bullying them. Bullying them for 10 per cent extra corporation tax—perhaps the Minister could have called the banking association—[*Crosstalk*—well, it is 25 to 30, 25 to 35. So it is 30 to 35 then? [*Crosstalk*] Okay? Well, 5 per cent. Let us say for argument’s sake, Madam Speaker, 5 per cent corporation tax. Perhaps—[*Crosstalk*—Madam Speaker, they are disturbing “meh” and I am trying to run through very quickly, for my time.

Hon. Member: This is the NAMDEVCO market?

Madam Speaker: Members.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, 5 per cent. Could the Minister tell the banks, look, put a fund with \$50 million and allow our farmers to access some low-cost funding for their infrastructure development. So you add whatever the ADB, whatever the State is providing, you now have the commercial banks adding some financing to that.

Paradigm shift six, Madam Speaker: the Government must really look at doing what a lot of other countries are doing and try to invest or even owning wheat farms in the United States and Europe. Owning these types of farms, Madam Speaker, will guarantee our food supply during times of war and conflict. We must never underestimate the impact of the North/South Korea conflict and how it can reach our shores very, very quickly. Madam Speaker, we cannot take anything for granted.

Paradigm number seven, Madam Speaker: connecting the use of IT and digital technology in farming. This is in direct connection to what the political leader spoke about, the fourth industrial revolution. Madam Speaker, do you know in

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the Netherlands, which is a very small country, they have approximately 153,000 greenhouses and, you know what? They produce over a 141,000 tonnes of products per square mile—per square mile—inside of these greenhouses by the clear use of technology-driven agriculture, Madam Speaker. This is the kind of—
[*Interruption*] Excuse me?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They have greenhouses in all?

Mr. R. Paray: Yes, 153,000 greenhouses. Madam Speaker, so the use of technology is critical for the farming industry in Trinidad and Tobago to move forward.

And last of all in the paradigm shift, Madam Speaker, is one of culture. It is how we see our farmers. We need to respect and treat our farmers with dignity. Madam Speaker, this is the most important element for success. We must give our farmers the respect and the dignity that the profession brings. Farmers must never be made to feel that they are second or third class citizens in this country. [*Desk thumping*] In my respectful view, our farmers ought to be positioned as the new 1 per cent going forward, Madam Speaker. This is the type of paradigm shift that we as a country should be expecting when a budget document comes before this House, but unfortunately, that is not the case.

So, Madam Speaker, as I wrap up, I want to let this House know that our people are prepared to make the sacrifices that are needed to move this country forward, but they are not prepared to willingly accept mediocrity and half-baked plans to take us nowhere.

Madam Speaker, as I bring my contribution to an end, I wish to remind this administration that we are all prepared for the burden of adjustment. We are all prepared to eat a little, live a little longer, but we are all prepared to do our part for the love of our country, but we are not prepared to accept poor leadership, poor governance and a total disrespect for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Miss Marlene Mc Donald (Port of Spain South): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as usual, for this opportunity to contribute to the 2018 budget debate. Madam Speaker, I want to state that this is my eleventh contribution [*Desk thumping*] and I could recognize when I hear a good contribution, when I hear a mediocre one and when someone is just going around the mulberry bush. I want to tell my colleague from Mayaro that between 2010 to 2015—you said a short while ago that we on this side, we are too preoccupied with talking about 2010 to

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2015, but Member for Mayaro, I sat across there for five years, from 2010 to 2015, and all I heard was the *Su*, the rapid rail, the church in Carapo, the duster, the nightie and who went with curlers in their hair on Old Year's Night to withdraw their money from the bank. [*Crosstalk*]

You know, I would tell you something further. I also heard, when I sat there, the Brian Lara stadium down in Tarouba and somebody on my side said: "When you all are going to finish it?" And the response from this side was: "That is PNM shame. We are not going to fix it. It is PNM shame." And now you are telling us on this side we must not talk about 2010 to 2015. Madam Speaker, 2010 to 2015 represented as far as I am concerned, the bankruptcy that you all are talking about. [*Desk thumping*]. It represents the bankruptcy. That is where it started. That is the genesis. You see, you were not in this House. You were not here.

Hon. Members: He was in the PNM. [*Laughter*]

Miss M. Mc Donald: But I sat there and I took it for five years and the Member for Oropouche East knows that. He is well aware of that. We took it for five years, and you all went on and on and now you all are trying to play paragon of virtue for me? [*Desk thumping*] No, no. [*Crosstalk*] You are as guilty as ever.

I recall the Member who sat here, the Member for Arima, told this House that PNM must atone for their sins—

Mr. Indarsingh: They still have to. [*Laughter*]

Miss M. Mc Donald: And I would you something—Member for Couva South, I am coming to you just now. [*Laughter*] I want to state quite clearly that we paid our dues and in 2010, the country took a decision. I was always one who was quick to say the country took a decision. They took a decision in 2015. Sit, accept it, do what you have to do, but do not knock us when we stand here and we speak about the activities between 2010 and 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

And with respect to the agricultural plan, I think you have some good ideas. You can speak to the Minister of Finance, but I also read the offerings of this Government in this budget statement and I can tell you that there is a comprehensive plan there, but you must remember that we do not have the type of money that you would want to see certain activities done. We do not have that type of money, but I notice that a \$20 million incentive programme has been put in place for the farmers. It has been placed there. I will tell you something, Member for Mayaro.

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You know better than I do with respect to agriculture. For years successive Governments would have been grappling with how to move agriculture forward, and if you go way back, 20, 25 years, you would recognize that when the oil industry took off and there was this boom, there was something in economics that you call the rural-urban drift. That is when people left the land. You would know it better than I do. They left the land and they went to work in the urban areas in the oil industry, et cetera. But I would tell you something. This Government is committed to assisting the farmers and we are not going to back down. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Government's theme for 2018 is Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path, and I support this theme wholeheartedly. What this budget is attempting to do is to continue what the Government has started in 2017 and their theme then was crafting a blueprint for transformation as well as growth and, in so doing, we are laying the foundation for a sound economy. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Madam Speaker, I stand here tonight with a heavy heart because I have been here for quite some time in this Parliament. I say so because of the difficult situation that this country has found itself. But I also do know that this country could have been so much better off were it not for those disastrous five years and 90 days of the rule, the governance, of the other side. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, they spent, they had a ball. They saved nothing and now all of them are now talking about this Government is bankrupt, we have no vision, we have no plan. But the thing about it is, where did it start?

So I want to come away from all their figures and whatnot and really talk—the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was having a conversation with the Speaker, and not only having a conversation with the Speaker, but having a conversation with this country here tonight—to remind you all that this country must never forget your fiscal irresponsibility. We must never forget your basic disregard for basic norms. We must never ever forget your preoccupation with being popular. I would tell you all something; as I said, I sat for five years and I observed.

Madam Speaker, from where I sit, this budget is not just about crunching numbers. This budget is not just about the fact that we have lost over \$20 billion in four years. This budget is not just about the depressed oil and gas prices. As someone on the ground, I dare say, that this budget 2018 has everything to do with people. It has to do with the people's issues and the problems we would encounter in trying to provide for our citizens while keeping this country away from the throes of the IMF. This budget will teach all of us to become our own managers at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, between 2010 to 2015, no new income streams were created. None were created to support the unprecedented expenditure. [*Crosstalk*] But if there were, then you all did not tell this country, you all did not tell us. No attempts were made at any form of diversification away from oil and gas. None. The reality is, Madam Speaker, we have to examine the nature of the expenditure that they got involved in, and we know the difference between the recurrent and the capital expenditure. The capital expenditure has everything to do with the generation of assets. In order to fund their projects, the former Government, what did they do? They ran high deficits and they borrowed, and they borrowed. They could not care less about the debt-to-GDP ratio. They did not care about that. International oil and gas prices had been on the decrease throughout 2014/2015, but despite this situation, the former Government took virtually no action to stabilize the public finances.

In 2015, fiscal 2015, while Government's revenue from oil fell by \$8 billion, the expenditure only went down by \$3 billion. So you were in this constant tailspin of deficit after deficit after deficit. As a consequence, the fiscal deficit ballooned to \$7 billion, roughly 4.2 per cent of GDP. So the situation before us is very clear, Madam Speaker. We cannot spend what we do not have. If our revenues have been reduced, then we have to adjust our expenditure. We as a responsible Government, it behoves us to act in a manner that will redound to the benefit of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have to adjust our expectations. This must be our new reality. This approach would give life to the Minister of Finance's theme: Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path. Madam Speaker, if we do not do this, then we run the risk of mortgaging this country, and it will be on the backs of our children and our grandchildren, that the burden of the debts we create today knowingly, they will have to pay. So we have to initiate that paradigm shift, and the time to do it is now. We need to take the corrective measures now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is better we make our own adjustments for our citizenry rather than to leave it to the IMF, an external force, to come to tell us what to do. We are a sovereign nation and we must live up to that. I can assure you that if we allow the IMF to enter this country, the first thing they will do is to cut recurrent expenditure and recurrent expenditure covers like your personnel expenditures—salaries, wages, purchases of goods and services, current transfers and subsidies, debt servicing.

Madam Speaker, I said it last year in this House and I would say it again this year, Trinidad and Tobago does not operate in a vacuum. We are an open

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dependent economy. We are price takers. Whatever happens in the global economy with respect to oil and gas prices would affect us here in Trinidad and Tobago. So, again, the issue for Trinidad and Tobago is how do we manage and adjust our economy in the face of decreasing and unstable oil and gas prices. Hence again, I am using the theme all over, the *raison d'être* of this budget is: Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path. This must become our new normal. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, at this point, I want to place our current crisis in the context of developments in the global economy and, in particular, to compare our country with other countries that are similarly circumstanced. And, Madam Speaker, you know I like to scan the globe, so I want to look at Saudi Arabia very briefly. Saudi Arabia possesses 18 per cent of the world's proven petroleum reserves and ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum. The oil and gas sector accounts for about 50 per cent of the GDP and about 85 per cent of export earnings, but over the past two years, Saudi Arabia had to cut energy subsidies. They had to slash public spending and started to look for new ways to raise revenue outside of the oil sector.

Madam Speaker, according to the World Bank Group, fiscal deficits are expected to surpass an estimated \$97 billion in 2017. International reserves are down, the kingdom has borrowed significantly: \$26 billion in 2016; \$10 billion, April 2017; and they are planning to borrow yet another \$15 billion. The Government has taken austerity measures in the 2016 budget, including a 14 per cent cut in spending, mainly on defence and fuel subsidies.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, budgetary allocations for health, education and municipality services have all been reduced. And a point that my colleague, the Member from La Brea made, the largest increases in fuel are 133 per cent for ethane, 79 per cent increase for transport diesel and 67 per cent each for natural gas and low-grade gasoline. Prices of electricity and water have been increased by 60 per cent, Madam Speaker. The wage bill is reduced to less than 15 per cent of GDP, curtailing public sector wage increases, and the renegotiating of all contracts have been cut also for capital expenditure. Madam Speaker, that is the state of play in Saudi Arabia.

In Nigeria, Nigeria is considered a middle-income emerging market and it is the largest economy in Africa. Their oil and gas sector accounts for some 35 per cent of GDP and 90 per cent of their total export revenue. However, Nigeria has been having a lot of problems also. They now have instituted a plan called the zero-oil plan. Nigeria has lost some 30 trillion of national export revenue

between 2015 to 2017 due to the crash in oil prices. So there is need now to ramp up in Nigeria the non-oil exports as Nigeria's future earnings seem to be doomed. Madam Speaker, the zero-oil plan aims at earning, at least \$30 billion from the non-oil sector in order to boost their economy. They are also looking at other things in terms of diversification. They are looking to export more rice, wheat, corn, palm oil, rubber, hides and skin and sugar amongst other things.

Norway, we go to Europe, the petroleum's contribution to GDP peaked at 25 per cent in 2008 to a low, an all-time low, of 15 per cent in 2015. Revenue tumbled from 33 per cent in 2012 to 20 per cent in 2015. As a result, thousands of Norwegians lost their jobs and Norwegians, the paper is saying, have become one of the most indebted people in Europe. Unemployment peaked in the middle of the year and has again fallen. That is the state of play in Norway. So you see, Madam Speaker, energy-dependent countries with larger reserves than Trinidad and Tobago are all experiencing levels of hardship and they have to adopt some sort of measure in order to move away from oil and gas revenues.

I turn my attention to the Caribbean region. We must always remember that our neighbours in the Caribbean, they absorb a large portion of our exports, especially in manufacturing. The health and strength of these economies, Madam Speaker, become very critical to our domestic non-oil exporters. The recent devastation by Irma, as well as Maria, should remind us all of how vulnerable our economies are. So, at this point, my deepest sympathies to the people in Barbuda, Dominica, St. Maarten, Puerto Rico and all other affected islands.

Madam Speaker, in order to understand the need to make our own adjustments I would briefly look at two Caricom countries and their approach to dealing or not dealing with the IMF. These two countries are—and I am going to juxtapose them—Jamaica which has been associated with the IMF for quite some time and Barbados who is resisting the IMF.

Jamaica's membership in the IMF dates back to February 21, 1963. Jamaica has a population of some 2.8 million and they have had 16 arrangements with the IMF since joining in 1963. So, Jamaica has been associated with the IMF for the past 54 years, yet there is no sign, Madam Speaker, that it has improved its economic viability in any way. After 20 years of negative average annual per capita, Jamaica continues to be plagued by high debt and low growth. Madam Speaker, they have just signed off on a new package, a new three-year package with the IMF.

Barbados, on the other hand, their membership dates back to December 29, 1970 but they have had two arrangements since joining the IMF; but Barbados

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represents a country that is heavily burdened but has done everything to resist going to the IMF. As they entered fiscal 2017, they were labouring under the burden of high debt, high expenditure and low income but Barbados has remained stubbornly outside of the doors of the IMF.

7.15 p.m.

You have to ask the question, why, Madam Speaker. Why has the Government held back from a formal agreement? And they did that because they feared that the deal may involve the devaluation of the Barbadian dollar, which is currently pegged at one Barbados dollar to 50 cents US. This comes, Madam Speaker, after the fact that the Barbados economy back in September, 2016, their net Government debt grew from \$8.4 billion—not grew, reduced from \$8.4 billion to \$7.8 billion. Despite it all the Barbadian Government decided we are not going there, we are going to try, and we are going to resist it, and we are going to do everything that is humanly possible so our people do not go through those austerity measures. You have to cut your cloth to suit your suit, according to my grandmother.

The other thing too, in Jamaica, it had gotten so bad in Jamaica with the IMF that the IMF had a member of staff stationed at the Central Bank, had his own office at the Central Bank in Jamaica. So you had people, external people actually dictating the pace for you in your country, and this is what this Government is trying to avoid. Through it all we are reducing. Yes, we are reducing. Yesterday I heard somebody said, I think was Member for Tabaquite, we reduced MiLAT, we reduced Civilian Conservation Corps. Yes, we have to reduce these programmes, because, again, we do not have the income to support. If we were doing \$40 million we cut it to \$30 million, but we are going to try still, and this is one of the ways we have to do it, reduce Government spending before the IMF comes in to tell us, we will reduce it for you.

Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, I turn now to our local economic situation, and I heard those on the other side criticizing the proposals, but let me tell you, the Opposition Leader in her contribution tried to compare the PNM's increase in revenue or expenditure between the years 2003 to 2008. But I want to tell her something—she is not here—between 2003 to 2004, our expenditure was \$15.8 billion, with a revenue of \$16.7 billion. We had a surplus of \$958 million. In 2005, the expenditure was \$19.1 billion with a revenue of \$20.6 billion. And up to 2009, 2008—2009, our expenditure was \$44.7 billion with a revenue of \$56.8 billion, with a surplus of 12.1. So when we got more revenue we were able to spend more on our people. We were able to do more capital expenditure, and perhaps more recurrent expenditure.

But, on the other hand, when we look at the figures, your figures over the last, between 2010 to 2015, each time the projected revenue increased you all spent more and more, but you all acted as if the budget was only about expenditure, nothing else, and then you claim—now you all have become the biggest town criers—the budget is bankrupt; you all have no vision, you all are clueless, you all vacuous. But I will tell you something what I will say here tonight is that you all have no shame. [*Desk thumping*] No shame! You took no hard decisions. You implemented no significant revenue-generating measures. Even something as non-oppressive as the old property tax you refused to implement. Madam Speaker, they continue not to accept responsibility for what has happened between 2010 to 2015. But in case they forgot, let me remind you, Madam Speaker, and the national community, the destabilization of the foreign exchange market began in 2014 and we are still struggling with it. The national budget went over \$60 billion. Overspending on almost every Government project or acquisition became the norm. The GATE programme exploded way out of control, and there was unrealistic wage settlements just before the election.

I want to talk about the Member for Couva North. I listened to the Member for Couva North's contribution, and the Member for Couva North said there was a decrease in the allocation to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. But the Member for Couva North, and you too Member for Couva South, you were in this House back in 2013. [*Interruption*] Hello, I am on my feet. Thank you. You were in this House, both of you, Member for Couva North and Member for Couva South, and you all would recall the massive increases to the UNC-controlled corporations. Massive increases, and I walked with the figures here because I went into the *Hansard* and I got out my figures in my contribution, and I want to tell you all for the Port of Spain Corporation, your City, we only got .48 per cent, which is \$933,000 increase.

San Juan/Laventille, another PNM-controlled corporation, got .34 per cent, which is \$462,000, but look at San Fernando, 9.7 per cent increase, that is \$9.9 million they got; Chaguanas, 9.3 per cent increase, that is \$6.4 million; Tunapuna, 9.9 per cent increase, that is \$1.5 million; Sangre Grande, 10.2 per cent, working out to \$6.4 million. That is what happened, and now we stand here now and we talk about inequitable distribution of resources. I am the one who championed that phrase, inequitable distribution of resources, because I asked the question then, what is in it for Port of Spain South? What is in it? No answer.

The Member for Oropouche West, I listened to the Member for Oropouche West from home yesterday and Oropouche West talked—I think the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, he spoke, and she mentioned that she was appalled, the

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Member was appalled that so many things happening up in North when the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs spoke, and she was wondering “what was happening in my constituency”. I want to tell her something, again, when I spoke back three years ago, I asked the Speaker for the opportunity to present some figures, and I asked what was happening on the East-West Corridor and in Port of Spain South, because I will give you the list of projects for what happened in South then: Oncology Centre in Penal, the Debe Campus in Penal, the Children’s Hospital in Preysal—this was in your PSIP—[*Crosstalk*]*—*campus of COSTATT in Chaguanas, construction [*Crosstalk*] Madam—protect “meh”, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed, Port of Spain South. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The construction of the UWI South Campus, Debe; establishment of a skills and technology centre in Debe/Penal; the National Aquatic Centre in Couva; the National Cycling Centre in Couva; the Ministry of Community Development in Chaguanas; a national centre for non-communicable diseases in Penal; YTEPP in Chaguanas, Ministry of Food Production in Chaguanas; this is what I presented to the Parliament and nobody rebutted this. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody rebutted this! All these here were in your PSIP.

Madam Speaker, I was appalled to hear the Leader of the Opposition spoke about shale gas, and she also said we must remember those people who voted us into power, they are our employers and we must account to them at all times, but the Member for Siparia is not here because I would have want to ask her, how did she account to the citizens of this country with respect to the true state of the financial affairs? Madam Speaker, it was in the 17th of September, 2014, when I made my contribution to the 2015 budget, and I said then that should the United States become self-sufficient in shale gas we would lose our competitive edge. And right now what we should have done is to be looking for new market, or looking for new source of supply, nobody took us on. We have not done well in finding new gas or oil reserves. We have not done well at all. But they continued on and on, and I am surprised to hear the Member for Siparia making those ludicrous statements in her contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, what they did over that five-year period, all they did was put plasters—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, and you see that irritating voice—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, could I invoke Standing Order 53, specifically in relation to the Member for Couva South?

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Madam Speaker: Members, I know it is late, I would rather that I protect the Member for Port of Spain South than she have to protect herself, so that I would ask people to cooperate. Please, continue, Port of Spain South. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss M. McDonald: Thank you, Madam Speaker, always good for your intervention. Member for Couva South, I will be here tomorrow for you. So, Madam Speaker, they were just putting plasters on sores. They were just propping up a very weak economy. So I want the Member for Siparia to tell me how was she accountable over that five-year period. And added to this, Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago revenue was threatened by that US shale gas. [*Interruption*] That is what you would want me to answer, and that is what you all wanted us to answer between 2010 to 2015, but I would not take that bait.

You on that side you have placed this country 10 years backward. [*Desk thumping*] You would recall back in 2014 to 2015 what happened. You all came to this Parliament here and you all increased all those grants in social development. It cost this country, for additional senior citizens' grant, \$500 million a year. It cost, the expansion of the social safety net, \$175 million annually, and the baby fund, \$100 million. And I asked the question then, could our resources withstand the increased expenditure? It could not, but you all borrowed and borrowed, and borrowed, and what you were borrowing to do, to spend on recurrent expenditure.

Madam Speaker, I also heard about deficit financing, and you all know in this House I was talk about deficit financing, I have no problem with deficit financing, it is used world over as a tool of recovery. However, once you have decided to do that you need to have a planned exit strategy, how are we going to come out of that? For four years I stood in this Parliament and spoke about it. I am surprised now that people are so incensed about the Minister of Finance's deficit budget. But look at see what he has done between 2015 to now. By reducing the expenditure, I mean, we have not achieved a balanced budget, but I can tell you he reduced the expenditure in light of the reduced revenue. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the budget as presented provides hope to our citizens. It cannot be business as usual. The measures undertaken in this budget go across the board. Everyone, if you are a true patriot, is being called upon to put country first. We need to make certain sacrifices. I call, and especially on housewives, and women across this country, from Picton, my constituency, down to Icacos, I ask you all to become creative, it involves everyone. All of us must put our back to the wheel and work this thing through. I said last year, again, that tough times do not last but tough people do, and we will get through this. [*Desk thumping*] We will get through this.

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With respect to the constituency, I observed in the PSIP, and I thank the Minister of Education, that we will be getting that new school, construction will start on the Piccadilly EC School [*Desk thumping*] I have submitted 25 roads to the Minister of Works and Transport, who went with me on a tour of the constituency, so I am expecting something to be done there. Also too I am eagerly awaiting word on the seafront project at Sea Lots. Yes, east Port of Spain, development will be coming. And, Madam Speaker, I want to close, I want to thank my constituents for their support for affording me the opportunity to serve. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, I owe them a debt of gratitude for their support. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, the 11th day of October, 2017, at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.31 p.m.