

Appropriation Bill, 2017

Thursday, October 12, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 12, 2017

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017

[Sixth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I take the opportunity here to join this debate this morning on behalf of the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I take the opportunity here to deal with this budget, a budget that has given no sense of direction to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to its delivery. [*Desk thumping*] This budget has been a budget that all and sundry has been against since its delivery by the Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Government led by Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley. And this budget has been clinically dissected by the Leader of the Opposition [*Desk thumping*] and all of my colleagues on this side in relation to its content which lacks creativity, lacks a sense of direction and has given no hope to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, I take the opportunity here, on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition and on behalf of all my colleagues on this side, to clearly indicate that there is a narrative that is being crafted, a narrative that is being put out in the public domain that this budget has the widespread support of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and all the stakeholders at large. And I want to say from the outset, Madam Speaker, that this Government, led by Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, is living in a fool's paradise, is living in an environment where they are totally disconnected from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And before I do so, I want to take the opportunity here this morning to briefly respond to some of the issues that have been raised during this parliamentary debate, especially by the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General, the Member for Laventille West and the Member for Port of Spain South, who took the opportunity here to try and paint the People's Partnership Government, led by

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Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as having Trinidad and Tobago in this current state that it is. And I want to say that in our five years, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, every sector of this society more or less experienced what we would call an increase in their standard of living [*Desk thumping*] and the population of this country understood what it meant in terms of the improvement in their quality of life, whether it was in health, whether it was in the cost of living and whether there was employment generation and so on, and a clear sense of direction.

And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West took the opportunity to use a cricketing analogy to indicate that the Minister of Finance was like the legendary West Indies fast bowler who is popularly known as, or referred to as Whispering Death, the legendary Michael Holding, and he said that the delivery—and he referred to that famous over at Kensington Oval in Barbados where he indicated that the six balls that were bowled to opening batsman, Geoffrey Boycott, was unplayable, and the Leader of the Opposition had no response and could not reply and could not craft an inning in response to the Minister of Finance. Well, I want to tell the Member for Laventille West here this morning—he is not in the Chamber but I am sure that his colleagues will take the opportunity to inform him—that after three attempts to take his guard at the crease, Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley has relegated him to, what we would call, 13th man. He is no longer in the first 11. [*Desk thumping*] He is carrying, what we would call, towels and doing the job of a water boy in terms of his role on behalf of the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley.

The Member for Laventille West, in his usual style, crass, and attempting to be vulgar and intimidatory in his language and so on, launched, what we would call, a broad-based attack, an unwarranted attack, on all the prison officers of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and the Prison Officers Association of this country. Madam Speaker, whilst there may be challenges within the prison service of this country, the Member for Laventille West attempted to broad-brush and to cast aspersions on the integrity of an arm of the law enforcement agencies of Trinidad and Tobago. And the Member for Laventille West went into the private lives of the prison officers of this country. He did not present one iota of evidence. He did not present any kind of studies or impact assessment as it relates to his findings or his conclusions, and he came up with his grand theory and so on. But what he will not tell the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is that the Attorney General, who has been parading up and down Trinidad and Tobago, attempting to shape and craft an image of him as a performing Attorney General, has abandoned the Prison Officers Association [*Desk thumping*] since he met with them in February of 2017—eight months.

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The Member for Laventille West, being a former member of the law enforcement agencies of this country, a former policeman and so on, should have been able to tell Trinidad and Tobago what his incompetent PNM Government is doing to deal with restorative justice [*Desk thumping*] and the prison system, the challenges that are confronting the prison officers of Trinidad and Tobago and even the prisoners within the restorative justice system and so on, in this country.

And, of course, my good friend from Port of Spain South who attempted to paint a picture of wastage, mismanagement and so on, well, I want to tell the Member for Port of Spain South this morning that she must do a sense of introspection and a sense of confession and admit that the PNM is scandal after scandal, [*Desk thumping*] corruption after corruption since September of 2015. And they attempt to take the opportunity here over the last few days of, as I said, attempting to shape a script, attempting to shape a narrative that there was waste, mismanagement and corruption.

But I want to tell the Member for Port of Spain South that if she had done her sense of introspection she would definitely come to the conclusion that there is crookedness in terms of the procurement of the *Cabo Star* and the *Ocean Flower* and [*Desk thumping*] the individual that the Prime Minister who is touted to have loved goat roti and so on, in relation to recruiting him as a lobbyist on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, no one can tell us after that allocation, I think, of how many million dollars—

Dr. Gopeesingh: \$14 million.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: \$14 million or \$16 million for this famous or infamous gentleman, who the Member for Oropouche East said that has a penchant for goat roti and so on, if he has been able to bring any kind of, what we would call, foreign direct investment, anything that will lead to an improvement in the quality of life on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. He has been an abysmal failure in the field of foreign affairs and that is why Trinidad and Tobago is not really taken seriously at the United Nations based on the performance or the lack of performance on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Madam Speaker, and they want to tell you—the Minister of Finance wants to tell Trinidad and Tobago that the burden is being shared by all and it is being equitably distributed based on the paradigm shift and ensuring a pathway of progress and prosperity and sustainability for the economy of this country. Well, I want to tell the Minister of Finance here this morning, after three budget

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presentations, after two midterm reviews, or mid-year reviews, whatever terminology he may want to append to it from a financial point of view, and after how many drawdowns from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and borrowings, whether locally or from the multilateral lending agencies and so on, the paradigm has not shifted and it will not change. [*Desk thumping*]

The only thing that the people have grown accustomed to under the PNM is taxation, unemployment, under-employment, pain, suffering and hardship. [*Desk thumping*] The health sector is in chaos, Madam Speaker. It is taking people six and seven, and sometimes a year and more than a year to get an appointment to do routine surgeries. The passport system has collapsed in Trinidad and Tobago. We are longer able to access a passport after two weeks and so on, in terms of an appointment or a renewal. I am told that there is a shortage of passports in Trinidad and Tobago and as a result of that, people who want to fly out of Trinidad and Tobago, they are being subjected to exorbitant fees in terms of paying for an expedited passport.

So whether it is from an educational point of view, from a medical point of view, from dealing with wanting to even go on a business enterprise, and so on, people have to wait months now, and the renewal of passports and the passport system at the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security has collapsed and it is indicative of the performance and the lack of leadership [*Desk thumping*] on the part of Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley.

And I want the Minister of Finance to listen because, apparently, he has made up his mind that he is not prepared to engage any stakeholder. That is why he went at the Chamber of Commerce post-budget forum analysis and attempted to attack a member of, what we would call, the professional class of this country, an economist who was attempting to put a different perspective, a different direction on the presentation of the budget. And the Minister of Finance attacked an economist in the person of Ms. Marla Dukharan. But the point I want to make here is that he indicated to the national community that he is not prepared to listen to any sterile or academic debate. The Member for Laventille West, when workers and persons who have been impacted upon in—this budget—in their pockets, when they attempted to engage or send a message outside of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, in his usual style, the Member for Laventille West said, “They could do what they want”, when he was booed by the disenfranchised, the pauperized people outside of the Parliament.

And this is indicative of their style. And I want the Minister of Finance to listen to how the changes announced in the budget have affected your way of life. And these are ordinary people, eh. They do not belong to any particular group. [*Interruption*] You had your time. You are now the 13th man in the side, Member for Laventille

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West. [*Desk thumping*] You had your time. The Opposition is on the dance floor so you will relax and when you get the opportunity, through one of your colleagues who may not take you on—[*Interruption*] they may not take you on in terms of what you are attempting to do—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 53, Madam Speaker. The Member is disturbing—

Madam Speaker: I think the Member can handle himself.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: So, Madam Speaker, for example, a kitchen supervisor by the name of Sharmatie Pancham from South Oropouche:

Things already expensive. Imagine what going to happen now that fuel prices gone up. Your pay not getting better, going up, but the cost of living getting higher and higher. Life will get harder for the people.

Annie Mohan, a business owner from Chaguanas:

I have a problem with GATE. My daughter got a diploma and I have to get \$14,000. I have to buy gas, food. I am single. We need to buy gas, food and pay bills. I feel like a pauper.

Angela Francis, a cemetery keeper from Morvant:

I don't even want to think about it. Life is hard for the working class and think about it becoming stringent. The working class pays the price.

Sarah Pariah, a student from Port of Spain:

People can barely afford these prices we have now and they are not raising your salary.

And, of course, Natalie Purcelle, 18, a student from Rousillac:

In terms of GATE we have to wait too long when we apply for GATE to know if we are approved. Now with the means test, I don't know what this means for us and in the meantime we have to find the money to pay our tuition fees.

This is just, what we would call, a snippet of the ordinary people who responded within—they did not need any sense of analysis, you know, Madam Speaker. They did not need an economist; they did not need an investment analyst and so on, to tell them. Within mere hours of the delivery of this budget this was the response of the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago, telling the failed Government and the incompetent Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, there can be no shift in the paradigm because it is sustained pressure on the poor since the 7th of February, 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

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And they might want to tell you differently, you know, Madam Speaker. But they, through their manifesto of 2015 and also in their interaction with the different stakeholders and so on, in Trinidad and Tobago, they knew that in a way, that when the Partnership came into being that there was, what we would call, an economic collapse or a financial collapse in 2008. When the Partnership came into power under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, it was no bed of roses in handling the economy of this country and dealing with the liabilities as it relates to the stakeholders of this country. But a Prime Minister with a sense of vision, a sense of creativity, a sense of wanting to work with the people and uplifting the people of Trinidad and Tobago, did not lift her hands in the air and say, “I cannot deal with the challenges of this country”. [*Desk thumping*] Because it was the first time in the country, in 17 years, that Trinidad and Tobago experienced, or went into negative economic growth of minus 4.4 per cent. There were liabilities across the board, whether it was from the point of view of Clico, the outstanding wage negotiations, settlements to contractors and so on, and I could go on and on.

And I want to tell Trinidad and Tobago to be very careful of this Government because it has been a sham, a charade, one of the biggest, what we would call, propaganda jobs that they have carried out on the population even before 2015, because they were in the practice nets, going all over the country, consulting with the stakeholders of this country. Whether it was the business community, the labour community, civil society and so on, they were consulting; they were in the practice nets telling the population of this country that they were “Red and Ready. We have all the solutions to the problems facing and confronting the people of Trinidad and Tobago.”

And they might want to tell you—they might want to deny it, but I want to remind you here this morning, and just read into the record and ask the Minister of Finance what has become of the memorandum of understanding with the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago and what has become of the grandiose promises that they made via the manifesto in terms of job creation and stimulating the economy of this country and providing a firm platform for future generations of this country. Madam Speaker, the great PNM, the saviour of the labour movement, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, has gone into hiding two years ago since she made a promise for, what is called, a grand 10-point plan to the workers of ArcelorMittal and Centrin, and only resurfaced on Piggott’s corner, what night, two years after hiding from the population [*Desk thumping*] and the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Missing in action.

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Mr. R. Indarsingh: But you know what is more important? And the labour movement must listen very carefully, because they promised to provide:

“...a clear Framework of the Rights and Responsibilities in the Workplace.

- A comprehensive and immediate review, in consultation with the Trade Union Movement, of all Labour Legislation—including—“the Industrial Relations Act”—and the—“Retrenchment & Separation Benefits Act.”—and so on.
- “Simplification of the Recognition Process for Trade Unions.

Timely Settlement of all...public sector wage and salary negotiations.”

Madam Speaker, when we were the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we met all the negotiations that they left hanging. In fact, the country must remember and never forgive them, because they had, and enjoyed oil prices at being US \$147 per barrel of oil. Natural gas was being sold at US \$9 per MMBtu. And you know what was their offer to the labour movement at that time, Madam Speaker? Zero, zero, zero. [*Desk thumping*] So a leopard cannot change its skin. That is why the Minister of Finance could continue to sing the tune of zero, zero, zero and go to the Hyatt and tell the IMF that, “we will carry out your dictates”, and that is why [*Desk thumping*] he had to make the broad pronouncement of zero, zero, zero. [*Interruption*] You stay quiet. As I said, you had your turn. And that is why your arrogance will also continue to be remembered by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And in regard to that, Madam Speaker, they also took the opportunity to promise job creation. They took the opportunity and they promised a plywood factory somewhere down in South. That plywood factory probably has not gotten off the ground because they have not received the expert advice of the Minister of Education and the Member for Arima. [*Desk thumping*] Probably he has failed to deliver. I do not know if he could stand up to scrutiny in terms of what is his role and function in relation to being the best woodwork teacher in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I say no more.

So they have not delivered on the plywood factory. They have not delivered on—the Member for—in fact, she is my constituent but I do not see here. The only time I saw her was at Piggott’s corner and she promised 35,000 jobs. She told the workers who lost their jobs at ArcelorMittal and Centrin that she was engaged in discussions on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with a recruitment agency by the name of Hire Pro Drivers Limited, I think. And she

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promised 35,000 jobs in relation to the possibility of driving long-haul trucks in Canada, and also the possibility of dual citizenship to the nationals who would have taken up these jobs and so on. And she indicated that it would have been concretized and discussions would have been finalized by the end of December of 2016.

We are slowly approaching the end of 2017 and that is a hallmark of incompetence and the lack of delivery [*Desk thumping*] on the part of the Ministers of this Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And in addition to that, the Minister of National Security came to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and I think in three budget presentations they promised that there would be the recruitment of supplemental police officers in the relevant local government bodies in this country. They said that in the 14 corporations there will be a recruitment of 100 supplemental police officers. And in that regard that is yet to get off the ground. And, again, it reeks of incompetence and a lack of delivery on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

And in this regard, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you that there will be no job creation. There will be no growth of the economy. There will be no diversification of the economy of this country. And, in fact, the fallout from this budget is already impacting.

10.30 a.m.

It is already causing a sense of hardship and pain, because, Madam Speaker, only yesterday you saw outside of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago how warmly the Leader of the Opposition was greeted. [*Desk thumping*] She was greeted by a large contingent of workers from the union of commercial, what we would call union of members' clubs and lottery workers in Trinidad and Tobago, because they know that the only hope for the restoration of Trinidad and Tobago is a Government led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and already six clubs have closed their doors. [*Desk thumping*] Already six clubs have closed their doors and what that means is that 1,200 workers have joined the unemployment line, or the unemployment numbers in this country based on the lack of the creativity on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Finance has attempted to double the taxation, Madam Speaker, on the already, what I would call persons who are committed to paying their taxation and so on. And in that regard, they do not have an appreciation of the pain, the injustice and so on, the instability that this will bring to the number

of single mothers and so on, the over 9,000 persons who are directly employed in this particular sphere of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and the further impact it will have upon approximately 30,000 persons who rely on this industry.

Madam Speaker, the manner in terms of how the Minister of Finance has operated in imposing this form of taxation on the people, or on the gaming industry, reflects an overall *modus operandi* of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. They continue to operate in bad faith. You cannot trust this Government [Desk thumping] at no point in time because of their *modus operandi*.

There was a Joint Select Committee before the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago headed by the Minister of Finance, and the Attorney General of this country being part of this Joint Select Committee, submissions were before the committee. The stakeholders were being afforded the opportunity to air their concerns and so on, and again like a thief in the night, without any sense of consultation, [Desk thumping] the Minister of Finance imposed this kind of taxation on the gaming industry of this country, and again a measure that will lead to further unemployment, further hardship, and further pain in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, I want to ask the Prime Minister, and I want to ask the Minister of Finance in this country, what is the real plan for the public service of this country? Because whether it is in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is in their budget presentations, whether it is in their conversations with the people up in St. Augustine or at Piggott's Corner, they continue to moan and groan about the size of the public service in Trinidad and Tobago. They continue to moan and groan about the collective bargaining process in the country. They said that the Partnership was irresponsible and reckless. I want to tell them unless they are prepared to undermine the collective bargaining process and the labour laws of Trinidad and Tobago, whatever wage increase was afforded to the trade union movement and their respective members, it was done through the collective bargaining process and the labour laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

What it tells me is that you are attacking the independence of the Office of the Chief Personnel Officer of this country, and the officers of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, and the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago because there were agreements that were realized bilaterally at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, at the Office of the Chief Personnel Officer, and the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago.

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So, Madam Speaker, I want the Minister of Finance to tell us in his winding-up, whether it will be a programme of job losses and cutting-back in the Ministries and across the public service based on the cuts that we have seen from a Ministry point of view across the board, and, again, that reeks of what we would call an IMF prescription. And I am further forced to deepen the argument whether it will be a programme of privatization at the state enterprises of this country because in his pronouncements, and if you read into the budget presentation, you will see that there are cuts earmarked and they continue to speak about the size of the debt at WASA and T&TEC and Petrotrin and so on.

In fact, what was stated in relation to Petrotrin, Madam Speaker, we heard it in the last budget and we heard it in the budget before. So nothing new has been said. Is it that the Minister of Finance is setting the platform for what I would call mass privatization of all the state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago? Minister of Finance, come clean with the population of this country, and come clean with the respective trade unions who are representing these workers in all the state enterprises. And that leads me to the very issue of Petrotrin.

Madam Speaker, at Petrotrin there seems to be a process now—well, we would have heard of the fake oil and the scandals and so on that were pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, and up to now they cannot tell us where the audit report is, what will become of the audit report and so on, but they boast of being—what?—they love to use the words “transparency and openness” in Government and so on, and working on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What will be the business model that will be used or that will come at Petrotrin? Will all the workers at Petrotrin lose their jobs? Will there be the creation of three new state entities, or three new business entities at Petrotrin?

Also, Madam Speaker, I want to ask a very important question. At Petrotrin we have heard of restructuring, but it cannot get off the ground for whatever reason because anytime a board is appointed at Petrotrin, a board is replaced with a parallel committee. We have heard of an implementation committee now in this budget presentation. When the board of Andrew Jupiter was appointed—up to now the country does not know why Andrew Jupiter resigned as the Chairman of Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] Whether it was linked to the fake oil scandal and the pressure that was applied on him, and nobody knows why the board of directors was replaced.

You had the Lashley report, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, a seven-man committee, nothing worked. The report is out in the public domain. I think the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has it,

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but he is guarding it. I do not know for what reason, but he has to meet and treat with the OWTU at some point in time and they must remember, “time longer than twine”. [*Desk thumping*]

In relation to that, after that no restructuring at Petrotrin. You hear now of a board led by Wilfred Espinet and also we hear of an implementation committee, and I want to ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Chairman of Petrotrin: In light of the scandals and in light of the debt burden, and in spite of we cannot spend money and so on, if he is aware of Mr. Neil Derrick, the Vice-President of HR and so on, in terms of who authorized the promotion of two persons within the HR Department of Petrotrin and so on, and who are drawing salaries in excess of \$45,000 per month in addition to allowances; and is this part of what we will call restructuring based on the PNM’s position and based on the utterances of the Prime Minister that we must deal with the restructuring of Petrotrin?

Madam Speaker, I also want to turn my direction to the Trinidad Tobago Revenue Authority. We have heard of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority in budget one, budget two and budget three, and also we have heard of their grandiose plans and so on, but I want to ask the Minister of Finance this morning, has he instructed the Minister in the Ministry of Finance Allyson West to conduct what we would call meetings with employees at the Board of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to carry out what it calls a human resource survey and a human resource exercise to find out whether persons will accept termination or whether they want to reapply in the new entity call the TTRA?

I ask that, Madam Speaker, because up till now, in spite of the Minister of Finance indicating in his budget presentation that this entity will come into force by the beginning of 2018, have they engaged the recognized majority union in law—that is the Public Services Association—have they formally written to him; have they completed a new organizational structure; have they completed a manpower audit exercise and so on? And in terms of successorship, Madam Speaker, will the Public Services Association have the right to continue to bargain on behalf of the employees who will form this new TTRA—these are the questions that I would want the Minister of Finance to answer on behalf of the 2,500 public servants who do not know what is the status of their job—and whether the Minister is only allowing the Minister in the Ministry to suppress and undermine the established labour laws of Trinidad and Tobago?

And since she has been appointed recently too, she came out of hiding too. She came out of hiding recently in a post-budget analysis again to say that she has evidence. She knows who is dodging tax in Trinidad and Tobago without

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providing any empirical data to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A broad-based attack again. An unwarranted attack on the middle class in this country without providing any sense of data, without any kind of empirical evidence, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Finance, we all want a more efficient tax collection system in this country, we all want a progressive Trinidad and Tobago, but we must remember this is the Minister of Finance who promised—he promised that he was going to hire—the broad headline was an army, a cadre of tax officers and compliance officers and so on. What have they done to improve the tax collection system at the Board of Inland Revenue and also at the Customs Division of the Ministry of Finance? He has presented nothing that will give the population of this country that the Government is serious about improving their revenue stream and improving the quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

I also want to ask the Minister of Finance, because I am sure the Minister of Finance could recollect that the management of the National Insurance Board indicated to the population of this country that if a serious restructuring exercise is not done at the National Insurance Board that the pension benefits and the benefits of all who enjoy their, what we would call their “cacada” from the national insurance system, it may be in jeopardy, it may evaporate by 2030, Madam Speaker. And I want to know if the Minister of Finance would tell us whether he instructed, or whether there was a plan by the management of the board of the National Insurance Board to cut all pensions across the board in all classes, Madam Speaker, and whether a study was done and who instructed who at the national insurance system to restructure the pensions benefit system based on the last actuarial report or review. That is what I would like the Minister of Finance to answer in his winding-up.

In addition to this, Madam Speaker, they must always remember that they will try to fool the people one time, two times, or three times, but they must be very aware that they cannot fool the people all the time in terms of their statistics and what they have attempted to put out before the population of this country, Madam Speaker, because I want to tell you that they have said that unemployment is 3.6 per cent in this country. Well, if unemployment is under 3.6 per cent in this country, we have full employment in this country. Then it should have nobody coming to my constituency office and lamenting the fact that they want a job because they cannot find a job in this economy. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South. Your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it. Please proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So they want us to forget that 25,000 people have lost their jobs and 1,200 now with the casino workers and climbing. They want us to forget how many state enterprises have been closed—Caroni Green, GISL—and I could read out the list off the top of my head. Madam Speaker, I will not bore you with that. And also, they want you to feel that people from an inflationary point of view can afford to purchase basic goods and services.

In my opening statement, Madam Speaker, I indicated how many people have been traumatized, how people have been brutalized, how people have been beaten into submission from the point of view of their standard of living, and I want to tell them that the taxi drivers in Les Coteaux, Tobago West, have already increased their taxi fares and that will be throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, the inflationary trend will continue under this Government. There is no hope at all, and I want to ask Trinidad and Tobago—because I will make a case here on behalf of the constituents of Couva South—after \$110 billion that have been spent in this country in the last two years, if I hold you by your hand and walk you through the constituency of Couva South I cannot tell you that one thing has been completed [*Desk thumping*] on behalf of the people after \$110 billion been spent.

Madam Speaker, I will not bore the House with reading into the record, but I have a bundle of letters that have been written to respective Ministers in this Government on this side. The Minister of Education—they could find \$400 million to start the highway going to wherever, they could find \$178 million to start the rehabilitation of some road in Moruga/Tableland. I have no problem with the development of Trinidad and Tobago you know, Madam Speaker, but the wickedness is what I have a problem with [*Desk thumping*] the vindictiveness is what I have a problem with. An early childhood education centre completed in Sonny Ladoo Trace in Couva, the former Minister of Education has told me that it will only cost \$50,000 to outfit it, but you know what, they could find \$90 million to pressure-wash the Brian Lara stadium [*Desk thumping*] and \$3 million to drink champagne and have a good time at the opening ceremony, but you cannot find \$50,000 in the development of the early childhood [*Desk thumping*] children of the constituency of Couva South.

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Well, I do not want to talk about Rowhan—Rohan, not Rowhan—the Minister of Works and Transport. The Minister of Works and Transport going all around the constituencies of Trinidad and Tobago. With much fanfare, he is committed to the improvement of infrastructural development and road rehabilitation in Trinidad and Tobago. You know what? The Camden Bridge that was started by the Partnership Government and halted by the vicious Minister of Works and—

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, 48(6), please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—when he occupied—

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

Madam Speaker: Member? Member for Couva South, I think you could say that in a better way. Okay? So just retract that and say it in a more appropriate way.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam Speaker. The heartless Minister of Works and Transport, [*Desk thumping*] he said that the need to stop the work on the Camden Bridge was to conduct an audit that there was corruption. Up to now I am still looking for him, like the Attorney General, to present their findings of audit for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] He said there was corruption, and after two years the Camden Bridge, which is of critical importance to the flow of vehicular traffic in and out of the port of Point Lisas and also the constituents of Couva South, no sign of it being completed.

Two years the Balmain recreation ground, the Partnership Government put up the lights, run the wires, everything. I have written to five Ministers of Public Utilities. [*Desk thumping*] In two years, the Members for Laventille West, D’Abadie/O’Meara, the Prime Minister when he held the portfolio of public utilities—

Miss Mc Donald: You never wrote me.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: You did not have time to even sit down on the chair. [*Desk thumping*] You did not even have time, Member for Port of Spain South, to warm the chair. I feel very sorry for you. I empathize with you.

Miss Mc Donald: You did not write me.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, they cannot light the Balmain recreation ground.

In addition, the very progressive Minister of Tertiary Education that we had, Fazal Karim [*Desk thumping*] built the aviation campus. We had a vision under Kamla Persad-Bissessar that would have taken the young people of this country—I see the public gallery is filled with them this morning. [*Desk thumping*] We had a

vision for their future. We spent \$63 million in building an aviation campus that would have provided hope for the young people in building a career in aviation industry, conserving foreign exchange in this country. Do you know what, Madam Speaker? They are allowing caraille bush, they are allowing all kind of vine, they have gingeer growing on it, and they have withdrawn the security because they do not want to open the aviation campus.

In addition to that—so they have failed the people of Couva South on their education, they have failed the people of Couva South on infrastructural development, they have failed the people of Couva South as it relates to the delivery of public utilities. Madam Speaker, I do not know if you drive throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, but the public lighting system in this country has collapsed everywhere. *[Desk thumping]* Everywhere you go there are areas of your respective constituencies that are in darkness. In fact, in Couva South—the Member for La Brea boasting how many street lights that she has had repaired—in Couva South there are over 200 street lights that have been blown *[Desk thumping]* and cannot be repaired on behalf of the people, and they live in fear because of the failure of them as it relates to tackling crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

So from where I sit, Madam Speaker, there can be no paradigm shift. The only thing that the people will experience under the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, is incompetent, scandal, corruption, a lack of delivery, and they will be forced to find more money to provide food on the table. They will only be able to barely make ends meet because they are committed to undermining the free and fair collective bargaining process in this country because in their manifesto too they promised a timely revision of the minimum wage rates in this country. They cannot tell you how much wage negotiation they have settled on behalf of the workers of this country. What is the future for workers and their children in an economy beyond 2040 in this country? Simply because it was a farce, it was a charade, *[Desk thumping]* it was a campaign in public relations. They were never ready to govern Trinidad and Tobago *[Desk thumping]* and that is why in the next general election, whenever it is called, the PNM and Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley will be history in terms of the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): *[Desk thumping]* Thank you, Madam Speaker. Perhaps I should take a moment of silence just to let the volume subside from the Member who last spoke. Shakespeare was right, and so too many other authors, that sound and fury fill certain vessels. *[Desk thumping]* I would not even continue further lest I interrupt the privileges of the Parliament. Madam

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Speaker, I think that the Member for Couva South gave his most constructive speech yet. I am forced to reflect upon the fact that the Member for Couva South sat as a Minister in the Ministry of Finance. It was not that he did not serve in a position of authority or management. I really did expect the hon. Member to carry a message to all of Trinidad and Tobago as to the reality of where we are.

In speaking to the reality first of all, may I offer my sincere congratulations to the Minister of Finance, to the Minister of Planning and Development, for an excellently constructed budget and I would like to say why. [*Desk thumping*] This budget was brought on the back of a first of its kind event, referred to as a Spotlight on Trinidad and Tobago. It was held on the 27th of September. It was an intervention by the public servants from the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the Chambers of Commerce, and there was a full-day seminar speaking to the reality of Trinidad and Tobago.

The truth is an appropriation Bill as this is really intended to be a report to the country on two facts. One, your allocations on how they have been spent; and two, your prospects for future development and strategy, both of them residing in the context of what your current reality is, and that first of its kind introduction into the facts and the figures of Trinidad and Tobago on the 27th of September, demonstrated what I think we should all join in to, it is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. It is in the context of the Appropriation Bill. What is the reality?

You see, it is very easy if you listen to the hyperbole of argument sometimes resembling that offered by my learned friend, the Member for Couva South. If you listen to the argument, "They say that it is only 3.5 per cent, 3.6 per cent unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago. That means nobody should be in my office asking for a job." I mean, simple extrapolation mathematics will tell you that 3.5 per cent of 1.4 million people is 49,000 people. You must expect people to be at your office. But is it not true that the business community is now speaking to employment which resembles a 40 per cent absenteeism rate?

We have one of the backroom offices where we are encouraging growth and development in the sectors of Trinidad and Tobago. The back-room offices are saying that of the call centres across the Caribbean, and back-room offices across the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago distinguishes itself by having a 45 per cent absenteeism rate.

The call to our country right now is sobriety, it is production, it is discipline, it is tolerance in the construct of the economic position that we find ourselves in. And what is that economic position? We had between 2010 and 2015, an average

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oil price—if you average off the prices per year—of roughly \$101.66 for barrel. The average oil price between 2015 and 2017 is \$41 per barrel. So you have gone from \$100 to \$41. The gas price on average between 2010 and 2015 is \$3.96. The average price between 2015 and 2017 is \$2.75.

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Now, we are a gas economy, not so much an oil economy. Our production levels have dropped from 100,000 barrels of oil per day to 77,000 barrels of oil per day and the price has dropped from \$100 on average down to \$41 on average. You are producing less and you are selling it for less. We have just had the Minister of Finance come truthfully and tell us that we have spent \$53 billion and we earned \$35 billion. There is a gap. We are told that the deficit gap this year is going to be \$7 billion odd, after financing, et cetera, filling the hole.

But the real decision in telling the facts and centre-staging the need for productivity and value for money is really in the income that we earn. Taxes on incomes and profits. For oil companies, we have dropped from \$16.02 billion, in 2011, \$16,000 million—\$16.02 billion, we have dropped to \$472 million; \$16 billion to \$472 million is a 99.97 per cent drop in your revenue. Oil revenue, as a percentage of total revenue, has dropped from 33.7 per cent, in the time of the last Government, to 1.2 per cent. That is a 96.44 per cent drop in revenue.

Our expenditure, from 2010 to 2015, we moved from \$6.7 billion to \$10 billion. We increased our expenditure by 50 per cent. Goods and services, we increased from \$6.4 billion to \$8 billion, a 20 per cent increase. Interest payments increased by 4 per cent from \$3.29 billion to \$3.4 billion. Transfers and subsidies grew from \$23 billion to \$30 billion. Transfers and subsidies include: social welfare support, CDAP, GATE, fuel subsidy. That entire package now, costs, in terms of our total expenditure, 53 cents out of every 100 are spent on transfers and subsidies. The subsidy on petroleum in 2015 was \$4.5 billion; 2016, it went down to \$0.9 billion, and 2017, it went down to \$0.8 billion. Now why have I bothered to repeat the information?

Let us put it into context in the Appropriation Bill. If you listen to the Member for Couva South talk about spending money in certain areas, he then says, “Why do you not spend on another area”. But, Madam Speaker, with the greatest of respect, we hear prescriptions as to why do you not spend more but not a Member opposite tells us, in the thread and tapestry, what you should give up to spend over there. You see, the Minister of Finance has had the task in balancing the PSIP, in balancing the expenditure of our country. He has had to decide how do we spend in one area and take away from another. And what hon. Members opposite are not levelling with the country on, is why we are in this situation.

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I heard hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre say that Kevin Ramnarine was the best Minister of Energy in Trinidad and Tobago, and I just want to spend one reflective point. Madam Speaker, what caused our revenue from our taxes on income and profits on oil companies to drop by 99.97 per cent? What dropped us from \$16.9 billion in 2014 to \$472 billion—million? What dropped from—let me repeat that. Sixteen point nine billion in 2014 to \$472 million. It was a decision of the Cabinet of the last Government. Now, I do not propose this morning to be pejorative or to cast blame. The focus of my contribution this morning is to report on the realities of where we are and what the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs has done as I will come to shortly. What caused that decision?

It is true and it was a very good decision to give incentives for oil and gas production, to tell companies, in the oil and gas industry, come and invest and we will give you an incentive to invest. That is true. *[Interruption]* Yes, you must be honest. But the problem was, in failing to cap the carry-forward losses. That is the problem. There was no cap on carrying forward losses in the oil companies, which meant that they will carry forward their losses almost until 2025. So this 99.97 per cent drop in revenue continues until 2025 where we earn \$472 million because they failed to put a cap on the write-off of deferred taxation liabilities. We have students from the University of the West Indies here, understand, through you, Madam Speaker, what I am saying. The cyanide pill in the decision of the last Cabinet in 2014 was a failure to calculate what the companies would do in terms of their carry-forward losses, beyond the concession which extends only until the next two months.

So what do we do in Trinidad and Tobago? You have lost 99 per cent of your revenue. You have to continue in the public sector. We only manage to maintain, at most months, the payment of public servants' salaries. As Attorney General, I have had to approve the bonds for each of the payments for public servants' salaries as we have auctions going on right now, today, this week, to pay for public servants' salaries.

We heard from the Opposition, "do not cut, spend over here", but not one reflection is spent on where to take it from. And what has happened in Trinidad and Tobago—I have heard the Member for Naparima just say across the floor, "*Cabo Star*" and other events. Madam Speaker, permit me to reflect upon this. I have heard the Member for St. Augustine, I have heard the Member for Couva South, I have heard the Member for Naparima. The truth is this. They say all of the allegations against the last Government and they are not seeing any action. I would like to say, we took a very specific decision not to prosecute in the press or in the public domain. And why? We spent as a country, between 2010 to 2015, \$1.4 billion in legal fees and we have nothing to show for it.

Right now, today, I can tell that, in fact, pleadings have been served—have been filed in the court to deal with major corruption activities. There are several matters that are before the courts right now. But the truth is that the citizens of this country are tired of hearing talk, talk, talk, talk, “ah coming fuh you, ah coming fuh you, ah coming for you”, pre-action protocol after pre-action protocol, what I call “pap smearing”; \$1.4 billion later and we do not have anything to show. So the truth is this. We understand that as a Government, we will be judged on our performance in 2019 in a local government election and in 2020 in the general election. Because the truth is that the population is waiting to see what you have done.

Let me turn, Madam Speaker, to the Attorney General’s office. As you know, there was a merger of two Ministries: Attorney General and Legal Affairs. That merger, I am happy to say, has been managed by the addition of two very skilled people into the Ministry. One is, of course, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West and the other is the Member for Laventille West. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to take a moment to thank both hon. Members for the enterprise and skill that they bring in an egoless environment where we share up the work and divide and conquer. And why is that? The Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs is essentially responsible for all civil law, all criminal law, our legislative work, reform of our jurisprudence and our path forward, but also responsible for 15 bodies, statutory bodies, including the Industrial Court, the Judiciary, the EOC, the environmental tribunal, the Anti-corruption Investigation Bureau and the list goes on. In that management of the entire backbone of Trinidad and Tobago’s structure, the Attorney General’s office is called upon to really be the engine for reform and reflection.

When we look to the appropriations, the appropriation that we came from by the last Government was \$547,290 million. The appropriation now before us for the two Ministries, Attorney General and Legal Affairs, is \$263 million. In other words then, it is 48 per cent of the budget that my predecessor Attorneys General worked with, 48 per cent of the budget. What have we done with our 48 per cent of the budget? What I can tell you is that the litmus test on that is to be found by a reflection of fees spent. We saw in the last Government that there was \$444 million in legal fees spent in the Attorney General’s office. In fact, I am able to report today that we have spent \$10 million on our local attorneys and we have cleared arrears of \$38 million to the DPP’s office; \$1.2 million again to the DPP’s office; we have half “ah” million dollars, again, to the DPP’s office and back pay in terms of arrears left, \$137 million of bills left by the last Attorney General, we have cleared \$1.5 million. [*Interruption*] Bills for lawyers.

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What we have, therefore, done is to reduce the expenditure in the Attorney General's office, year on year comparison. We, as a Government, have spent 8 per cent of what my predecessor spent year on year, [*Desk thumping*] 8 per cent. What have we done with the 8 per cent? We did that by ensuring that the 1,062 people that we employ are properly utilized across the divisions: the Solicitor General, the Chief State Solicitor, CPC's department, the DPP's department, by way of satellite management.

But I want to inform hon. Members, the number of employees that we inherited in 2015 was 1,142. We are operating with 1,062. No persons at the AG's office have been sent home. Not a single person has been sent home from 2015 to now. At the legal affairs end, where we have the discrepancy in bodies, the drop in figures, approximately 180 people were interviewed and re-interviewed, and what we had was roughly 86 people just not turning up. They did not possess the qualifications, they did not return to work, there was no interview process for them. In short, they were ghosts; were reported to 500 that we had in 2015 and we now have 86 but we have managed to keep the entire staff in check by simply reorganizing. That was sent to the police as you are aware, we are awaiting on the police production. What I can say in relation to that, Madam Speaker, the Government can only go so far in dealing with matters.

Let me give you an example. We had an example of a case that is now complete of members of the Defence Force being alleged to have robbed the Defence Force essentially. The Attorney General's office went in, took action against these persons, froze their accounts, recovered their assets and they admitted to guilt on the pleadings. They admitted to guilt, the police have yet to charge them. We have done our end of the work on the civil side. I cannot agitate the police or the Director of Public Prosecutions to do more than they can other than to provide them with the documentation.

We have roughly, in the Solicitor General's Department, an increase in about 20 per cent of the workload year by year. We are processing approximately 2,519 new matters and when you do the ratio, how we manage to save money, we did so because we now have roughly 52 matters per attorney. In the Chief State Solicitor's Department, where we have 27 persons working across administrative matters and otherwise, we have a much higher number but it is a lesser workload of approximately 1,500 matters per attorney. And what we have done really is to ensure that we are getting value for money of the persons who are working there. That is how we are able to drop a legal bill from \$138 million per year, as my predecessors spent, down to \$10 million per year, and that is no small feat, Madam Speaker. That is accounting for value for money at the Attorney General's office.

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for St. Augustine yesterday speaking to efficiencies. I would like to say that some of the efficiency improvements in the Attorney General's office have been because we have computerized the environment. We have provided laptops for the first time to the state attorneys working. We have provided a case management system for the first time to attorneys working. We have provided a tracking system, what you call docket management, for state attorneys working. What we have done essentially, Madam Speaker, is to make sure that Trinidad and Tobago has a functioning environment.

The Member for St. Augustine yesterday spoke about the Attorney General being tactical and bringing bad law and saying that three-fifth majorities were required on Bills. And I asked, in crosstalk yesterday to my learned colleague, well if you have a complaint of that nature, why do you not go to court? And his response was, it is too expensive to go to court. I would like to inform the hon. Member that in matters of a constitutional nature where you can go and there is no prescriptive amount, that the maximum exposure in cost that you are facing is TT \$14,000. That is certainly not a far stretch, Madam Speaker.

But I would like to tell the hon. Member this, if the law was that bad, as he referred to it, in the abolition of child marriages where we were speaking about that abolition for a short 26 years, where the Opposition was telling us "go and consult some more", if it was that bad, why did every single Member—minus the Member for Siparia who was not here—vote for that Bill? [*Desk thumping*] You see, Madam Speaker, the hon. Members said to us, "Bring good law and we will support it". How do we explain the fact that the Senate Bench of the United National Congress supported law 100 per cent as brought by this Government and then when we bring it down to the House, every man jack opposite votes "no" for it? How could that match up to bring good law and we will support it? Their own Senate Bench sits for hours on end and support the law but the Members in the House of Representatives vote "no" for what their own Senators brought. Now, it is true that you have two different Houses but they are under one whip, one leadership whip, and that is the Member for Siparia. So most respectfully, Madam Speaker, it makes no sense.

When we look to the work conducted by the CPC's department, we are, in fact, properly on track to where we are wanting to find ourselves, and when we look to the work that the CPC's department brought forward, let me just reflect on some of those figures. We, in fact, dealt with 66 Bills at the legislative department, 186 Legal Notices, 25 Bills were introduced into Parliament. We dealt with the criminal justice reform, it was a mainstay and in dealing with criminal justice

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reform we then layer that as a platform to take the anti-corruption, which I will come to in just a moment, as to where we are headed to in the future. But the CPC's department has been very hard at work. The work which we have performed is not without effort. In fact, as the "pilotor" of most of the Bills in this session now completed, I can tell you that we sat in Parliament up to four days a week—twice in the Senate and twice in the House. That is to keep pace with the demand of work that is going on.

But, Madam Speaker, if you listen to hon. Members opposite, in their statement that they will only support good law, how do we reflect upon the Anti-Gang Bill that we brought? Madam Speaker, I propose to reflect upon the merit for supporting that Bill on two fronts. One, it was simply for an extension of a sunset clause by the last Government and two, we have had the benefit of litigation on anti-gang matters. There are 44 matters of litigation now completed in large part. All of which have had up to Court of Appeal reflection upon the Anti-Gang Bill and in reflecting upon the Anti-Gang Bill, what the court said, unfortunately, it was a double-edged sword. They said that the last Government basically caused the detention of persons without evidence and therefore, we are now exposed to \$100,000 plus \$120,000, \$200,000 per case. So that is 44 multiplied by \$200,000 in terms of exposure for costs.

But what the honourable Judge of Appeal, Mr. Justice Bereaux reflected upon was that had the police come with the evidence before the court that there was a structured gang activity, there were described operations amongst them, that the law could have stood. And my honourable colleagues opposite know this because one of their lead Senators, Sen. Ramdeen, who has done some very good work in the last Parliament, in the last session concluded, was part of that litigation team which dealt with it. But it is inexplicable, when we are battling with crime, for Members opposite not to support legislation as they have.

Madam Speaker, allow me to reflect upon the Office of the DPP. I would like to say that in dealing with the Office of the DPP, we have advanced work which was sitting idle for the very long time of successive Governments put back to back. In fact, there was a good push and momentum up to 2009 and then it fell flat. We have invited the country to have the DPP's office become more efficient specifically to operationalize the abolition of preliminary enquiries. Why? The example of fraud that stands foremost in the mind of citizens in Trinidad and Tobago is the Piarco airport enquiry. Persons who are before the court wish to have their day in court, persons who are crying for justice wish to see if there is

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merit in the case. The simple point there is that that case has been going on for 17 years. After the 17th year has now come upon us, we are now going into judicial review of the magistrate's enquiry into Piarco No. 2. That then goes to the Court of Appeal, then to the Privy Council, then back to the Magistracy, so we are looking at another five to six years.

We have said to the country the abolition of preliminary enquiries will quicken the pace of justice. It allows for less people to stay in pre-trial detention in the prison's population. It allows for the improvement of the consequence following the event. But when we look to the abolition of preliminary enquiries and in advocating the DPP as a central figure, whether it is under the existing law which allows the DPP to directly indict under section 23 of the preliminary enquiries Act or under the new proposed law, what we can say is that manpower was critical, offices were critical and budget was critical.

And permit me to put onto the record that we have given the DPP three new offices. One which is far advanced in Tobago, nearly complete, one in Port of Spain and one in San Fernando and all that we are waiting on is the DPP to give certain instructions for the completion of those works. We have similarly ensured that we have appointed a significant number of other bodies to the DPP by agitation to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and we have improved their manpower by approximately 40 per cent. But more than that, I tie back to the amount of fees spent. I asked you to note that of the budgeted amount of \$50 million to be spent by the Attorney General's office last year, \$40 million was spent in the DPP's office and that shows you the focused attention for the support of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

More than that, in terms of dealing with crime which is the number one issue in our country, if you look at the statistics in crime, you can analyse until kingdom come. It is true that serious crimes have fallen in 2017 significantly from where they were in the five-year period prior. But that has not redounded to a reduction in the number of murders which is the true barometer of crime and criminality or to the sense of security that citizens want to feel and ought to feel. But when you look to the administration of justice, the development of the Criminal Proceedings Rules, which came in April 2016 under this Government, has been a landmark event, and I wish to signal that as the backbone upon which we have prosecuted reforms for the introduction of judge only trials, for the introduction of plea bargaining, for the introduction of an easier access to bail, for the introduction of the decriminalization of motor vehicle offences as to violations, so that we remove 100,000 cases from the Magistracy.

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But I would like to say that that has been on the back of two significant points of development in the AG's office and that involves improving the prosecutorial management in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which does 95 per cent of our prosecutions and also in the DPP's office, and you have heard of the commitment that the Government has given to the DPP's office. But when you look to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the introduction, as is now happening under the very capable hand of Laventille West, is for case management structures in the TTPS so that the prosecutors are ready when the matters come in and that they can meet their obligations under the Criminal Proceedings Rules.

Madam Speaker, this quickening of the pace of the criminal justice system is tied in to other aspects of significant development for us and that significant development lies in fraud and corruption, it lies in anti-terrorism and it lies in, specifically, ensuring that we meet our obligations by having a consequence meted out to an event. If you commit the crime, you should do the time. That is usually the maxim spoken there.

But what we have right now, Madam Speaker, in the quickening of justice is the next platform. You have heard the Government speak and you will see in this session of Parliament that having dealt with some of the criminal justice factors, we are improving the prosecutorial functions at the DPP's office in tandem with the development of a public defender system. And that is specifically because one of the roadblocks to the prosecution of matters is that the defendant's attorney is not available—my lawyer is busy. So the obligation should be that the matter starts, not with the counsel of choice but with competent counsel. If after three occasions have passed, you are not ready, the State should provide you with counsel and that is the development of the Legal Aid and Advice Authority reform which is fast under production, no lesser person than the Member for Laventille West doing yeoman service there, together with Minister Young and I, both.

Madam Speaker, when we come now to treating with criminality, the rationale standing behind what is referred to as the Al Capone approach is really quite simple. You not only look at taking guns off the street, charging people for murder, et cetera—and I would like to pause to compliment the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It is not lost upon me that there is an incredibly shortened gap now between an allegation of kidnapping and somebody now before the court, [*Desk thumping*] an allegation of murder and somebody before the court, an allegation of a shooting and somebody before the court, and that did not happen

by mistake. It is not spoken about widely but if you look at the improvement in the quickening of time frame of persons coming before the court, that did not happen by mistake. We have a very humble Minister of National Security who does not often boast about the work that he has done but I wish to testify for him that our international partners find the work at the Ministry of National Security, in improving the systems, to be the best that they have ever seen and I compliment the hon. Member for Point Fortin on the work that he has done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we heard the Member for Naparima engaged in what I thought was a very reckless event and I say so because the hon. Member for Naparima stood up on the floor of this Parliament and told us—and I quote from his *Hansard* at page 19. The hon. Member for Naparima said this:

“We were told two weeks ago that when they captured one of the major cities in Syria...they captured ISIS fighters, they found Trinidad and Tobago families among those that were ISIS fighters. We had to find that out from aboard, not from our SSA.”

We made a big deal about that on this side by way of an interruption through the hon. Prime Minister under the Standing Order that the hon. Member stood to try to clarify the issue, when he then came back to say he was reading from a news report and that it was really Iraq and not Syria. And that was properly introduction of new material because that is not what the Member said, the hon. Member spoke to Syria. But the offence that was taken, Madam Speaker, is because the Anti-Terrorism Bill was introduced under a PNM Government in April 2010.

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For five years straight, nothing was done under anti-terrorism; not an entity listed, not a border patrol put into effect, no outward-bound management, no inward-bound management, not a file at the National Security Council. And Members opposite—the Member for Oropouche East is quoted as having given a statement saying that there were 400 persons from Trinidad and Tobago who were in ISIS; failing to recognize that there is no actual information in the system as to 400 people anywhere, but more particularly, not being available to answer a single query that was put to the hon. Member.

And the hon. Member for Naparima ought to know, because he served abroad for Trinidad and Tobago, that when you make statements like that, our international partners pay attention. It finds its way into international journals. It

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finds its way into television programmes. They promote that Trinidad and Tobago is this highest per capita contributor of ISIS fighters in the world. And when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West says that that is unpatriotic, it is true. [*Desk thumping*]

And Madam Speaker, I would like to say, both Minister Young and I have been in constant discussions with our international partners. There are weeks when I attend at the United States Embassy on Skype conferencing to the Attorney General of the United States, to the Homeland Security, to the Department of Justice, accounting for what Trinidad and Tobago's real position is. And do you know what the real position is? Since taking office, this Government has listed 341 persons under the anti-terrorism law. [*Desk thumping*]

This country has listed an individual from Trinidad and Tobago, based on evidence at the United Nations. This country, under the Minister of National Security, has taken up a product which sat languishing for five years under the last Government, to introduce the PISCES system. And for those who do not know, when you enter the United States and they ask for your fingerprints and they take a picture of you, that is the PISCES system. No border control mechanisms were put into place. The Advanced Passenger Information System, the introduction of the version of PISCES into our jails, so that we can do biometric mapping, none of that was put into place, but our Minister of National Security and the Attorney General's Office have actually signed and are implementing all of these measures. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, standing up and making irresponsible statements devoid from facts is the same form of behaviour that we see in Tobago: "Let us diversify. Trinidad and Tobago needs tourism." "Buh doh bring Sandals, cause Sandals is de worse." St. Lucia has seven of them or six of them, but Trinidad and Tobago does not need any. "Let us diversify into tourism, buh doh go tuh Tobago, cause you will find no foods on the shelf, no water in de grocery, transportation cyah happen", when the truth is the ferry is sailing with 30 per cent capacity, 30 per cent capacity.

And worse yet, when you see public servants being invited to go on leave, and investigations going on, it is not by mistake, Madam Speaker. When you see a dismissal happen in a public service environment, it is not by mistake, Madam Speaker. When the Government seeks to focus upon securing the goods and services for Trinidad and Tobago by eliminating corruption, what does the Opposition do? "Dey say 'allyuh attacking public servants. Side wit dem.'"

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Madam Speaker, it reminds me of the debate that is going on in the gaming community right now. I noticed yesterday a person from my office was coming across and passed through the crowd and was given a book in his hand and he was told sign the book otherwise you cannot be paid. That is a fact, Madam Speaker. A Government employee was handed a book yesterday and told: “Sign or you cannot be paid”.

I would like to declare, Madam Speaker, that I did do a considerable amount of work for persons in the gaming community when I was in private practice. And I want to tell you some of the scoping, without breaching any client privilege or other facts. I will speak in general terms. I am aware of one casino that rented a location for \$450,000 a month and kept it empty for umpteen years, just to block competition from coming; \$450,000 per month to block competition from occupying the space. I find it conspicuous that the actual owners are not coming forward, that the workers are being sent forward. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to tell the workers, do not be used as scapegoats. Do not be used as scapegoats. The gaming community is wealthy enough to afford the measures put into effect. But more than that, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] there is enough room for adjustment. There is no reason to threaten the workers or to agitate.

Madam Speaker, it gives this Government no pleasure for people to be told bad news, such as, let us remove a subsidy. Look at the increase in diesel. It is 48 per cent. Not every car uses diesel. There is CNG, which is massively cheaper and which has been incentivized for years but nobody has migrated to it. Why? Because there was no need to migrate. It is approximately a billion dollars in fuel subsidy, \$800 million dollars last year to be precise. And we are at a point where we need to take that money in subsidy and actually provide it to other areas, like health, like education, like paying public servants' salaries. But, Madam Speaker, when you try to prosper on the back of difficulty you are headed in the wrong direction, and the gaming workers are being exploited, Madam Speaker, and I ask them to hold strong, because the Government is very aware of their position. [*Desk thumping*] As the regulatory environment pushes out, the industry will settle itself and we move away from the vagaries of an unregulated, un-bankable sector, into a regulated sector. And that is something to be looked forward to with anxious anticipation.

Madam Speaker, on that point of diesel, 48 per cent across a 12-seater maxi-taxi, is what per customer? Is it not 4 per cent? Is not a 25-seater maxi, 2.2 per cent per customer? Is it not true that customers should be empowered by the Opposition to say: “Well look, everybody does not have to suffer a 50 per cent hike.” In fact, if you take a 25-seater and you divide it by the number of users, it is 2 per cent per customer.

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So instead of calling for responsibility, as Minister Young did in speaking to one of our banking sectors and saying: “Do not touch the hair on the head of an employee.” Minister Young was doing no different from what RBC did when David White stepped out and said in the public press that there will not be any adjustments as a result of the increase in 30 to 35 per cent for corporate taxes. Because, Madam Speaker, the truth is that this budget does not target the most vulnerable. This budget is designed to encourage the most vulnerable to receive the state resources. Taking a billion dollars in fuel subsidy and paying people to still be employed is maintaining their lifestyles. [*Desk thumping*] That is the truth of the equation.

Madam Speaker, another extremely important facet of success by this Government resides in the work that we have done. Tied into our criminal justice reform was the reform that we did in children, Madam Speaker. And let me speak to this because I notice that, perhaps, we do not boast well enough. This Government came to Parliament with the Family and Children Division Bill and this Government amended 19 pieces of law. This Government sat and dealt with the child rehabilitation centres, children's homes, the conversion of YTC to child rehabilitation centre, from St. Michael's moving across there, and this very humble Member for Tobago East, not out in the frontline boasting.

But, Madam Speaker, I notice other people are now taking credit for the facilitation of a product which sat down for 20 years in the Judiciary, five years under the last Government. Madam Speaker, we will, as a Government, be able to open two new courts, one in Fyzabad, one in Port of Spain; two new courts, after the interview of 13,000 employees, after the production of the rules of the juvenile court project, of the establishment of 169 child protection officers of the TTPS, under this Minister of National Security and all of that would have been done in 12 months' time. [*Desk thumping*] What is the big news item for the Members opposite? Frankie Khan wife owns the property in Fyzabad. That is the big news.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for San Fernando West, your original time is now expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So the big news for the Members opposite is that a Member of the Government, his spouse owns the property. And you know what? That is true. The Judiciary took the property in 2014/2015. The last Attorney General would have been dealing with the Judiciary in securing Mrs. Khan's property. So all of a sudden it is scandal.

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You see, Madam, Speaker, I want to caution the public. This Parliament has privilege. Some Members are wont to use their privilege in whatever way they see fit. Some of those Members are not ready to go outside and say what they have to say. You would notice that this Government is not “bussing any mark” in the Parliament. What we have to say is on the outside. Madam Speaker, “we bussing it in de courthouse. That is where the mark is being bussed”, and albeit that it is measured. Because we wish not to sensationalize the matters because—do you know what is important?—it is the proof in the product, the proof in the pudding, proof in the eating; “not de gallery and ole talk.”

And I want to compliment Minister Young for his boundless energy in being such a phenomenal team player. [*Desk thumping*] And I would like to compliment the Prime Minister for having the foresight to put someone with energy, crossing two portfolios, Office of the Prime Minister and Office of the Attorney General. You see, we are team players, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I could easily tell you about matters that we are looking at. There is a matter right now on my desk. A door, a door being replaced under a contract for \$76,900, one door. That is the same type of bill that we had in Piarco Airport Enquiry where one door was \$80,000. But Madam Speaker, that is in fact not a police matter. The truth is this, we could stand up, we could list the names. Minister Deyalsingh stood yesterday and showed you a plate for US \$18. That lands here at TT \$180, being sold for \$5,800. He could have called the name. He could have called the supplier, but he did not. Do you know why? People want to see the results.

Madam Speaker, when we look to the Children and Family Division as a success story, I would like to say that this Government would have achieved in the Children and Family Division one of the greatest accomplishments in law possible. And, Madam Speaker, I would like to flag that coming next in line is in fact the criminal division, as we take that model and apply it to the criminal division.

Madam Speaker, I would like to spend a couple of moments on the registry, that is, the land registry. I would like to tell you that we have achieved a landmark under this particular Government. There are 470,000 deeds that we are now scanning, from 1930-1959. We have completed the locking of the IDB project for the scanning of all deeds under the RPO section and from the 1970 go forward. We are prioritizing the registry so that we can have electronic filing, electronic availability of documents and I would like to flag that we are soon to introduce e-payment in a cashless environment.

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But why are we doing this, Madam Speaker? The land registry and the vital records registry is critical to fraud and to enforcement. I am very pleased to say that the Registrar General's division has signed MOUs with the FIB, with the TTPS, with the Ministry of Social Development, et cetera, where we provide all live records: birth records, death records, marriage records, et cetera.

We have taken the information in the Ministry of Works and Transport where we have completed the registration of all licences, of all cars, as we move forward. Put all of that into an accessibility amongst government stakeholders, be it in pensions or national security, or the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. But the land registry ties into the implementation of property tax and it ties into the implementation of anti-fraud measures.

You see, Madam Speaker, when you know who the owner of a property is, when it was transferred, and when you lay that on with a very important thing, which is coming in the amendments to the registration of lands and deeds and other aspects, you are actually going to see an improvement in the knowledge of how we manage the resources of Trinidad and Tobago.

And when they ask the Minister of Finance what is he doing to operationalize the property tax; that is what is being done. Because, Madam Speaker, there is nothing wrong with property taxes. Look at WASA, Minister Le Hunte put out into the public domain recently the fact that one litre of water costs \$5.50. All day of WASA, tap on, run the tank dry, cost you TT \$3.00. That is the level of subsidy in our country. But, Madam Speaker, property taxes are essential to make sure we repair roads, we have the municipal corporations functioning, we pick up garbage, we clean rivers, we deal with our schools.

And, Madam Speaker, that, perhaps takes me, because I have very little time, to one quick topic. I asked the national community to bear in mind, that a lot of the obstruction we are seeing right now could have been avoided. The previous Attorney General, Mr. Anand Ramlogan, took us to court for the Government failing to have a child rehabilitation centre. The claim before the court was the failure of the Attorney General to have a community residence. So, Ramlogan sued himself in a different capacity. As Attorney General, the law was proclaimed by his Government. He stops being Attorney General, he goes to court and he sues himself. And here is what it cost us. It cost us \$1,579,000 to maintain one child, thanks to Mr. Ramlogan.

It is no different from Devant Maharaj going to court and suing the Government for the production of the annual reports for the Interception of Communications Act for the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. The judge was compelled to

observe, after the judge refused to give the order that he requested, that he was a Member of the same Cabinet with the responsibility to do it that did not do it. [Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: And when we tell them: “Ask yourself, dey does get vex.”

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: As the Prime Minister says when we tell you ask yourselves, you get vex. But, Madam Speaker, what I am trying to point out here in the round, is that there is significant need for sobriety. And I just ask hon. Members opposite, listen, if it is that you are confident that you will return to Government, do you not want a better system? Why not lean in and lend a hand? We demonstrated, without fear, the ability to support 95 per cent of the then Government’s legislation and still win an election. [Desk thumping] So let us be honest.

Madam Speaker, I would like to say to the Minister of Planning, the Minister of Housing, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Community Development and Minister of Works and Transport, thank you from the people of San Fernando West for the work that you have done. Madam Speaker, I was disappointed that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre did not reflect to the national community that on the day of significant flooding, that I was in his constituency with backhoes, with trucks, cleaning rivers in his constituency, called to make sure that the work was being done. But do you know what the incredible thing is? Acting Prime Minister, Errol McLeod, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre for five years straight, did absolutely nothing. And the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre says today: “why allyuh doh fix meh up?” Well, we are fixing you up and we started in your rivers and in your drains and we cleared.

But, Madam Speaker, I should declare my interest in housing. As you know I am involved in quite a lot of development. The measures under the Minister of Finance for housing are very significant. It is to completely renovate the housing demand in Trinidad and Tobago. Because, Madam Speaker, San Fernando West has approved in the budget its waterfront for the first time. [Desk thumping] It has approved housing under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for the first time. It has approved its community centres for the first time. We turned sod and opened the St. Vincent Street Community Centre, to complete the works which were stopped in 2010. Seven years later, San Fernando central is about to get a community centre.

But, Madam Speaker, on housing, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to the people of San Fernando West, there is massive opportunity available under the housing programme. And under that housing programme, the private sector steps in, the private sector develops land, the private sector can access government land, the

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private sector, if it uses its own land, can be paid approximately \$100,000 per unit in an environment where you are told: "Here is the plan, here is the selling price. If you build under the selling price the profit is yours. Here is your guaranteed surplus. Here is the list from the HDC." And by the way, persons approved at the HDC come with the benefit of a TTMF mortgage or a Home Mortgage Bank mortgage, so your risk on investment is next to nothing. That is why the Member for Tabaquite was broad smiles throughout the whole budget. As a successful land developer himself, and I compliment him for it, the truth is that there is massive opportunity. It stimulates the private sector. It encourages development.

So, Madam Speaker, far from this being a budget of doom and gloom, this budget is a call to sobriety, to production. There is a lot to come, in terms of our regulatory growth, and Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the last day, I believe, of debate in this House.

May I begin by congratulating colleagues on my side, particularly the Member for Siparia, for the very comprehensive [*Desk thumping*] and detailed response to this budget statement, and to all my colleagues who, from various sectoral areas, presented their responses and spoke on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; many of whom have found it necessary to journey to Port of Spain to come in the burning hot sun or in the rain to express their view.

This has been a remarkable four days, Madam Speaker, where we have had in our Chamber 41, 40 speakers and we have had thousands of speakers on the pavement giving their budget statement. [*Desk thumping*] Whether it is casino workers, maxi-taxi drivers and operators, other workers, fishermen, and so on, they came outside to present their parliamentary budget response and we must applaud the democracy. And instead of intimidating and harassing and telling people not to be used by A, B, C we must applaud citizens that they can come to the Parliament [*Desk thumping*] and express their criticism, their discontent with the administration of the day.

Madam Speaker, I would indicate upfront that it is my intention to deal with two areas really, my two thematic areas. One would be to analyze Government expenditure policy, in response to a Government that for two years have carried a mantra, have carried a slogan, have carried a theme that there is no money, that we are pressed for cash.

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The last speaker, for a few minutes, dealt with matters of finance, and the last speaker again told us the impact of the fall on revenues to the economy and the nature of the challenge that the Government faces. And that has been a thematic for two years that the Government is facing this crisis. We do not have money. We have to do more with less. Another catch line is value for money. I want to deal with that issue, because it relates to expenditure policy.

The other matter that affects us all is the matter of crime and criminality. I would like to share some thoughts on that as well, because, Madam Speaker, it matters not if you do not have water if you are dead. You do not need a hospital bed if you are dead. You do not need social services, a food card and so on, if you are dead. And since this administration has been in place, we have had over 1,000 citizens of this country murdered. To date, we have had more murders per pay than days in the year. We estimate that we will pass, by far, Lara's record and we will go on to 500 by the end of this year, and that is what we face. It is the most burning challenge.

While that is happening, our Minister of National Security from Point Fortin has declared war on crime. He has declared war on crime. The Leader of North Korea declared war on the United States. The Venezuelan leader may declare such. He has declared war. Just before he board the stage to dance on that boat, he declared war on crime. Mr. Minister, as the Member for Caroni Central indicated, you should really deal with the murder rate first before a declaration of war. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will deal with the matter of crime and so on, but just a couple of points to make on the last speaker. Madam Speaker, I found it interesting that the last speaker said we are not about "bussing mark. We not about dat." This is after two years of hearing about ghost workers at the Attorney General's Office, where they said it went to the police and these ghost workers have been reported. To this day, nothing. It is not that they are not "bussing mark", it is that they have no "mark tuh buss". [*Desk thumping*] They have none. They have none. What will they say? And in the context where they have nothing to report, precious little or nothing, they have nothing to report. The Minister from San Fernando East has not built one single house in two years. [*Desk thumping*] They took away the food cards. They have nothing to report in any sector.

Madam Speaker, they are stripping this economy. It is like an obscene striptease act. Piece by piece they are destroying the economy and destroying the society. They have nothing to report and they have no mark to "buss". Because in their first year they spoke high and dry about all type of activities under the former administration. You know, the only matter that is in court, to our knowledge, because it is a matter in the civil court, a matter involving HDC.

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Madam Speaker, after two years, the Government cannot file the requisite materials in the court, statements. They cannot, after two years. They cannot. But every time you see them—you see, Madam Speaker, this is the Government of threats. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, who appears more angry than anybody else, is the minister of threat. You threaten everybody in the society. The banker leader, we threaten him. We threaten the people at the Chamber of Commerce. The Wednesday before the budget, they went to the Hyatt to tell us that “we poor”. A lady stood up there and made a statement. The Minister made a disparaging remark. When they caught him out, he said: “No, ah did not mean all of you to insult you, yuh know. It was just dis lady, Marla.” Now poor Marla came there and faced that from the Minister.

The Prime Minister says to shut up. When he is pressed on: “How could you say dat?” He say: “No, no, no. I did not tell everybody dat, yuh know. Was just de Opposition I referring to.” This is their *modus operandi*. It is one of threatening people.

And I have been fortunate or unfortunate to be really the major recipient of their threats. Madam Speaker, if you go to 10 people in the national community and you ask them: “Who is the PNM after?” Eleven people will tell them the Member for Oropouche East. If you ask 10, 11 people they will tell you that. But, Madam Speaker a lion “do not cower, do not hide”. [*Desk thumping*] Then you lose the element, definitional element of a lion. They believe that I will be frightened and intimidated and harassed and cower and I would stay quiet. But I know they are out to get me. That is why I am out to get you. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I am out to get you. And I will continue.

This morning, before I rose, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, I just read my oath again, and the line:

“...will uphold the Constitution and the law, and will conscientiously and impartially discharge the responsibilities to the people...”

I read this just before I spoke today because I want to dwell on that as well.

Madam Speaker, the last speaker raised a matter concerning the Member for Naparima. When the Member for Naparima spoke of Iraq and Syria, the ISIS is called the Islamic State for Iraq and Syria. It is both in one. [*Desk thumping*] So to say he talked about Iraq and not Syria is neither here nor there. Nation states today do not exist like that before. There are transnational issues and international diplomatic challenges that transcend boundaries. The Member for Naparima understands that. He understands that. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East again, you know, spoke about the challenges of the economy, employers and how much we spend. You know, every Minister talked about how much the last administration spent. Today, I want to talk about how much they spent because, Madam Speaker, let me remind the national community this occasion is not for the UNC to account for its performance. It is for the Government to account for its performance. Not the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] It is for you. We accounted in September 2015. That is why we are here. We accounted and we are here. You have to account. It is not us. So do not shift it to talk about the NGC dividends and the money spent. [*Desk thumping*]

And they accuse us of spending money. But public finance involves money. You must spend money properly. And this is why, when we speak so strongly, it is because we are convinced that we have done no wrong. Process has been followed. I never went all over the world and meet bankers and promise deal and tell them I am going to become a Minister soon, rest assured we will do some business. [*Desk thumping*] I am coming back to that. I am coming back to that, Madam Speaker. So we are strong and we are brave.

Madam Speaker, the Sandals matter, I just want to deal with that quickly; the Sandals matter. Now, the Member for Tobago West is not here now. But, to let the Member for Tobago West know, Madam Speaker, that nobody on this side is saying that we do not need Sandals or we do not need resort tourism and family resorts, and so on, in Tobago. Tobago needs that. We all know that. Maybe Trinidad needs that too in Mayaro and elsewhere. Right, of course, but that is not the issue. We are concerned with process. We are concerned with procurement. We are concerned with transparency. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are concerned with, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, for two years, this Government has put a lot of emphasis on a twin pillar for development for their diversification. Well, first they are committed to diversification within the energy sector and they are also committed, they claim, to tourism. And they have hedged that, they spoke so much about that. Do you know what is remarkable? After two years they do not even have a piece of napkin signed by Sandals with a deal, with an arrangement, [*Desk thumping*] not one piece of document. Because this is a paperless Government. They make deals without paper. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister goes to Houston, comes back to announce: "I represented you well. We had a nice deal cut there and thank God I went. We have a supply of gas to follow." We say: "Who yuh went with? Nobody. What yuh have in writing? Nothing." So when we form the Government soon and we want to fully

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implement his wonderful work, “who we need to talk to?” Somebody in Houston, we “doh know? When we go there what tuh say? A gentleman from Diego Martin West was here, what allyuh agree to? Tell us. We want tuh implement.” Public management involves, notes, minutes, papers, reports. [*Desk thumping*]

They talk about the gas line from Venezuela. “Dey fly tuh Venezuela.” We saw somebody in a conga line in Venezuela with Maduro. When we asked: What do you have in writing? “We doh have anything yet. We coming close, we coming close. We coming close.” Everything will happen soon. All we have is a picture of a conga line from Venezuela. Nothing we have. When we raise the issues, “dey say we unpatriotic. We doh love Trinidad and Tobago.” That is what their response is, you know.

In Sandals, I would just put quickly on the table, Madam Speaker, Sandals have indicated to the Government, is it true or not, that while they may have an interest, they will not fund that project. [*Desk thumping*] That project is expected to be US \$400 million to US \$500 million, almost TT \$4 billion. Where is the TT \$4 billion coming from? [*Desk thumping*]

They tell us we are following the Hyatt model. Well this is actually the Hyatt model. We are in the Hyatt model. But the Hyatt model is taxpayers pay, and every single year we pay \$256 million on loan arrangements for Hyatt, Wrightson Road Tower I, Tower II. It is done under UDeCOTT. Those of us in UDeCOTT over the years know. The Hyatt model is taxpayers pay. So is Tobago Sandals the Hyatt model? Where are you going to find \$4 billion to \$5 billion from? Because Sandals is telling you we will fly the flag, “buh we doh have dat money. You find de money.”

Madam Speaker, what are the favourable concessions, the tax concessions? What are the financial package and the tax breaks offered? What is the land deal? Are there foreign labour arrangements involved to bring in foreign labour? So people in Tobago who think they are getting jobs or certain categories of jobs, think again. What are the environmental considerations? What are the investment concessions packages that you are going to give? These are simple questions we ask.

And you know one problem with this Government, the Member for Caroni East, he bought 98,000 laptops in five years. “Anybody know dat?” [*Desk thumping*] Ninety-eight thousand laptops. No iota of corruption and to—“dey try tuh rent two boat, dey cyah do it without bobol. Tuh get two boats, they cyah do

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that without bobol. Yuh know it had four probes fuh two boats?” They cannot do it without some cooking up, some corruption, some “bobol”. And tell us upfront about Sandals before you create a situation where we need “20 probe” into Sandals.

Who has the land been transferred to? If it has been transferred, to which company? Who is the chairman of that company? Who are the directors, if the land has been transferred? We ask you. Are there considerations for an expansion of the airport in Tobago? If that airport is to be expanded or a new airport built, on whose lands will you do that? What is the infrastructure cost? Do you all even know that by now?

And, Madam Speaker, is that project to be funded outside of the constitutional THA budget allocation? These are important questions you must confront now, otherwise you would have to put “20 probe” in place after. [*Desk thumping*] Do it upfront and level with the population. We are not saying no to Sandals.

And the final point on Sandals I raise. What is it about you? There are established procurement processes in Ministries, Central Tenders Board, you have not implemented procurement legislation yet. So have CTB and so on. But did you open an invitation? Did you send out an invitation in the Caribbean, in the hemisphere, in whatever forum, and invited hotels and resort centres around the world to say: “Please send us your package. Give us your package, your proposals, for a resort and family beach resort in Tobago.” Did you do that? Did you ask Spice Island, Royalton Luxury Resort, Cap Maison, Four Seasons?

In San Fernando East, there is a resort “Villa-something”, and the Member is familiar with that. Did you enquire from them if they are interested in putting a proposal for Tobago? [*Interruption*] “Some villa thing” in San Fernando. Did you ask for proposals? No. It is on record that the principal of Sandals came to Trinidad years ago, met someone who he did not know was the Opposition Leader and they started to talk and “somebody say: ‘yuh know Sandals in Tobago is a good idea. Let us do it’.” You cannot do that. “You cyah do dat.” To say it in local terms. “Yuh cyah do dat.” Public expenditure requires public process, transparency. [*Desk thumping*] Go out. Go out and do the thing properly. You get a resort, you have a short-list. You put a team together and you select. [*Cell phone rings*] The Member for Moruga now is disturbing but he would find his way by himself, Madam Speaker.

Yes, Madam Speaker, I heard him speak, from Moruga/Tableland, I took some notes to respond to the Member for Moruga/Tableland. He left. Madam Speaker, when he was talking, the sign language man could not understand. That is the man

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right here on the screen. [*Desk thumping*] He could not understand what he was saying. He made some statements about history and Moruga and the road. Do you know they had sod turning for roads in Moruga in his office? He turned the sod in his office. “But when he come back. Ah doh like talking behind people back.”

Madam Speaker, I want to get to another key matter. Everybody, the mantra, we do not have money, we do not have money. How we could do this without money. We have to cut and paste. We have to do this. Madam Speaker, look, I cannot display “nothing”, but I can hold in my hand, close to my chest.

Madam Speaker: But you cannot brandish.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I cannot brandish nothing and this is a—I would put a clear page, Madam Speaker. This is information from NLCB, National Lotteries Control Board multibillion-dollar enterprise, came to us because people believe that if you come to us with information we can articulate in the Parliament and elsewhere and call people to account. NLCB, and I want to raise some matters about expenditure policy there, because the Attorney General and others telling us: “We doh have money. We doh have money.” The Minister of Finance came in this House and told us he was going to do a report on NLCB’s chairman. We have not heard anything yet because a whistle-blower will come to us.

But, Madam Speaker, there is now a sickening development taking place in the society. Madam Speaker, we all know of the trouble with the port. We all know that. Madam Speaker, would you believe that on that matter, Madam Speaker, a witness came before the JSC and made certain statements about a Minister of Government. That witness was fired at 12.00 midnight by email, Madam Speaker, fired at 12 midnight by email, a dismissal letter from the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, whatever are the issues there, and I would come to it briefly, there is a serious matter here and it concerns an assault on this Parliament; an assault! An assault, not unlike 1990, an assault. That was a physical violent assault. This is an assault on a governance, the major governance structure of our democracy. And when you throw down the democracy and these structures, it leads to the violence. It leads to violence.

Imagine, under our Constitution, Madam Speaker, and this is why I had to pull the Constitution this morning, it is said, 55(4) of our Constitution:

“A person called to give any evidence before either House or any committee shall enjoy the same privileges and immunities as a member of either House.”

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This is our Constitution. [*Desk thumping*] Someone came and gave evidence. The chairman, acting on your behalf or on behalf of the Parliament as chairman with the authority, invited the witness and “say: ‘Tell us the truth and only the truth. We need you to be upfront and transparent and honest’.” The lady came and did that, two weeks later, fired 12.00 midnight. When you look at the letter now, “it say: ‘Well look yuh take vacation and we did not know yuh gone on vacation. Yuh did not take de vacation we send yuh on,’” and so on. That is fine. Relevant other—oh there is this:

Your said refusal to proceed on vacation and various issues the board had with you.

But the one that interests me, the recent information from PricewaterhouseCoopers, a letter dated, Madam Speaker, 09 October, 2017, dismissal letter:

The recent information from PricewaterhouseCoopers forensic searches.

Madam Speaker, the Minister in charge of everything told a post Cabinet press conference 21st September, and I quote the Minister, I think it is the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

“Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs... yesterday said the ministry has, ‘already begun to conduct a forensic audit, forensic investigation and examination at the port authority.’”

This involved computer equipment, laptop, phones, and so on. What Ministry—when we asked how can a Ministry seize devices from a statutory body, an entity such as the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development has in its building the HDC.

This Minister of Housing cannot go to Mr. Newman and tell him surrender all your computer and your phones, and so on, we are doing an analysis—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), there is no relevance.

Madam Speaker: Member, I would give you a little leeway. Please tie what you are saying to the budget presentation.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I will tie it because in the contribution of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, his contribution on the 6th of the 10th dealt with this matter. [*Desk thumping*] And I would just like to respond.

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The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said, and I quote:

“It is trite law that an employer who owns the equipment of an employee is entitled to take the equipment of the employee and to look through the equipment of the employee...”

He said this. I respond.

The Ministry of Works and Transport or the Ministry of the Attorney General is not the employer of Charmaine Lewis. [*Desk thumping*] The port authority is. It is a statutory body and the Ministry is not an employer. This letter suggests that PricewaterhouseCoopers is acting as the FBI [*Desk thumping*] doing forensic analysis. When that phone—and I will end with this; there is a dangerous issue here. When that phone and computer go to PricewaterhouseCoopers, do you know now they have all the secret, private and confidential matters of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago? A so-called independent agency paid by the Government. The Government pays PricewaterhouseCoopers. Correct? “Who pay dem? Not de Opposition, de Government.” They now have every sensitive material of the port in their possession and they are paid and they are doing forensic analysis. They are not the police.

In the police, you have a chain of command. You have a property keeper. You have persons authorized in law to interrogate phones, not in PricewaterhouseCoopers. They have now undermined. The port authority has its own police. Why did you not ask them, trained men and women, to undertake an analysis? This wreaks of corruption. This wreaks of a massive cover-up. It wreaks of political interference, victimization and the undermining of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker I move on, because I know they are troubled by this matter if I continue. Madam Speaker, they have no money. Because let us get to money, M-O-N-E-Y. They have no money, M-O-N-E-Y. At CEPEP, we learnt that they gave almost \$3 million to a consultant, Mr. Rolph Balgobin, to undertake a reorganization of CEPEP. At the end of it, he was reorganized. He left all the state boards. He left. CEPEP squandering \$3 million on that.

NLCB, Madam Speaker, I want to get to that quickly. NLCB is told, as the rest of the national community, to tighten their belt, tighten their belt and they have to cut expenses, and so on. Madam Speaker, we are seeing a total mismanagement of a leading financial organization in this country. The report suggests that they have squandered money as if they never see money. They have spent and overspent on trips abroad, Madam Speaker, lavish travels to China, Italy, Las Vegas,

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Magdalena, Tobago, expenditure on awards ceremony. The Minister of Finance stopped one trip. That is what they are muttering. The Minister stopped the travel of NLCB. I ask the Minister of Finance, did they return the money? Just confirm that money given to officials of NLCB were returned to NLCB, when the Minister of Finance actually did clip their wings. They were off to China, off to Japan and the Minister clipped their wings, whether they returned the money. That is the issue. They had awards ceremony, Madam Speaker, and I would come to it, retreats at the Hyatt, cricket excursions, invoices to friends and family. Unbelievable how they spend money.

Let us look at the money. At Hilton, NLCB staff and awards function. They took vouchers from Massy Stores. “Yuh know” the total amount of these vouchers, Madam Speaker, which they paid, was almost \$100,000? Eighty thousand dollars plus additional expenses of \$23,000 paid to Massy. This is voucher for employees at a time when they claim they have no money. Madam Speaker, 10 members of staff received staff long service award, \$108,000.

They bought Johnny Walker Black from AS Bryden as gifts for board members, \$40,000. And yesterday the Minister of Health, poor “fella”, I saw a newspaper report, Madam Speaker, Minister of Health complaining it is too expensive for a screw. That is what he was complaining about yesterday. A screw for \$3.50, they buying in the regional authority for \$1,200. He went online on Amazon and see the screw for \$3.50. He complaining that the screw too expensive, and at NLCB, \$40,000 on Johnny Walker Black. That is where we reach, Madam Speaker. He wanted a cheaper screw and could not get it and complaining about that, while NLCB is squandering this type of money.

Madam Speaker, decoration for Hilton for their function, \$106,000, \$60,000 sound system. Hear this one, the entire bill for their awards ceremony was in excess of \$800,000 at NLCB, complaining about this titanium screw.

Madam Speaker, the children's party, in excess of \$250,000. They are farming out management services, and so on, to companies, \$400,000. That is what they are spending, Madam Speaker. Is that tightening the belt at NLCB? Is that, Madam Speaker, what the Government is talking about? So when you ask us where to get the money, that is where you get the money.

Madam Speaker, I go to another piece of package, NLCB board members, friends and family. They had a grand fiesta at the CPL cricket. Do you know what is the expenditure for this cricket excursion for members when you add up all the cost? It is \$687,000, NLCB.

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Madam Speaker, this is unbelievable. I have the full list here of Prosecco and Johnny Walker. Some of these things I do not know, Madam Speaker, the type of thing. I do have a—Madam Speaker, where I come from “we doh have dis”.

Madam Speaker, they have the full list here. It is just a copy of that. A director came from Tobago. We welcome him to Trinidad. He went to the cricket, the taxi fare is \$1,000 alone to go down to the Brian Lara. You all could have given him a lift in one of “allyuh” Benz and Porsche and whatever you all drive. Could have given him a little lift, you know. A thousand dollars for taxi to go Brian Lara—or in the Ford Mustang or whatever that is.

Madam Speaker, this is bad expenditure. It is a waste of money. They had a two-day retreat at Hyatt, I told you about that. Do you know the pens and the pencils, stationery cost \$18,000. Paperclips, pens and pencils were \$18,000 at the retreat. Look, I have here all the bills from Trinidad and Tobago Supply Chain Solutions is the company they are using for Hyatt. I have it here, bad expenditure, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I raised a matter with the Minister of Finance. I told him they have a chairman there. Is the chairman related to any Member of the Cabinet? That is the first issue, eh. Is the chairman related to any Member of Cabinet? I do not know. Maybe they would clarify that, NLCB chairman. Do you know this member claimed to receive threats, but admitted in a letter to NLCB signed by the chairman: “I did not report this to the police. I spoke to a few board members. They tell me to get private security.” We have been—the taxpayer is paying, Madam Speaker, in excess per month, of \$10,000 for personal bodyguard service for the chairman, people patrolling by his house and some other patrol. Oh no, “dey doing” bug sweep in his office. The Special Branch is there. If any Member of Government, senior Member of course, believes that somebody is spying on them, there is a unit in the police, you can call to do a sweep, and so on. That is normal. This is done independently, so the taxpayer pays \$10,000 a month. This is, what you call, value for money. [*Interruption*] “Yeah dah is de man”.

Madam Speaker, they have an outstanding bill there. They have an outstanding report, outstanding bad debts owed to NLCB, \$25 million in bad debts owed to the NLCB from agents. It will be interesting to look at the list of agents to see who they are, where they are. I “doh have time fuh dat. I doh” have time today, Madam Speaker. Not today.

Madam Speaker, I come to another important point, because I want to get on to crime, badly. You see, Madam Speaker, when we speak on this matter, they accuse us. You know when we talk about corruption they accuse us of corruption?

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When we talk about theft, they accuse us of being thief. Thank God we do not talk about rape, Madam Speaker. So they accuse us of the crimes that we raise for accountability.

The Prime Minister went in the airport, and he knew. The Prime Minister said he knew that the Member for Oropouche East will be in court. “He know dat. Went on Piccadilly Square. He know what people wearing in dey bedroom”, but did not know the Minister of Public Utilities was not a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago or was a citizen of another country. He did not know that one, [*Desk thumping*] but know that.

And Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: And he could cuss.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, as I heard that at the side, there is a disturbing, there is, Madam Speaker, to me, I want to say there is a disturbing and almost pathological obsession by the head of the Government with the female anatomy and female attire. [*Desk thumping*] It is a pathological obsession to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I ask you to withdraw that and say it another way, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I withdraw that. I would say it another way then. There is an obsession with attacking females. I can say that.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, Madam Speaker, I withdraw it. Let us move. Madam Speaker, to deal with crime requires a certain approach. It requires a strong approach. It requires a law enforcement community, Madam Speaker, that is clean and we have to deal with corruption there.

A recent report, Madam Speaker, I must say, there was a report in the newspaper yesterday on the editorial page, I think page 7 of the *Newsday*. Elizabeth Solomon wrote on a Latin American report on corruption, the barometer of corruption by Transparency International, and in the hemisphere and in the Caribbean, it is well reported that persons do not have confidence in elected representatives and in the police, in dealing with corruption. We know that. And this is why we must work to deal with corruption. But dealing with corruption is not “mauvais langue” and “ole talk”, you know. It is not talking about a mall in

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Holland, which you cannot find in two years. It is not talking about house. “Only people on this side have house, it look like.” It is not talking about that. It is putting institutions in place, governance institutions, strengthening them and allowing them to do their job, allowing them to do their job to call to account persons. It is persons who themselves, their hands are clean.

I heard the Prime Minister say the Minister of Works and Transport went to the port and he is trying to clean up corruption. That is like giving a cat a tin opener.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: What do you expect to do with that? Madam Speaker, I withdraw that. I withdraw that. Madam Speaker, I am saying that one must build a police service, build a public service, where institutions respond to allegations.

Madam Speaker, people like us, members of the community give us information. Members of the public give us information. They come to us because they believe we can articulate matters. They are voiceless. In some cases, they are invisible. They give us information. Madam Speaker, some troubling information has come to me of allegations involving high public officials, public officials who themselves are in sensitive positions and information that public officials are involved themselves in wrongdoing, allegations.

One such matter, Madam Speaker, came to me and my advice to persons coming to me with that is one thing, I am not police. I “doh” investigate nothing. I have nothing to do with that. Anyone comes to me as an Opposition Member, I invite them to please go to the police and report. Because that is the right and correct thing to do. We do not investigate. We can raise matters, and so on, but we have no power beyond that. And so I have advised people over the last two years who come to my office. I say please go to the police station and report because you have some allegation, and that is what it is. It is an allegation. It is not true. So you cannot hold someone who is in public service to account or make them out as if they are guilty of something, unless it goes through a process, not what Members opposite do, like jumping up and saying how much, who “tief and who do this and who do dat.”

Madam Speaker, one such allegation involves public officials and I have come across material which suggests that there are transcripts, text message transcripts between officials and between someone, not one person and not one official, other officials as well, suggesting that high public officials are involved, Madam Speaker, in certain criminal wrongdoings, matters involving Opposition MPs, matters involving a very sensitive matter.

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One matter came to me, Madam Speaker, and a chill ran up my spine, because it spoke to a conspiracy to plant recording devices in the office of an Opposition Member of Parliament. And when I asked for some material to substantiate that, Madam Speaker, I got something in which a public official is replying to the person to say:

I will be away for a few days. I am waiting on you. I have to be at an important event tomorrow. We will do the rest next week. Thanks to you. I appreciate your reach out.

Madam Speaker, and what troubled me is when a public official is saying:

I am at your convenience. Just let me know what you need and when, and I will be ready to assist you. Be comfortable and prepared. Meet after six at the office.

Then:

Great, remember we in a new building. You can meet me in the new building in the basement.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member, could you tie this to the budget, please. Thank you.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, when the Member for Point Fortin spoke on dealing with crime and the Attorney General and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, they spoke about dealing with corruption within government and within the law enforcement community. [*Desk thumping*] They did. All I am saying to the Members today is that the threat is real. The threat is real. Because if it is that Members or persons in high public service, something like this could be happening, Madam Speaker, where someone is reporting to us in the Opposition that they are engaged with public officials in a conspiracy to wiretap an office of an Opposition Leader, it is serious.

Madam Speaker, a President of the United States was impeached on Water Gate, President Nixon lost his job on this matter [*Desk thumping*] and in this—I will not read every single thing now, because I want to move on.

12.30 p.m.

In this matter before me, a public official is saying, “I am sending recording devices, SIM cards, what else do you need? And I have a go-between” and the name of the go-between is here. I cannot call the name because I cannot do that.

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The name and number of the go-between is here, "he is on his way to meet you. I have confidence in him, you can trust him. I have them and you will get them, sorting out the SIMS now, will do."

Madam Speaker, all of this would have meant nothing, if I had this alone, it would have meant nothing. This means nothing really in the scheme of things, because you do not know the actual offence. And it continues, I will not read everything. Twenty-eight pages of text, but Madam Speaker, it is my information that a report has been made to the police, to investigate this matter and investigate one or more high public officials for a conspiracy to wiretap, to plant recording devices, and to break in the office of Opposition Member of Parliament, attorney-at-law, Sen. Gerald Ramdeen.

Madam Speaker, I do not have the name of the public officials, I have the number. I have the number, I can tell you the number, if you want you can ring it. You can ring it. The number is 683-6442; that is the number on the document. I have never tried this number, I do not know if it is the number of anyone in the House or outside. You all can dial it, it may vibrate in the House. Madam Speaker, this is a serious matter [*Interruption*] the police is in the—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What does this relate to in the budget giving somebody's telephone number?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you to move on.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, in moving on could I indicate that it is my information that the draft of this transcript of text messages has been placed on social media by someone and anybody who wants to read can go there and read it. Madam Speaker, let me move on now. Another matter that troubles me another matter troubles me, is some time ago I asked a question in Parliament, I asked a question in Parliament, and that question related to a statement the Attorney General made that he had received legal advice on a matter. And when I asked the question in Parliament, the question, Madam Speaker, was allowed, properly, and the Attorney General got up and made an interesting comment. He said yes we got advice, I said "How much did you pay for it?" He said "No, it was free." and the Prime Minister ask "What wrong with that?"

The Prime Minister believes that he is running a parlour selling condensed milk, sweetie, and Chubby. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in Government you cannot allow a situation where people are giving you free service. What is that? They appointed a one-man investigator into the Port. They ask him, the reference is there August 15, 2017, a letter from the Prime Minister. You tell him "Please

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give us a report on the procurement of the *Ocean Flower II* and the *Cabo Star*". You know he wrote a report on *Galicia*, [Laughter] that is like you ask him to tell us about KFC and he tell you about Royal Castle. That is what happen there. Madam Speaker, you know what, I want to say I want my money back from the sole investigator the taxpayer wants their money back, but we did not pay. There is no legal contract; there is no binding arrangement; there is no proper terms of reference. No consideration.

Madam Speaker, if a citizen is affected by that report and sues the sole commissioner, Madam Speaker—they can sue him for that, for what he did. There is no arrangement with the Government properly, you have to pay for a service. Even if you pay less money, the person does it for you, for a smaller fee, you have to pay. Mr. Mouttet did a report; we have no contract with him; we have no arrangement with him properly, so we do not know if he breached any contract. This thing is wrong that you meet people, they are your friends and you are in government. Could you imagine, I am Minister of Housing and something happens in the housing sector, I call up a friend and say, "Partner come, we have some help, people making trouble here, investigate this for me". You cannot do that, you have to properly recruit properly secure, properly pay someone with the requisite skills to do a job. That is how it is done in public—[Desk thumping]—business.

And the matter is not ending there, Madam Speaker, there is an issue down at Petrotrin, as if Petrotrin has not had enough bacchanal by themselves, there is an issue in Petrotrin. And, Madam Speaker, the issue in Petrotrin revolves around consultants at Petrotrin. Madam Speaker, consultants at Petrotrin—Madam Speaker, I have just been told that the information I gave was seen by someone at TT expose—Facebook.com\TT expose—Madam Speaker at Petrotrin they hire consultants—well they do not hire consultants. We are told based on a report in a management meeting by their manger of exploration, Madam Speaker, that they are taking people on board to provide services, consultancy services, and when the managers at Pointe-a-Pierre in the note I have before me ask, they are told that the consultants are free, they are doing services for free.

One of the consultants is related to a Government Minister. Now, nothing is wrong with that on the surface. The person is probably well skilled and so on, but do you work for free and there are implications of this free work in the State sector? First we are told that it may be free for the individual but for a company linked to him they get a million dollars a year for that work.

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

Dr. R. Moonilal: Humbly, Ma'am, I will. Madam Speaker [*Desk thumping*] the Petrotrin report tells us—and this is a minute of a meeting held on Wednesday 12 October, 2016—the managers are concerned about confidentiality agreements signed by consultants. They are concerned Madam Speaker with recruitment, how did they—they are asking the company senior management: “How did you recruit consultants? Was it by open tender? Did you invite persons to submit an application and assess applications?” They did that at UTT as well, right.

They are asking how is the Vice-President and others, do they not have confidence in us? How can we trust people with confidential information, and you know what is one bit of the confidential information? Information that if it got into the hands of lease operators can be to the detriment of Petrotrin. So, so-called free consultants coming in at Petrotrin, getting sensitive information on exploration that can be used by lease operators. Who is a lease operator? That is the contractors who outside in Cats Hill and wherever, Madam Speaker. And seismic information is also being made available to persons who have no contract, who have no recruitment policy, Madam Speaker, with Petrotrin. And this is a danger. We saw this trend developing with the Government, where they invite people they say “Come, come. Help us. We have a problem here.” And no proper recruitment, no procurement policy followed, no proper contract in place, no payment based upon skill or expertise.

And, Madam Speaker, that leads me to the point that this came from, we were told, Madam Speaker, I did not have the misfortune of listening to the meeting at Piccadilly Corner, but of course—what you call it?—it is Piggott’s Corner. Sorry, sorry, it was at Piggott’s Corner. I did not have the misfortune of hearing it, but I got a report of course, I saw the newspaper, and the Prime Minister said something very interesting. In attacking the Member for Siparia, on the matter raised in this budget debate, might I remind you, Madam Speaker, the matter of TGU, the sale of 40 per cent of TGU is a live issue in the Parliament today in this budget debate. It is a live issue, before they stand on 48(1).

And, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister said that he went to Germany as Opposition Leader and met bankers. Why did he go there, to open a bank account? What you met bankers for while being Opposition Leader? Madam Speaker, when you are an Opposition Leader, you meet protesters, you do not meet bankers. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker: Somebody's device is interfering with the system, somebody's device. Continue please, Oropouche—

Dr. Moonilal: Because it might be 683-6442, Madam Speaker, as Opposition Leader, went to Germany, met a banker and had chats with this banker and assured them that I am Opposition Leader of Trinidad and Tobago and pretty soon I might be Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader—was the then Opposition Leader soliciting deals as Opposition Leader before becoming Prime Minister—

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

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you to withdraw that, say it in another way.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I was never aware, having spent 10 years in Opposition, that an Opposition Leader properly, could be involved in banking and financial arrangements prior to entering Government. [*Desk thumping*] I was not aware of that. And Madam Speaker, when that banker's name was called, it is also linked to Ferrostaal and the TGU sell of 40 per cent, it is a dangerous set of dots that the population must connect. Because it happened with Sandals. Sandals was conceptualized prior to 2015. And—

Hon. Member: The golf course.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—I will come to the golf course just now. But it is a dangerous thing when a Leader of the Opposition then, seemed to be involved in some matters not properly under the ambit of a Leader of the Opposition and then indicates to the nation that the genesis of certain arrangements were in Opposition. What did you promise? What was promised to you? These are questions that arise. Did somebody promise you something? Did you promise somebody something? You cannot do that, and it speaks, Madam Speaker, regrettably I must say, it also speaks to a certain level of misbehaviour in public office, which somebody else—[*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this matter the Opposition Leader raised with great care and concern, I suspect we will be hearing more about this matter as the days and hours go by.

Hon. Member: Ferrostaal.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Ferrostaal. Madam Speaker, Ferrostaal came to my attention as a university student, when I was studying Point Lisas, and one Professor Ken Julien was at ISCOTT, Madam Speaker, and do you know at ISCOTT, Madam Speaker, they were losing a million dollars a days and there was a deal involving German companies and Ferrostaal. And today it comes back full circle.

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But, as in the few minutes I have left, Madam Speaker, I want to assure the national community that their time is limited as the Opposition Leader, political leader said they have reached Wednesday in the political cycle; when you blink you on Friday. And they will soon discover that the time is ending and they have to account to the population, and accounting to the population is not saying, about 2010 and 2015. I heard the Member for Port of Spain South the other night reciting all the ills of the administration of the PNM, because claiming that we said that when we were in government and so on, and the Member for Port of Spain South, I could not stay too long to hear her but I understand she made a brief presentation, because the Member had to account, I think for two days as a minister [*Desk thumping*] so it did not take much time.

But Madam Speaker, when we raise matters like these, it is not for the Government, because I know what they will do, they will stand up after I am finished and say look who talking, and corruption, and mismanagement, and EMBDC and this and that. That is what they will do, accuse us when we stand to raise matters of governance, accountability and transparency to you. Madam Speaker, that is what they will do. If I said it once—last year I raised a matter, a sensitive matter as well, I want to remind the national community, when I raised that matter, the Prime Minister got up and attacked me. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West got up and was brutal, attacking me last year when I raised a sensitive matter. The mouse that roared from San Fernando East also put his two cents in, Madam Speaker, last year. This year I raise sensitive matters, I expect that they will treat me the same way. But I want to indicate, Madam Speaker that the lion does not hide, does not cower. They do not hide [*Desk thumping*] so I am prepared. Madam Speaker, it is only warriors that carry scars, cowards do not carry scars. [*Desk thumping*] So cowards do not have scars, it is only warriors. So we are afraid of no one on this side, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Government in the closing time to look at their spending. Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is misbehaving. Madam Speaker, in the closing moments I have, I want to ask the Prime Minister again, last year when we raised an issue with the money for the Prime Minister's house in Tobago, they said it was \$500,000—\$500,000, no more. It was for what? Pre-feasibility study. Do you know in the current budget, Madam Speaker—I have the document before me here—in the current budget they have put \$5 million for a residence for the Prime Minister. You telling people you “doh” have money, \$5 million for a residence for the Prime Minister, \$3 million for a golf course—and let me tell the Member for Diego

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Martin Central one time. It is not that nobody do not like golf. Golf is one of the biggest, fastest growing games in the world. Children playing golf now; biggest, fastest growing game. Our vision was that the private sector would be involved in golf, not the taxpayer. Taxpayers do not involve themselves in spending \$3 million for a golf course. That is the private sector must do that. Give them some benefit to open a restaurant and a bar and facilities and entertainment, they will manage the golf course not the taxpayer.

12.45 p.m.

I am asking, is this the best time? You want value for money, do more with less. And more for less, Madam Speaker, mean getting more money for less oil. That is what it means. You are asking people, do more for less but \$5 million for a Prime Minister house, at this time, when you claim you do not have money? That, Madam Speaker, is a travesty; that, Madam Speaker, speaks to a certain level of arrogance, a certain level of disbelief and disconnect between the citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

They are going to tax Play Whe. I call upon you, in closing, Mr. Minister, remove that tax from the Play Whe. The Play Whe, if you tax 10 per cent on Play Whe, it will lead to an expansion of illegal gambling. Withdraw that immediately. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the less than one minute that I have before me, I want to ask the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, in particular, the people are suffering, calling for houses, do something apart from reciting old, beaten and trumped up polices like private/public partnership. They are coming with that two years now. I understand the partnership at Mount Hope, I think that partnership ended. The partnership ended in more ways than one. Private partnerships for the children's hospital, absolutely nothing two years later. I predict that caraille vine will grow on the Couva hospital and reptiles will be running there. I predict that. Madam Speaker, I thank you so much for your patience. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 44(8). The hon. Member in reciting what I had said then introduced, by way of misrepresentation, my telephone number 683-6442, onto a matter of a whistleblower which is properly the subject of a court action and (b), the subject of the police and, in fact, completely misrepresented all of the truth. I thank you for the opportunity to deal with that particular point.

Dr. Moonilal: That is a rebuttal. [*Crosstalk*]

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Madam Speaker: Members, I think we agreed that we will take the break now for lunch. We shall return at two o'clock.

12.47 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. As we resume after lunch, I recognize the Member for Arouca/Maloney. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to lend my voice and support to the package of fiscal measures articulated a few days ago by my colleague of long standing, the Minister of Finance and Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise in my capacity as the Minister of Planning and Development, but also in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Arouca/Maloney, a constituency that has remained faithful to the People's National Movement for several years and a constituency that allows me to lend my voice here today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance has gone through the colossal undertaking of successfully managing, compiling and presenting the budget that we have been debating for the last few days. Even though it was a daunting task, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel I can speak, not only for the constituents of Arouca/Maloney, but indeed for the constituents of Arima, Tunapuna, Diego Martin West, Chaguanas West, Pointe-a-Pierre and Tobago East and West in saying that the Minister of Finance, his staff and the staff of the Ministry of Planning and Development have done an excellent budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago under the circumstances. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I get into the meat of my contribution, I would like to start by talking about some of the things that my colleagues on the other side have put forward as their response to this budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, I wonder with a little shock that the Member for Oropouche East can talk about the issue of process. Mr. Deputy Speaker, hearing that from the Member for Oropouche East left me in shock and awe that that Member could talk about the issue of process and procedure. That is the Member, who as Minister of Housing left us with contracts worth over \$3 billion without any contractual agreements. Contracts worth over \$3 billion that the Member of San Fernando East as Minister of Housing and Urban Development is now trying to sort out, and he talks to us about process and procedure.

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I would like to ask the Member for Oropouche East if he remembers the name Fixin' T&T and the numerous rental vehicles that they rented at the HDC and the Ministry of Housing for staff who was not qualified and without a single contract and without a tendering process, no tendering process. [*Crosstalk*] And I ask today: Who was driving that Mercedes Benz that taxpayers were paying for? The Member for Oropouche East talks to us about process. I want to ask the Member for Oropouche East, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if he remembers that there was a search warrant issued for the County of St. Patrick. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I crave your indulgence to read the warrant. And it says:

Search Warrant:

The Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act, Chap. 12:01 section 5, County of St. Patrick.

To all Constables

Police Inspector Derick Walker,

Whereas by information on oath giving before me by Police Inspector of the Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau—

I repeat:

of the Anti-Corruption Investigation Bureau, I the undersigned Maria Busby Earle-Caddle, Acting Chief Magistrate of Trinidad and Tobago, being a Magistrate in the district of St. George West in the Island of Trinidad and Tobago, am satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the material listed in the schedule hereunder is located on the premises of TN Ramnath and Company Limited at Teemul Trace.

I am also satisfied that the said material would afford evidence as to the commission of indictable offences by one Dr. Roodal Moonilal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that process?

Mr. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). The relevance of this to the budget. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Overruled.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 48(2). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the Member for Caroni East might be a little confused. It is a search warrant under the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act, Chap. 12:01, section 5 in the County of St. Patrick, to all constables, meaning every single police officer looking for him, and the magistrate said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, excuse. Kindly address the Chair.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, all police constables looking for him.

I am also satisfied that the said material would afford evidence as to the commission of indictable offences by one—the first one, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Dr. Roodal Moonilal—the Member for Oropouche East—and several others. Mr. Deputy Speaker—and namely conspiracies to:

(1) Commit misconduct in public office by the said Dr. Roodal Moonilal.

Miss Cudjoe: He is not in his seat.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, he is not in his seat now, out of the Chamber. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do I need to say more? But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will say more. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Arouca/ Maloney. Members, the Member for Arouca/Maloney does not need no assistance from the other Members on the Government side in order to participate in the debate. According to Standing Order 53, listen in silence. The same thing goes for on the Opposition side. All right? Listen in silence. Thank you. Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is Dr. Roodal Moonilal and eight other persons and companies. The offences are: conspiracies to commit misconduct in public office, corruptly give advantages as an inducement and or reward. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, imagine the Member for Oropouche East coming here today to tell us about process. I want to say a little more about that issue. What it means when a search warrant is issued? It means that a court was convinced, convinced, that there was a *prima facie* case of evidence linking the Member for Oropouche East to the charges that I just spoke about. So do not let the Member for Oropouche East come here and try to give us advice about process and procedure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to say a little more.

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The Member for Oropouche East came here today and spoke about a telephone number like if we did not all know that telephone number. The number was—and the Attorney General got up and indicated that it was his number. Again, a desperate man will grasp at a straw. I have spoken to the Attorney General on this, and I am going to give an indication of the real circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not the fabrication that was before us in this Parliament about an hour ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a whistleblower—and I am asking to be allowed to read copiously from my notes, please, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A whistleblower came to the Attorney General on the LifeSport matter and other issues. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in case anybody has forgotten, LifeSport is a massive corruption that took place under the stewardship of the Member of Siparia and all those Members sitting there today.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 48(4). Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4), imputing improper motives—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: It is true. Impute? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I repeat. A whistleblower came to the Attorney General on the LifeSport issue and other matters. He expressed fear for his life. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to remind you that he is not the first person to express fear for their life under this LifeSport issue. In fact, some people lost their lives in relation to this LifeSport issue. He said he needed, what he called, clean numbers. He said he wanted to record—he wanted to record his statements and the Attorney General put him in the hands of an attorney-at-law to deal with these issues. The documents on certain matters to deal with LifeSport were received and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is ongoing litigation.

There has been a total misrepresentation and fabrication of the matters. The Attorney General has nothing to hide. As a matter of fact, this is an Attorney General coming after another Attorney General who served under them, he will never be seen in handcuffs. He will never be seen—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: How could you say that?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I will say that because I know that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I know what we are on this side of the House. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot say that.

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

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know what we are on this side of the House. [*Desk thumping*] No Attorney General on this side of the House under Keith Rowley, the Member for Diego Martin West will be seen trying to tamper with a witness. [*Desk thumping*] Not any Attorney General under this Prime Minister and, certainly, not this Attorney General, the Member for San Fernando West. The Member for Oropouche East coming to talk to us about process and procedure? Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the sign of a desperate man, and he is not the only desperate one on that side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind you of the behaviour of the Member for Caroni East when he was a Minister of Government. I have friends and colleagues in the Ministry of Education, and I know that the Member for Caroni East is a gynaecologist, but I do not think he needed to tell people in that Ministry how their mother conceive them.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am on my legs. [*Crosstalk*] Hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would prefer if you do not go down that line, please. Member, Members. Member for Caroni East, I am on my legs. Member, I am on my legs and I am making a ruling. [*Interruption*] Member for Arouca/Maloney, I would prefer if we do not go down that road. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. Member: Take a walk.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Caroni East was disrespectful to public servants consistently in that—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), the Member for Caroni East's character is not on rule here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Mr. Charles: What is the relevance?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am being asked what is the relevance by the Member for Naparima. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Caroni East in his submission pontificated to us on this side about how we must treat people, how we must talk to people, how the Member for Diego Martin West must behave, how all of us must behave and how the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West must behave. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, just like the Member for Oropouche East, he cannot tell us on this side how to behave. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind them about their Member for Tobago East who came in this Parliament and denigrated this Parliament—they cannot tell us how to behave—and each one of them thumped their desks loudly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member for Naparima. As a matter of fact, I am not going to tolerate any outburst across the House on both sides. Proceed, Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind them about that banner that the Member for Oropouche East put up about our now Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, “hide your children” implying that he was a paedophile. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not going to stand for that. We are not going to stand for them pontificating on us when they have a history that shows that not one of them, not one of them can claim any kind of decency or moral authority to pontificate on us on this side of the House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(4), insulting language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to talk to them about truth. I want to talk to them about truth, because they are the ones who said that—the Member for Naparima was the one who talked about persons—denigrating the country again. I do not even want to repeat it—with regard to that issue on Syria, totally fabricated, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also want to talk to the Member for St. Augustine who said that he was one of the persons who was against Jack Warner's appointment. He was one of the first person—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, call the Member properly, please.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The Member for St. Augustine was one of the first persons—that is what the Member for St. Augustine said yesterday—to be very concerned about the appointment of Jack Warner as a Minister of government. If I remember correctly, the only person who said anything as soon as Jack Warner was appointed, was the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think their memories are quite short. If I may, I would like to quote from the *Newsday* of Sunday June 24th an article by Corey Connelly: “Reshuffle will Strengthen PP”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I quote:

“Congress of the People...political leader, Prakash Ramadhar, yesterday said the Cabinet reshuffle will strengthen the two-year-old People’s Partnership (PP) Government.

Asked about the appointment of Jack Warner as Minister of National Security, Ramadhar said, ‘Whoever could get the job done is the foremost and utmost priority to us. Crime is one of our biggest issues. The Prime Minister is continually worried about it, as we all are, and I wish Mr Warner the very best. His success is the success of Trinidad and Tobago in the fight of crime.’”

Is this somebody who was against Jack Warner being appointed to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to posit that that is very, very far from the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard them talk about the effect of VAT on the income of Trinidad and Tobago, and they consistently say that the CSO figures are incorrect and we cannot trust the CSO. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not going to quote from a CSO document. I am going to quote from a document of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. This is what the Central Bank document says, because they consistently want to mislead the population. It says and I quote—sorry, I am just trying to find the exact quotation. It is the *Economic Bulletin of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago*, September 20, 2017, Volume XIX No. 2 and it says.

“In June 2017, food inflation eased to its lowest level since August 2011. Food inflation decelerated to 0.5 per cent in June 2017, compared with 7.6 per cent in January 2017 and 9.4 per cent in June 2016. The end of the base effect after the reintroduction of VAT in February 2016 on several zero-rated items contributed to the slowdown in food price increases.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are the ones who are saying that because we put VAT back on items that there has been inflation. The Central Bank Bulletin says:

“Food inflation decelerated”—and it is because of—“The end of the base effect after the reintroduction of VAT in February on several zero-rated items”—and that—“contributed to the slowdown in food price increases.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the work of the Minister of Finance is coming to fruition. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been working consistently in this Government where they have been trying to give the impression that we are not doing anything, we do not have anything to show for it. Before anything can show, there is a gestation period. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we came into this Government in a situation that was very difficult for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and for us as a Government. Massive debt: in one state enterprise alone, the EFCL, the debt was at the level of \$4 billion when we came into this office, \$4 billion. They consistently try to rewrite history but we will not allow them to do that on this side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I talk about rewriting history, I want to take the opportunity to speak very briefly about an allegation made by the Member for Princes Town that the Prime Minister—our Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago—had over 17 trips since he came into office. I just want to set the record straight.

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister for the period 2015-2016 travelled as follows:

The 24th session of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Malta, and the cost of the entire contingent amounted to \$590,181;

The meeting on cricket with the Prime Minister of Grenada and the President of the West Indian Cricket Board, the cost was \$15,572;

The 27th Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government, \$30,502;

The participation in the US-Caribbean-Central American Energy Summit, \$267,000;

The inter-hemispheric meeting with bp and the official visit to Ghana, and the 7th Summit of Heads of States of the Association of Caribbean States, \$129,544;

The 37th regular meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom, \$133,042;

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The official visit to Jamaica—and you would remember that visit to Jamaica, Deputy Speaker, was to beg Jamaica not to take our goods off the shelves—was \$249,447.

By comparison, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the total was \$1,810,179.09 for eight trips. [*Crosstalk*] Eight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by comparison.

Official overseas travel for the period 2010 to 2011 in respect of the Member for Siparia when she was Prime Minister:

21st meeting of the Subcommittee on External Trade, \$405,715.

And that was the visit when the Member for Siparia, in her own inimitable style, told the Jamaicans and Caricom that Trinidad and Tobago was not an ATM. We paid \$405,000 in order for her to go and say that—in order for the Member for Siparia to go and tell the Jamaicans and Caricom that we are no longer an ATM.

India Day Parade and other events in New York, \$118,275.10.

I do not know if this was official but it is listed here.

The Prime Minister's visit to the USA to attend meetings and events—I do not know if it was a lime—\$252,742.55;

Commonwealth Day celebrations and other Commonwealth meetings, \$486,210;

Hemispheric forum on women's leadership for citizens' democracy, \$282,251;

Prime Minister's visit to Brazil, 6th regional meeting of World Economic Forum—Mr. Deputy Speaker, you remember that was the World Cup visit when the Prime Minister's grandson was dressed as Spiderman—that was \$193,238.52—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, would the hon. Member give way just for clarification?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: No, I need to finish this.

Meeting of the prime-ministerial subcommittee on cricket and Caricom, \$27,598.40.

Cricket, no involvement in cricket. I do not even think the Member goes to cricket here. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were 14 trips during this time, and they came up to \$3,287,617.32, and they are questioning the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who, every single visit, every single one, was official business for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Members. Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So when they come here and want to pontificate and say all kinds of things about us on this side, I want to remind them of what they did to Trinidad and Tobago, and why we need a paradigm shift. We have to move our country away from what they did to Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have heard the Members ask why we are paying \$3 million, or why we have allocated the sum of \$3 million for the golf course at Chaguaramas. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to answer that question. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has acknowledged the importance of sports tourism. The Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about it, the Member for Tobago West spoke about tourism and sports tourism, and we have noted that one of the increasingly growing sports is the sport of golf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind the Members on the other side that the golf course at Chaguaramas is the only public golf course in Trinidad and Tobago. The other golf courses, you either have to be a member of a club or you have to be, in some way, a member before you can enter the golf course. With Chaguaramas the golf course is free. *[Interruption]* No, the one in Caroni is not. The golf course is free to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is PNM policy. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talk about the \$3 million that we have allocated, and I want to indicate that we have been doing upgrade works—“Yuh taking ah walk on yuh own?” *[Laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, address the Chair. Chief Whip, the Member for Princes Town—“oh”, he is still here—the Member for Princes Town, tell him, please, I am not tolerating that in this House, the Member for Princes Town. Proceed. You can proceed. Proceed, Member.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, upgrade works on the golf course started in November 2016. It had been left to languish under the Member for Caroni Central, nothing was done with the golf course during that time. It has resulted in a noticeable increase in revenue for the months thereafter. That was from November 2016 to now. This income boost followed a careful analysis of the golf course’s viability which allowed the CDA to indicate that this facility harboured very great potential. Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite the fact that there had been limited funds, the CDA formulated an action plan towards improving the golf course’s commercial revenue-generating ability, and the plan included upgrade works to the facility’s

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infrastructure, as well as restructuring and improving its administration. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this resulted with the upgrade and improvement in its administration. It has resulted in revenue soaring from \$292,397 in September 2015, to \$598,529 by September 2017. In the two-year period that the CDA is under the PNM administration there has been a \$300,000 increase in revenue at that golf course [*Desk thumping*] and they are begrudging the \$3 million that we have allocated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after those initial improvements were made to the golf course, the CDA has been able to host a junior golf clinic and the Rudder Alexander tournament in September, 2017, which brought golfers from all other golf courses around the country to the Chaguaramas Golf Course. There were small improvements but it has resulted in a major boost to the sport of golf and to the Chaguaramas area.

I want to move now to the issue of what the Ministry of Planning and Development has been doing to ensure that we diversify the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that there have been several stops and starts as it relates to the issue of diversification, and I want to make the point very clearly that if those on the other side had followed the well-thought-out Vision 2020 we would have been much further along in Trinidad and Tobago on the road to diversification. That vision document had a diversification map. It had a mechanism by which Trinidad and Tobago would develop to developed country status by 2020. I have heard those on the other side indicate that Malaysia has done very well, that Jamaica is doing well, but one of the things that I want to point out to the Members on the other side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that in each instance where a country has done well with their vision document, it has been because it has been accepted by both sides of the aisle. It is not in circumstances where the document is a PNM document or a UNC document.

In fact, in the Vision 2020 we had over 600 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago participate in the development of that document, including the Member for Caroni Central. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to make the point that we have laid that document here and yet the Members on the other side have not seen it fit to appoint their Members, or to indicate who their Members would be for the Joint Select Committee. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we continue along that line nothing in the mode of Malaysia or in the mode of Jamaica will take place in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are not daunted. We will continue to do the work that has been outlined in the vision document and in the National Performance Framework document. The Ministry of Planning and Development is ready to

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implement, and each Ministry is ready to implement. I want to take the opportunity to congratulate my colleagues, who on each occasion that they stood in this Parliament outlined, very cogently, what their Ministries have been doing in order to move the process forward and in order to shift the paradigm in which we find ourselves. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we left a university of Trinidad and Tobago poised for take-off, but when those on the other side came into office they fired Brian Lara, they fired Gordon Greenidge, and they fired several members of staff, and slandered and scandalized Professor Ramroop. [*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am hearing them talking about the creative industries and so on, Professor Ramroop was ready to start that programme of bespoke tailoring in Trinidad and Tobago, but I want to make the point that he is now going to start it under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why I am very surprised when they talk about diversification. We handed them Tamana InTech Park. They did nothing with it, they just left it. The Minister at the time closed down the park, and they are talking about vine, and so on, growing, that was where vine and bamboo, and all sorts of things grew on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also handed them NAPA, we handed them SAPA, and, again, they did absolutely nothing, nothing with what we gave them. We handed them local content ready to go in Ghana; again, they did absolutely nothing with it. We handed them mega farms in Chaguaramas and they closed it down. And, you know, the Member for Caroni Central, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talks about diversification and what we should have done, and what we should do, and we handed him things on a platter and they did absolutely nothing with it, and now we have to talk again about diversification. As a matter of fact, one of the only ideas that the Member for Caroni Central had was to have cable cars over Laventille, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also to give away Invaders Bay, and also to put buildings on the Eddie Hart ground. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not moving in that direction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a vision for Trinidad and Tobago, and that is what we call our Vision 2030. It is the national development strategy, and we have determined that that is the mechanism, that and the National Performance Framework are the mechanisms by which the Ministry of Planning and Development, in coordination with all Ministries, will be moving, or has started moving this country to the next paradigm. We have been making the paradigm shift, and we are working assiduously to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand what we are doing, and understand the direction in which we are going as a country.

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But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the development path is not easy. The development path is not easy. As a matter of fact, one of the issues that has concerned this administration is the issue of what took place under the last administration, and that is an issue because for the five years before we came into governance, all the processes, all the procedures were broken down. And as a consequence of that, it is now very challenging for us to reinvigorate the public service, but we are seeing the first green shoots of a public service that is ready and raring to go. We have seen it in particular in the Ministry of the Member for St. Ann's East. Everybody here has commended the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for the work that they have been doing in communities, [*Desk thumping*] and that is one of the Ministries that has been working assiduously to ensure that they again go back to the moorings, go back to where we were in 2010.

Another Ministry that has been working assiduously is the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, cleaning the rolls and making sure that those who deserve social assistance are the ones who are in fact getting that social assistance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we move forward, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, with the new movement that we are seeing in terms of housing development, is also moving in that direction. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our motto as a Government is: delivering good governance and service excellence, improving productivity through quality infrastructure and transport, building globally competitive businesses, and placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development. And that is the paradigm that we are shifting to as a Government of Trinidad and Tobago. As we shift the paradigm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it means that each Ministry must move in the direction of strategic management, in the direction of careful and clear policy design and implementation coordination.

There must be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in each Ministry, a unit that deals with monitoring and improving performance, a unit that deals with managing all the policies, not only of the respective Ministries, but the Government policies that lead us toward delivering good governance and service excellence. [*Interruption*]

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

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of these units are transformational units, and we are certain that we are moving in the right direction and that we are, as the Minister of Finance said, shifting that paradigm. The Government's approach has been strategic, the Government's approach has been long term, and the developmental results will be realized through accessible and timely delivery of Government services, which citizens demand and rightfully deserve.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is expected to achieve a modest recovery from the three consecutive years of economic decline. Whilst the modest improvement is projected to be a 3.4 per cent growth in GDP in 2018, our economy remains heavily dependent on the energy sector and the exogenous shocks will always come at us. And this vulnerability, Madam Speaker, is reflected in the current financial position of the Government and means that as a Government we will have to carefully navigate the effects of exogenous shocks whilst preventing a precipitous downturn in the economy. But, Madam Speaker, each one of us on this side, the 23 of us on this side, are up to the task. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I mentioned the 23 of us, it is each and every one of us on this side and our constituents.

Madam Speaker, I just want to make one slight—I want to divert a little from what I have been saying here and I want to talk a little bit about the Member for Port of Spain South. Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and I think the Member for Oropouche East, talk about the Member for Port of Spain South being a PNM and they are not sure—Member for Barataria/San Juan, “you didn’ say dah?” [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Moonilal.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Okay. The Member for Oropouche East—[*Interruption*] “Oh”, you said to reinstate her. All right. I just want to remind those on the other side that the Member for Port of Spain South, despite your various calls to her to have tea—do not look at me surprised. Several Members were calling her, the Member for Port of Spain South, to have tea with them—[*Interruption*]—yeah, to come and have tea. She is PNM, PNM, PNM, PNM, [*Desk thumping*] so do not bother to call her to have tea. On this side we have tea, we have cocoa, we have juice, we have coffee, we have everything that is needed for the Member. [*Desk thumping*] We even have “zebapeek”, so, Madam Speaker, she is safe on this side. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Port of Spain South is a

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PNM and will remain PNM. [*Desk thumping*] Let me also say that the Member for Diego Martin West was also removed from a Cabinet, if some of you remember, and you see where he is now, okay. [*Desk thumping*] So stop calling her for tea, she does not need tea. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: Port of Spain South need a basket.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: She does not need tea.

Mr. Padarath:—take your basket.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: She has her own basket.

Hon. Member: We know that.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, let me also indicate that the projects that we have specifically named, that is the Revenue Authority, the establishment of the National Statistical Institute, the Global Services Promotion Programme, and I thank the Member for Caroni Central for negotiating that, the regeneration of the San Fernando waterfront, the IDB assisted Health Services Support Programme, and the completion of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway are all aligned to the vision for Trinidad and Tobago. Each project has been specifically aligned to the vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, let me also indicate that one area that I have to speak about before I take my seat is the area of agriculture. And, Madam Speaker, our medium-term growth strategy is outlined by the EDAB. They have given us advice on the diversification road map, and we thank the members of the EDAB for their yeoman service. This diversification strategy and road map focuses on four subsectors, that is, the energy services sub-sector, the tourism sector, the agriculture sector and the maritime services sector. Then there are, in year two, the export manufacturing sector, port development, building up our creative industries, and increasing the productive potential of the education sub-sector, and we also focused on the financial services sector, diaspora engagement and trans-shipment operations.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch briefly on the agricultural sector, and I have heard those on the other side claim that we of the PNM do nothing for agriculture. They always want to say that, we do nothing for agriculture, and I want to say that under this administration we have been focusing heavily on the agriculture sector, and the budget documents bear testimony to that.

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Madam Speaker, you would recall that one of the many Ministers of Agriculture of the other side who now parades himself as one of the biggest defenders of agriculture and the biggest defender of the downtrodden masses who—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I do not know what word to give him—[*Interruption*] I cannot. But, Madam Speaker, that imposter, in one line in the Finance Act they repealed the 53-year-old Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board Act, one line in the Finance Act. And under that Act, the State bought and exported all cocoa and coffee, and paid guaranteed prices and provided technical support to cocoa and coffee farmers. By repealing that Act, the statutory framework for supporting the industry and managing the country's status as a fine cocoa producer was destroyed. But what have we done, Madam Speaker, we have been working with local buyers to ensure that local beans can be bought and sold, and we have worked with the cocoa and coffee corporative to support their local buying activities, resulting in the launch of chocolate factories and the creation of several sustainable jobs. Additionally, Madam Speaker, we have our cocoa now being seen as one of the finest cocoas. We have known that, but it is now being considered for the International Cocoa Awards in Paris at the end of this month. And this year the Ministry's beans from Rio Claro are being considered as the best in the world. [*Desk thumping*]

2.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that the World Intellectual Property Organization Magazine has Trinidad and Tobago's cocoa sector as the front page of their magazine and it says:

“Breathing new life into Trinidad and Tobago's cocoa sector”

Let me say that we have worked assiduously to ensure this. We have also worked assiduously to put agricultural access roads in place. And let me say that the people of Maloney and Arouca are grateful to this Government for this budget that the Minister of Finance has put in place.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I rise as the 40th speaker in this budget debate, and as the 18th speaker on behalf of the loyal and patriotic Opposition [*Desk thumping*] and the alternative Government, I rise with a tinge of displeasure because I rise to indicate to this Parliament and to the country that for the first time in my memory, a search warrant has been read into the parliamentary records of this Parliament of a sitting Member of Parliament.

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Madam Speaker, what we have engaged in is a fudging of the lines of the separation of powers. It is clear that when a *prima facie* case is established, then the person is not yet charged. [*Desk thumping*] Our rule of law provides for a presumption of innocence, and a person is innocent until proven guilty. If you have a case, proceed with it. You know there is a line from the movie *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, “When you come to shoot, shoot, do not talk”. [*Desk thumping*]

You know the last time from my memory that such an event occurred was when the private, confidential psychiatric records of the pilot, Captain Hernandez, were read into the Parliament by the then Minister George Chambers.

So what has happened here today is something for thought and reflection, because what it points to is a zero-sum game. If what Vernella Toppin says is wrong, then it is cancelled out by what another Member says. So it is a zero-sum game we are engaging in, in this in Parliament and as a result of that what we have, we would have a measure of parliamentary institutional paralysis, and then the reasonable man looking on the outside, other than our hard-core party supporters on both sides, will then look at the Parliament and say they continue their “kicksing” whilst there are serious problems impacting, affecting our society. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: He started it.

Mr. G. Singh: It does not matter who “start”, this is not an infant class. [*Laughter*] It does not matter who start, Madam Speaker, there is a position to take on this situation.

The hon. Member, my good friend, the Minister of Planning and Development, Member for Arouca/Maloney, indicated how we can find common ground. How can we lift this country but find common ground? And she pointed to the Vision 2030 which is, to my mind, a dusted-off version of Vision 2020. But the point is that it is a document that is before us and how can we find common ground. The reality is that when we conduct ourselves as we have today on that matter, that we will not find common ground and we have to deal with that reality, because in this manner we will alienate the majority of the people.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member spoke about the text and interpreted the text to be part of a witness protection programme, so we have now text-gate. We have not resolved email-gate, which was dealt with in this House for how many years. My understanding is that the report is sitting on the desk of the current Acting Commissioner of Police for several months. The investigating officer

presented his report, and he has since died. I want the Commissioner of Police to know, look, let us resolve this matter. It is a matter that is very germane to the body politic of this country. Make a decision either way but let us move forward on the matter of the email-gate. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney spoke of the hon. Member for Oropouche East as being a desperate man, but that can equally be applied. What about the desperation of this Government? There is heat outside and heat inside. So you understand that the reality is that it comes back to the constant alienation and the removal from the parliamentary process of the public, Madam Speaker.

The Member said something that really struck me, and I have a note here that we on this side cannot claim any decency or morality. Now, I claim, and I am a politician, I am not a statesman, I am a politician. I lay no claim to have the monopoly on virtue and morality. And I want to say that, Madam Speaker, I am willing to indicate to all those on the other side, nor can any one of them claim, as paragons of virtue, a monopoly on morality and decency and virtue. A zero-sum game again.

The hon. Member indicated that the Opposition is guilty of everything and must not question the Government on any of their questionable actions. The Opposition must shut up in accordance with the wishes of their leader. That cannot be the systemic and institutional response of an Opposition which has to monitor and scrutinize the actions of the Government. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, you know, for us, my colleague, the hon. Member for Princes Town, indicated to me that it was said that our leader attended the World Economic Forum in Brazil in 2012, but in fact, she attended it in 2014 and went to the World Cup and paid her way in a private visit. So this kind of infantile skirmish is something that really we ought to look at in the context of what is happening in the country.

Madam Speaker, the inflation is real in this country, ask people who eat or buy consumer goods. The inflation is real because of the fluctuation in the TT dollar, and it is clear that it will get worse.

The golf course in Chaguaramas—I particularly like the golf course in Chaguaramas because whilst you are playing there, you can hear the howler monkeys. So there is nothing wrong with that investment as part of the public good. The question is: Is it a priority and are there competing priorities in respect of the investment in a golf course? That is the question. From our end, what is the role of the private sector? Is it an opportune investment for the private sector?

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Madam Speaker, Members also spoke about the mega-farms, and that the only claim to fame was that we had two long cucumbers brought into Parliament by the former Minister. [*Laughter*] That is where we have reached in the context of what we are having. But, Madam Speaker, under the previous administration we provided a lease to a mega-farm that provided 100 acres, and today production is expanding in that area.

Cocoa? Look, I have been hearing about the gene pool in cocoa since the days of the Imperial College of Agriculture. [*Laughter*] All right, we have the best cocoa in the world, best cocoa, but we did not translate that into activity for the benefit. The fact that it is happening now and it started—and Government is a continuum—is because it started previously. So you understand, Madam Speaker. So those are just responses that I have to the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

I just want to add, Madam Speaker, that I heard in his contribution, the hon. Member for San Fernando West, indicating that he had Skype conversations or discussions with the Attorney General when he went within the portals of the offices of the US Embassy. I think that the Member ought to be very careful as to how we proceed. We are a sovereign State. America is a sovereign State, and we must not genuflect in any way to America. I am not saying you be like North Korea, but I am saying there are certain sovereign issues associated with that. And even if the conversation was of a confidential nature, I think—the Member—it is prudent not to mention that in the context of the Parliament.

The hon. Member indicated also that we are going back to where we were in 2010 by virtue of the planning process. I would tell the Member be very careful of that journey, because in the area I had responsibility for, the water and waste water sector, you would not want to go back to 2010, but you would want to build on the gains and the tremendous gains we made in the 2010 to 2015 era. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to just correct the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who was for a short while the Minister of Public Utilities. You know, Madam Speaker, when I looked across, there are three Members of Public Utilities in two years, three Ministers. My good friend, the hon. Member for Laventille West, my other good friend, the hon. Member for Port of Spain South, and the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, and then, of course, the Member for Diego Martin West twice anointed and, similarly, Sen. the Hon. Robert Le Hunte twice anointed—twice appointed—because he had a faux pas over his Ghanaian citizenship.

The hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara indicated that, and I quote from his *Hansard*—he called me out, that is why I am dealing with him:

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“Too long we go without water in Malabar and the water problem in Trinidad and Tobago is man-made and I am glad that the Member for Chaguanas West is here. Trinidad and Tobago experienced sufficient rainfall during the course of the year. There is enough surface water. There is enough groundwater and, of course, now we have desalination water. The problem with Trinidad and Tobago is a water distribution problem. The water is not being distributed properly.”

I want to tell the hon. Member maybe he ought to have spent more time reading the documentation. Look at the integrated water resource management, look at the whole question of the availability of water. There is sufficient rainfall, but rainfall is not the harvested water. When rain falls you have to harvest it, and if you do not harvest it and impound it, you do not have water to treat. So that is Water 101 for you.

Madam Speaker, I now proceed to the substantive nature of my contribution for today. I am always cognizant of the fact that I am No. 40 in the line-up. I first want to indicate that the tone for this loyal Opposition was set on Friday last with the thorough and comprehensive dissection of the budget statement by the Leader of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] The wounds inflicted by the Opposition Leader on the body politic of the Government were felt throughout, because throughout the contributions of Members you saw that reflected the pain that came from that.

Mr. Hinds: You know better than that.

Mr. G. Singh: That is tone that was set in the context of the Opposition Members, and that is why I want to congratulate my 16 other colleagues on their sterling contributions that they made.

But what was the first response of the leader on the other side to the statement, the response of the Leader of the Opposition? At Piggott’s Corner, as reported in the *Newsday* of Sunday, October 08, 2017, I quote:

Rowley said as Prime Minister he would never entertain any oil company executive in his hotel room in his pyjamas.

This is the kind of thinking from the country’s head of Government that inspired columnist Ralph Maraj, and a former Minister in the PNM. In fact—

Hon. Member: Minister in the UNC too.

Mr. G. Singh:—this is what Ralph Maraj had to say, and he is a former Minister of Public Utilities. He said that as a result of this, words like “disturbing

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insufficiency, predictable and pedestrian, plain and empty, unjustly chastised women, callous insensitivity and abysmal ignorance”. It is in that context that I say that leaders set the tone.

In fact, the lethal and unmistakable significance of the hon. Leader of the Opposition’s marathon contribution was best captured by PNM apologist, Keith Subero, in the *Trinidad Express* on Monday, October 9, 2017, when he said:

“Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s budget presentation on Friday was simply outstanding.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Garcia: You do not understand satire?

Mr. G. Singh: There is no doubt that we are confronted with serious challenges, financially, socially and politically. We hear people talk about financial deficits, declines and slowdowns, but we need to stop sugar-coating the truth of the severity of the circumstances we are faced with. This Government, this PNM Government has savaged the Trinidad and Tobago economy and in doing so they have ravaged the people of the country.

We all remember the Finance Minister early in his term in a television interview, indicating that the people did not riot when the price of fuel was increased, so he might consider increasing it again. Well, he did and now the JTUM is saying that riot may come. In today’s newspaper of October 12, 2017, an article by Rhonda Dowlat:

Roget: Riot may become reality if no change to the budget.

So rather than recognizing and appreciating the stoic resilience of the Trinidad and Tobago people, the hon. Minister punished them with blasé concern with subsequent price increases. This is what we are faced with, and this is what we confront as we genuinely lift ourselves out of this economic hardship.

Madam Speaker, let me correct one important miscommunication from the Government. The current state of the economy is not solely the cause of a serious fall off in revenue. It is in fact because of a Government that has absolutely no idea where it is, where it needs to go and how to get there and what it needs in order to get there. [*Desk thumping*]

If we look no further than the successive *Public Sector Investment Programme*, the documents of this current administration, it leaves us wondering how much closer we are to Vision 2030. As I indicated, we have basis for common ground, but what we are engaged in will ensure that there is no common ground.

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The 2017 PSIP states a series of aspirational goals, and I get the impression it says, if it sounds good, write it, you do not have to worry about doing it, and I will explain that. The document stated in fiscal 2016 an original allocation of \$7 billion was appropriated to facilitate the implementation of projects and programmes under the PSIP. The original allocation was increased to \$7.7 billion by the end of the fiscal year. But there was only a 61.1 per cent utilization rate of the PSIP funding. In other words, notwithstanding having all this money, the hon. Members on that side as Members of the Government, only \$4.7 million was expended, with \$3.1 million under the Consolidated Fund and \$1.5 billion under the Infrastructure Development Fund. So therefore, you had a poor utilization rate. When you compare that to what was being utilized by our administration, you had a 90 per cent-plus utilization rate in the PSIP, and this is throughout. Similarly in 2017, you had a low utilization rate, a 66 per cent utilization rate in the revised allocation in 2017. So there is stark incompetence on the part of those who are implementing the moneys which the public sector funding is being doled out to.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that we have to confront the following challenges: low oil and gas price, low oil and gas production volumes, declining natural gas reserves, declining foreign exchange reserves accompanied by foreign exchange shortages and downgrade of the country's credit ratings. So, while the money is there, incompetence and ineffective leadership is hampering the effective execution of the projects that will keep the economy fairly healthy.

Madam Speaker, can we blame people who are now saying bold and loud, how could they have claimed to be red and ready and end up looking like the biblical five foolish virgins, completely unprepared for anything that was in front of them. Red and ready, but when they finally found a way in, it rapidly became painfully clear that they were utterly unprepared for the responsibility of Government.

Madam Speaker, the economic facts are clear and my colleagues dealt with that. I want to indicate that from the very start of this administration, on every street corner they went crying wolf, "Things bad; cut spending; austerity." And do you know what it amounted to? This is what Terrence Farrell refers to as "ritual incantation". I want to quote from Terrence Farrell's book: *The underachieving society, development strategy and policy in Trinidad and Tobago, 1958 to 2008*. Now, this is the same Farrell that is the head of the Economic Advisory Board, as I heard a muttering from the hon. Minister of Finance. This is how Mr. Farrell describes what happens, at page 252.

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“Downturns are accompanied by ritual incantations by government officials of the need for ‘diversification’ to reduce the country’s dependence on oil and the energy-based industries, the formation of new committees, task forces and boards, and considerable hand-wringing and angst about the ‘sustainability’ of government fiscal operations. Seemingly bold initiatives and projects are announced and all the while everyone is waiting and secretly hoping for a quick turnaround in the price of oil, ammonia, methanol and natural gas, so that rents will begin to accrue, governments spending programmes can restart and the fete can resume. Trinidad and Tobago”—he concludes—“will not achieve its potential for development until and unless the cycle is broken.”

So, reflective of that ritual incantation is the Minister in the budget statement at page 5 says:

A three-pronged strategy, one to improve revenue administration, two, to reduce, rethink expenditure patterns and three to intensify efforts at diversity.

First, you understand that what some of those on the other side are hoping is that there will be a confrontation by Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump and the price of oil and gas will increase and skyrocket. That is what they hope, because this is what it is.

“Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path” is a good example, because how you can change the paradigm when we see what happened here today? How can you restore confidence when there is no fundamental shift, which I will show later on? It is clear it is the same ritual incantations, the same economic savagery meted out against the people. The most politically unaware amongst us has suddenly realized that this country has made a political mistake and it has fed an economic crisis that did not have to be. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, one of my colleagues, I think the Member for Caroni Central, spoke about what was projected and what was the actual deficit for 2016/2017 where you had a doubling up, and now for 2018.

3.25 p.m.

So it is clear what is emerging, Madam Speaker, that at the end of 2018 it appears that the budget deficit may be unbridgeable. Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Finance’s strategy of tax and spend is not working. As the Leader of the Opposition and others indicated, over \$100 billion spent and nothing to show. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, my colleague, the hon. Member for Oropouche East raised the issue of Sandals and I have some questions, because what is happening there is that what you have is a situation where, and I will quote from the *Guardian* of July 04, 2016:

“Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley approached Jamaican hotel tycoon Gordon “Butch” Stewart to bring the Sandals chain to Tobago before he had won last year’s general election.”

This was confirmed by Stewart in an email interview with the *Trinidad Guardian* where it was noted that Dr. Rowley approached him and his son Adam when they were here in mid-2015 for a function hosted by the Manufacturers’ Association.

“Adam was a guest speaker at the manufacturing association. A gentleman came up to me and said when I become prime minister I am going to give you a call,”—Stewart said, adding that—“...that man was Keith Rowley.”

Now, Madam Speaker, the question you have to ask, this is a Government—our established institutional framework is government according to law. The entire process of the selection of Sandals has been corrupted, subverted and exists only with [*Desk thumping*] the justification, this is what Dr. Rowley wants. How under our Constitution, where the Prime Minister is chairman of the Cabinet, how can you just merely by diktat and anoint someone sole selected? Where is the bidding process? Where is the bidding process? [*Crosstalk*] What is that? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, so it is clear that you cannot act in our system in our Constitution arbitrarily. [*Desk thumping*] There is a restriction of arbitrary action by anyone from the ordinary man in the maxi taxi to the Prime Minister, we are a Government according to law. What established law or provision in law gave the Prime Minister the right to choose Butch Stewart’s Sandals Resort without any competition, bidding or procurement process? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, so this is about—we are in full support of foreign investment, but this is about a Prime Minister who brokered and confirmed a multi-million dollar deal involving public real estate without a single procurement process being activated and not a damn dog bark. [*Desk thumping*]

So you see, Madam Speaker, when you look at what this kind of value system and tone sets down the line, you begin to explain what happened in the TSTT acquisition of Massy Communications. The chairman, I would say, he was like a *primus inter pares* of chairman. That was the phrase I used when I piloted the Motion. He was first amongst equals amongst chairmen; he had access. And he went and made—he said that the chairman acquired Massy Communications for \$255 million dollars.

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How it went, Madam Speaker? The chairman of TSTT said that he had the approval of Cabinet to proceed with \$255 million deal to purchase Massy Technologies. The Prime Minister then said that the Cabinet was aware of the deal. The Corporation Sole disagreed, Minister Stuart Young disagreed and Minister Fitzgerald Hinds disagreed at that point in time. And it is also clear that for a state enterprise to make such large purchases approval is required from the Corporation Sole.

Madam Speaker, and you were purchasing a company that had already recorded a \$40 million loss and experienced a \$2 million loss at the start up. So what you have is not a buyout, but a bail out. [*Desk thumping*] You had TSTT being a white knight for the bail out of another conglomerate within that oligarchic circle.

So, Madam Speaker, but when the picture comes clear on July 31, 2017, it was reported TSTT completes buy out of Massy Communications for \$40 million dollars. It was only because of the alertness and the focus and the monitoring and the scrutiny of the Opposition that you had the price dropped from 255 to 240. [*Desk thumping*] I want to suggest that that is a matter—[*Crosstalk*]

The second issue I want to raise with respect to this whole question of what transpires in this country now; the political leader and Leader of the Opposition raised the matter of TGU and indicated by way of Cabinet Note that there was, and a Cabinet Note and I quote, 922 dated 25 May, 2017:

That the Ministry of Finance and union Generation Company Limited with appropriate consultants managed the sale of TGU to Ferrostaal for 40 per cent of TGU with another 10 per cent offered to corporate and private institutional investors.

Madam Speaker, you would expect that a Cabinet considering something of this magnitude, one would expect that issues of procurement and all the elements requesting proposals and so on would have been exhausted. The process issue of procurement to reach at arrival on a Cabinet Note for Government to make a decision that would have been exhausted.

Madam Speaker, since the Leader of the Opposition raised that on Friday last 40 Members, well 39 Members on that side have spoken—no, 39 collectively in this House, but 22 on that side have spoken, not one Member, not a whimper, not a word from anyone who are Members of the Cabinet? If it is that there was a sale, say so, there was not a sale, say so, but is this new paradigm is that a matter of this nature, multi-billion dollar arrangement, is shrouded in secrecy? Madam

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Speaker, this cannot be the paradigm shift that the Government wants, it cannot be. Because you have to take the context that the last time there was a sale of generation assets in 1994, 1994, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was a Parliament Member at the time, it was in PowerGen, the same, the hon. Member was a Member. You would think, cognizant of what transpired then, that you would have this level of openness taking place.

And when you look, as the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the role of Prof. Ken Julien and when we recall 23 years ago the role of Prof. Ken Julien in the sale of the PowerGen assets, generation assets, 49 per cent, then you have to ask yourself questions. What is the facilitative role and why is there not some measure of disclosure on the part of the Government in dealing with this matter? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the area of the utilities, I think that on another occasion, I have other matters to raise and I will deal with that, but what I can say is that what is happening in the utilities sector, having regard to the utterances of those on the other side that you have a special relationship developing where a chairman, the chairman of the Water and Sewerage Authority has become a rogue chairman. When there is a gap in the political vacuum through the appointment of the seven appointments of Ministers, what you have is that the technocrats and the bureaucrats take over to fill that vacuum, and the chairman of WASA has become an executive chairman [*Desk thumping*] against all issues with respect to the state manual and so on.

Madam Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the hon. Prime Minister, and when you read what is said in the budget statement on page 67 that the model has not worked. We all recognize that Mr. Manning, Prime Minister Manning as he then was in 2006 said, WASA is a \$27 billion dollar headache. It has always been like that. The whole utility sector has been in serious problem for some time. So the Minister is right, that the model has not worked for the benefit of the country so we need to change the model. But whilst the Minister is fashioning policy, what is happening?—is that they are doing their own thing in WASA. Due diligence document, a due diligence—Cowater International in association with Sogema Technologies.

You have a group that came, Madam Speaker, is doing a due diligence of WASA. Why a due diligence at this stage? The question is, I have several questions to ask with respect to this company and its intrusion into WASA. What was the procurement process that brought forth this company? How was it selected? Who made the decision? What is the purpose of the due diligence by this foreign entity on this multibillion dollar enterprise called WASA?

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Due diligence is a comprehensive appraisal of a business undertaken by a prospective buyer especially to establish its assets, liabilities and evaluate its commercial potential. So, Madam Speaker, is due diligence being done? Due diligence being done so that therefore, what is it? They are anticipating the rate hike which the current Minister is—the current Minister of Public Utilities is talking all over the place about rate hike, not understanding the role of the political directorate. The Regulated Industries Commission insulates the political directorate from involvement in the rate appraisal process, but the current Minister suffering from newness, perhaps jet lag from his journey from Ghana, is talking all of the place about the rate hike.

So there is a rate hike in electricity coming through the process, a rate hike in water coming, but the predators are swooping in whether it is through TGU or through WASA to deal with this rate hike. There are fundamental problems and certainly the strategic interest in this country is best served by taking a good look at these things before you make decisions. Certainly in Vision 2020 they articulate positions with water and wastewater, but never the whole question of private sector involvement in this kind of back door. So what this really, Madam Speaker, this due diligence process is to bring in a Canadian company through the backdoor for the privatization of the Water and Sewerage Authority, and the rouge chairman is at the very heart of it. Prime Minister, you look quizzical, but I would suggest that you take a look at that because that is what is happening under your very watch.

Because you see, Madam Speaker, the formula was there before with the Israelis Mekorot and Merhav. Yeah. They came in to do some work, then they did a framework agreement and then next thing you know they were taking over the operations of WASA.

Madam Speaker, I want to raise the issue of the gambling, my colleague dealt with it, but we sit on a Joint Select Committee. When we sit in that committee, we had very excellent sittings of the committee, we presented the reports, we listened to the consultation process was thorough, but this imposition of this tax coming as it is, really sets back or regresses the process before the Joint Select Committee.

I live in the countryside, Madam Speaker, so in the bars you have these slot machines, they used to pay \$3,000; now they will pay \$6,000. It will cut into their rural community income and so on. So that therefore, it is a very expensive process, but what is the fundamental flaw is what they call the flypaper taxation theory, is that you think the tax that you are imposing is going to stick on what you are imposing it on, but the reality is that it will shift the burden. What will

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happen is that the members who are paying their taxes, they will be virtually punished into debt. These taxes and the quantum of the taxes talk to the death knell of the existing tax paying gaming fraternity. But the underground fraternity exists, some 80 or 90 per cent, they will continue their work because they have been working outside of the law. So, we need to review that. I saw in the newspaper that the members have requested a meeting with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and I hope that they will begin to resolve those issues in a much more consultative manner.

You see, Madam Speaker, in the learning it is said that taxing on gaming is an unresented tax, unresented, but you have to also look at how you are going to grow your industry in that context.

Housing, Madam Speaker, I want to quickly deal with an issue in housing because you see, I had asked a question of the Prime Minister—[*Interruption*]

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

Mr. G. Singh: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] In housing, that I had asked the Prime Minister a question on Prime Minister's question day on 10th of the 5th 2017.

"Could the Prime Minister provide an update on the Public-Private Partnership Project on housing at Mount Hope entered into September 2016?"

Madam Speaker, this is the reply of the Prime Minister.

"...the latest update I have on that project is that the project is under way. Initial earthworks are under way and preparations and that the project is scheduled to be completed sometime in 2019.

Could Prime Minister indicate..."—

Me again:

"...whether Government has guaranteed or any state institution has guaranteed the financing of this project?

Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not aware that any government or state guarantee has been given and that is not the basis on which the public/private partnership is entered into."

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The Prime Minister was right. But, Madam Speaker, it is clear to me that this project notwithstanding, this project the first of its type under this administration has died, it is stillborn. Because, you see, when you read the evaluation report done by PricewaterhouseCoopers on this project, you would find that in the body of the proposals whilst a contractor was selected as the number one contractor, in the body of his request for proposal, they wanted a guarantee.

So for the last year this contractor has been shopping around for a guarantee, and I am happy that the Prime Minister who is aware of his good friend has not provided that guarantee, because it would have been going against the grain of the RFP. So that therefore, this matter has died as a public sector/private sector partnership.

Madam Speaker, but you see in the housing sector what is happening under the Housing Act, there are leakages and the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about leakages, revenue leakages. Madam Speaker, whilst the Minister of Finance is taxing the gaming sector, taxing the nuts man, taxing the doubles man, widening the net of taxes, widening—taxing the vegetable vendor, taxing, taxing everybody, the question is—I want to point out under section 42(2)(c) of the Housing Act and form 6 on page 86 of the regulations to the Housing Act, they have two categories of housing contractors, traders, as my colleague no doubt will fall within that category, and builders in the housing sector.

Madam Speaker, traders in housing are exempted from corporation tax, they can do things tax free, but builders are not exempted from the income, their income from housing is not exempted and they must pay corporation tax.

What is happening, traders in the housing sectors who are also builders are required according to the law to keep separate books, to keep separate accounts, to show where their income is coming so they cannot dodge the tax man. As I indicated before, income as a trader is tax free, income as a builder is not.

So that what is happening in the housing sector, there are tax dodgers in the housing sector who are commingling, commingling their income, not keeping separate accounts for the trader part of their business and separate accounts, which is tax free, and separate accounts for the builder part of their business which is not tax free.

So that I call upon the relevant authorities to take strong action, because whilst you seek to tax the ordinary man, the multi-millionaires are getting away with tax evasion because they are commingling their income from the housing sector, and keep in mind, Madam Speaker, that the builders within are builders for the HDC

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and the traders exist outside the realm of the HDC. So millions of dollars of taxpayers' money are being hidden by virtue of tax evasion in that sector, and nothing is being done about it.

Madam Speaker, it is clear to us on this side, that with this budget we are left with more questions than answers having to face the reality of the population with genuine and gentle concern for them. It is clear that under this administration that the rule of law is being compromised and we are hearing the public relations about a paradigm shift, but what we see is that the DNA of the PNM has not changed [*Desk thumping*] whether it is 1994 or 2017. So that the reality is there for us and we are saying that given the seriousness of the situation that there is need for fundamental shift and therefore, what you are saying here, you have to walk the talk.

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes in my contribution I want to pay attention, a bit of attention to my constituency, Chaguanas West. [*Crosstalk*] And I am hearing the utterance of the Member for Diego Martin West, I will tell amongst all 41 of us here, I got the highest number of votes in the 2015 election. [*Desk thumping*] So I have great privilege in representing the people of Chaguanas West. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, it is clear that, look, Chaguanas is a cultural space, it is a commercial space, it is the shopper's paradise, but we have fundamental problems, traffic, you have drainage issues. There is one issue that I have engaged the Minister of Works and Transport in his visit and the Minister of Local Government for the relocation of the Lakhan Kharia cremation site in Felicity. You have coexisting a cremation site and moorings and a marina side by side in the Espanola River. So that therefore, there is need [*Crosstalk*] yes, a marina. We have, you see—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Ah better go down dey.”

Mr. G. Singh: Yeah. You could come down there. I will invite you to come down and see. You have a whole pleasure craft industry existing in Felicity. [*Desk thumping*] Felicity people is Felicity moorings, you know. We “doh” have to be Westmoorings. [*Crosstalk*]

The hospital facility. I looked in the books. The Minister made a promise on the last occasion in a question and response to Chaguanas East. There is nothing for the Chaguanas health facility, nothing for the Chaguanas health facility. Well, if you are saying, do something about that. It is an area in which there is significant need.

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Madam Speaker, the road conditions. The road condition is in a poor state. Pothole, “yuh” dodging. Every day I travel in the area, “yuh” dodging pot hole in Munroe Road, “yuh” dodging pothole in Caroni Savannah Road, “yuh” dodging pothole in Narsaloo Ramiah Road, “yuh” dodging pothole in the Old Southern Main Road. Pick six, two, three men, it does not work, it does not work. Took the Minister for tour, promised a lot, but yet to deliver. He is a touring Minister, I can tell you that.

Madam Speaker, the people of Chaguanas are resilient. We have people from all over the Caribbean coming to shop there. You have the market is in dire need of repair, a \$2 million allocation has been made, but there is significant work necessary. Chaguanas is the capital centre of the Divali festival whether it is the Nagar [*Desk thumping*] or the Divali Utsav in Felicity. [*Desk thumping*] It is the only community that has two noble laureates, Vidia Naipaul and Derek Walcott [*Desk thumping*] writing about the Ramleela in that community. And we have significant need for the infusion and for the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to get involved in building that creative centre in Chaguanas.

Madam Speaker, it is in the context of what is happening that there is need for a paradigm shift, but it is clear in the current situation that there will be no paradigm shift with the attitude, the tone of the head of the Government and the implementation process. We expect from the Prime Minister a different tone if you want to have a fundamental shift in the paradigm in this country. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did not really plan to rise on the crescendo of my colleague for Chaguanas West. I had no idea that he was calling me into the debate and to end on such a note that the paradigm shift would take place by the behaviour of the Prime Minister being changed. I was not aware, Madam Speaker, that I was being held responsible for the behaviour of the Opposition, but now that I know, I will pay particular attention to it, because they really do need to change their behaviour. [*Desk thumping*] And since what we had been experiencing is as a result of what something that I have been doing, then maybe I have to look at myself too. Because if they do accept their responsibility or will wholly accept it based on the Prime Minister’s behaviour, then at least there is hope for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, I want to begin at this time where we have been here for what?—four or five days, five days debating the national budget for 2018. And I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Finance for the very many long hours [*Desk thumping*] that he and his staff and their associates and those at the Ministry of Planning and Development who not only firmly prepared a budget, but who have been shepherding this country through some very difficult situations. [*Desk thumping*]

Members of the national community may only be paying attention at budget time to the budget, but the budget is not a one day, one stroke item, the budget is a living ongoing operation. And if you look at the documents, they are called loosely the budget, but the bold print on those yellow documents are estimates, they are called the draft estimates. The budget is a package of estimates.

3.55 p.m.

And by that I mean, you make certain presumptions and forecasts as to what kinds of revenues are likely to come in the next 12-month period, and assuming a figure for those revenues that you assume will be available from a variety of sources, you then now make projections and predictions as to how you will spend that revenue if you actually receive it. And that is why it is so easy for Members on the other side to get up here and point for five days at numbers, that you said you were going to spend “X” and you did not do it. You said you were going to spend “Y” and you did not do it. You said you were going to raise “X”—but that is the budgetary process. Projected revenues and anticipated expenditure—and if those revenues for whatever reason are not realized, then certainly you cannot expect to spend as if they were realized.

My colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West just made a very understanding consideration of the Public Sector Investment Programme. And he was not the only one, there were other Members of the House, pointed that the Parliament had approved, I think it was \$5 billion, and look they only spent this. And, of course, they drew conclusions from that. I cannot argue with that. I mean, you draw conclusions to make the Government look as bad as you can get it to look. “It is because the Government is incompetent. It is because there is no leadership.” That sounds good, makes good sound bite on television. But the bottom line is, it is because the money just was not there. It was not realized.

So, you plan to spend and you did not realize it for whatever reason. You can take issue with the reasons, but the bottom line is, when we make those projections and those predictions, the understanding is that they are always exposed to certain vagaries, one of which is the price of what you put in the marketplace. The other

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one is, as the Minister of Finance pointed out, in the budget we had planned to raise some funds from certain asset sales which had certain legal difficulties, and we did not hide that from the country. We said we wanted to raise a certain amount of money by disposing of some shareholding in TGU and CLF. Of course, the CLF story played out in full public view, so I need not go into that. But, it allows us, in 2018, an opening which we did not have in 2017, so at least we did not use up that money in 2017. We survived 2017 and some of that money is available in 2018.

The TGU thing—Madam Speaker, I noticed a number of my colleagues here, seeking to create some disquiet in the public domain about Ferrostaal and TGU. I want to go on record here, Madam Speaker, on record, as saying that as Prime Minister I have absolutely nothing to hide or to do with Ferrostaal's interest in any shareholding in any company in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So they could infer and speculate as much as they like, I am on record here now saying that no amount of conspiracy theory could draw me into any of their foolishness. If they know something and they want to come out and say so, then say so, but do not waste Parliament's time about speculation and what you think, and who did talk to who and what.

Let me tell you something, Madam Speaker. I heard the Opposition Leader, and I see some lesser colleagues of mine, talking about the Opposition Leader spoke to Ferrostaal and he went to Germany and therefore there is something that the people of Trinidad and Tobago must be concerned about, and the bad penny of Oropouche, my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, he is talking about there is more to come and you will hear more about it. Hear about what? What exactly are they implying? "Doh imply nutten, come out and say it!" If you know something, come out and say it. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I was Opposition Leader for five years. Five years I was in the Opposition, and during that period I familiarized myself with the country, the components of the country and the business of the country. [*Desk thumping*] I have met with virtually every head of every oil company that is significant in Trinidad and Tobago, as Opposition Leader. Either I went to see them or they came to see me. I met with bankers who bank in this country, because Trinidad and Tobago is a business. I met with universities. I met with all kinds of people as Opposition Leader and I am putting it to every one of them on the other side, you come forward and say any one of them make any deal with me and I will use unparliamentary language on you.

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Madam Speaker, they have been accustomed to conduct their business and the country's business in a particular way, and the paradigm shift that this country knows about today is that nobody in this Government has been shown to be operating—[*Desk thumping*] So for all the insinuations, and all this speculation, and all the “I think so and I know so”, it was just so much a waste of Parliament's time. [*Desk thumping*]

A very important point was made by my colleague, the Member for San Fernando West, and I want to reiterate the point, and the point is this. We were never saying that you should not give incentives to stimulate investment in the offshore, in particular. The country had to do that. What we did not expect is that when you did that, you would have changed the existing arrangements for the carrying forward of the investment as tax losses. They did that and, as a result of that, where these huge investments are being made, the fact that they could write them off in that way and carry them forward, it means that the profits that would arise during the years ahead—and I was told by the Minister of Finance 2025—I was shocked when the Minister of Finance showed me that, the document from the oil company, showing that there are no taxes to come until 2025 as petroleum profits tax from that operation. I said, how could this happen? It turned out that they are carrying forward these losses, applying it, and what they had before was that the investment made this year could be written off in the shortest possible time.

Madam Speaker, I went to the boardroom of bp and I said to them, had the PNM Government been in office we would never have agreed to that. But, of course, the argument of some people is that to get investment in this country you have to give away the shop, because if you do not give away the shop nobody would come to buy. So we give away the shop. They came and they agreed to big investments and we would stop and watch. Do you know what I said to them? I said to bp board, you have your shareholders who every year get a big dividend. I found out in that conversation that the largest number of shareholders in bp are Americans in California. It is called British Petroleum but it is owned by Californians. And I said I have my shareholders too. My shareholders are the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And if that is the condition under which we are going to allow people to extract our hydrocarbon resources, we might as well let it stay in the ground, because their shareholders, the whole of British pension—bp is probably one of the largest contributors to British pension. When they had the Macondo fire in the Gulf of Mexico, the pensioners in Britain were scared that they could not get a pension if they did not pay for that. They paid \$40 billion or more for that. But in Trinidad and Tobago,

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we have to give away the shop to get them to invest here? Well I dare say, no. No. And I told them that we have to revisit that situation. I speak as the Prime Minister of the Trinidad and Tobago on this matter. [*Desk thumping*] And if the Opposition, if the Opposition instead of standing and backing the Government on that, is prepared to talk about something underhand happened because the Prime Minister talk to the bp board. Let one person in bp or any oil company get up outside and say that they talked to me about any underhandedness and I fix for life; for life. [*Laughter*] Anybody who say they make a deal with me, I am fixed for life because we off to the Hall of Justice. I cannot say all you could say that.

Madam Speaker, when I came in as Prime Minister there were two things that shocked me: The very first day I came in as Prime Minister I was told—I think my briefcase was still in my hand—that we had a little crisis. What is the crisis? There is a vessel, Trinidad and Tobago has a coast guard vessel on its way on the high seas approaching pirate infested waters and the vessel is unarmed and 30 people on board. I say, what you telling me at all? Trinidad and Tobago has a coast guard vessel on the high seas, where? Coming out of China. Coming out of China. You hear them talking about, as my friend, somebody from across there talked about we buy coast guard boats. That was one of the boats. What they did, Madam Speaker, they went to China and they saw a boat. They say, “Ah want one ah those”. And unbeknownst to the country, on the eve of the elections, without paying for the boat, they made an arrangement to have the vessel sailed to Trinidad without even a pop gun on board, with some Trinidad nationals on board and probably some Chinese nationals.

Madam Speaker, I had to call certain foreign countries and ask them to watch that vessel on its way to Trinidad and Tobago. They told me they did not have assets in the area. I had to ask them to ask their friends to watch it, to make sure it gets to Port of Spain. You understand? We are now—you look in the estimates you will see provision of a hundred and something million?

Maj. Gen. Dillon: A hundred and sixty seven.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: A hundred and sixty-seven million dollars. They are accusing us of spending money now. We are now paying for that boat. That boat arrived here since when? Took a boat on credit, without a sound.

I just heard my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West there, making a big song and dance about process, process, and you want to know the process about Sandals. I will come to that in a minute. But the process, and this desire for process, and this need for process did not apply when they were the Government

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of Trinidad and Tobago. They trust a boat in China, put the boat to sea, and the boat sailed. Through all that risk, putting me in that situation to have to go and beg foreign countries to guard that vessel through dangerous waters to get here. But today, as my colleague, the Member for Arouca/Maloney say, they want to lecture us on process. We are now paying for that vessel, and it is here and being put to use. That is how they went about it. That is how they went about it.

Something else now, Madam Speaker, I will tell you about, changing the paradigm. We had look at the country's needs for border protection under the Manning administration, and we paid for offshore patrol vessels, and associated with those vessels were high quality helicopters for offshore use, AugustaWestland, four of them. The Government of the day, the new Government came in, cancelled the arrangements on the OPVs, take back the money, for reasons best known to them, but they did not cancel the helicopters. They kept the helicopters. The helicopters were supposed to be on board those ships to be a part of a team. Helicopter and ship. Offshore patrol vessel out there with a helicopter. No, no, they cancelled it. They cancelled the offshore patrol vessels but they kept the helicopters because they wanted pram. Right? And used them like pram back and forth, \$20,000 a time.

The end result is, today, under the present circumstances, a few months ago, look we struggling as we are now, I am confronted with a bill, a maintenance bill of \$200 million a year to maintain those four AugustaWestland helicopters. And without apologies to my friend of process, my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West. Process? As Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago I had to ask myself, if this country has \$200 million to spend in the crime-fighting effort, is that the best way to spend it? If we can afford \$200 million more in crime-fighting, pay \$200 million to maintain four helicopters? The answer is no. I guided the Cabinet to a decision that we would ground those four helicopters, and they grounded them. [*Desk thumping*] Not to mention that in there was a training package for pilots. They spend years in office, when I asked for the pilots, none. I said, why not, because it is part of the arrangement. We paid for that. The Government did not provide the trainees to be trained.

You understand, Madam Speaker. I just give you these two examples so that you will understand how it is difficult for us to listen to them giving us lecture, and pontificating, and talking down to us. That is their record. And when we say they do not like this country, they "does" get vex. How could you have done that to this country? [*Desk thumping*] And every opportunity they get they come here

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and talk down to us about what we are doing wrong, and that the country waiting on them. But I tell this country already, you know, “the day they want all yuh back, take all yuh back”. Because if after that experience, they in a hurry to get you back, I cannot argue with them. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, process.

The second shocker I got as Prime Minister, was—this came within the first month of being Prime Minister. A major local business house is a partner with Japanese Mitsubishi in a major plant. It was Neal & Massy. As a partner Neal & Massy, NGC and Mitsubishi are the partners, major partner being Mitsubishi, on a methanol plant. Right? Big plant in La Brea. Okay, we cannot argue with that. If we get some investment in La Brea, of all places, we would love to get it. But, guess what? I got this contact from Neal & Massy that they need the Attorney General to sign off on this project. And I said, but why sign off on it, the project is up and running. It is supposed to go. It was announced by the Government, everything is in place. They said, no. The legal document requires one more signature from the Attorney General.

So, I asked, why did the last Attorney General not sign it? And the answer was a little fuzzy, eh. I said, okay, we will look at it, and once it is the AG’s signature as required, we would look at it. When we looked at it, we saw this hand grenade with the pin pulled, saying that one of the conditions for that project—and this is a time when we had been into three years of gas shortages, eh. They knew that, because we were talking about that from the Opposition, and we were saying that we are exposed, because if there were existing gas contracts in Point Lisas, I am satisfied there are going to be liabilities for NGC. This new project has as a condition that they will have a guarantee on any gas available.

Mr. Young: In priority.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Priority would go to them. This new company. And that was the Cabinet’s agreement, you know. The Cabinet changed the country’s gas sales policy, where existing companies, I mean, that go back to the beginning, investors who were here from the beginning, all those plants in Point Lisas that have gas contracts, many of them holding out, some of them operating at 75, 80 per cent capacity. Some of them threatening, and some of them talking to me in the Opposition, saying, “If we don’t get gas, and if there is no gas in the horizon we will have to lift our plants from in Trinidad and Tobago”. And that is what I was talking about. Do not do that. We could do it. I sat down at breakfast with them—Point Lisas people—to tell them, I am a geologist, I know we are in a good gas province, we can find the gas. We holding on. But, of course, this contract was there.

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We, as a PNM Government, as a sane Government, said there is no way we can agree to this. We cannot agree to this. And worse, another clause in the contract said, “if the project came to grief at any point in time, the NGC will pay off the debt, and they will walk away, and don’t get the plant.” Would you believe that? NGC is a partner in there contracted to pay off the debt. The debt tail buy down is for them, if it comes to grief, and Mitsubishi will walk away. We said there is no way this Government will agree to that. We have to renegotiate this or we have no project. We did renegotiate it, the Japanese understood, and they backed away from those two conditions, and the plant is now under construction in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I do not even want to go into the details here, it sounds crazy. NGC exposed \$4.5 billion in that contract. We had to stop that. Stop that. So when they are advising us, it is against that background they are talking about. Against that background. But, I want, Madam Speaker, to talk about Sandals, because it seems to be a problem for a lot of people. Again, I heard my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, this evening talk about process, and the absence of process to bring Sandals. Madam Speaker, this Government is resolute that we need to do something, not talk something about expansion in tourism. We need to do something to expand our tourism input into our economy. It is the best opportunity for some diversification. Lots of Caribbean territories live only on tourism. We are saying, if we join the tourism export of the region, if we make Tobago a destination, a Caribbean destination, then we too can share in this benefit that our colleagues live off.

So, we looked at it, from the Opposition. Those who say we have no plan, from Opposition we looked at it. We looked at what that product is doing across the Caribbean. In Turks and Caicos, in Bahamas, in Jamaica, in Barbados, in Antigua, and lately in Grenada, and in every situation the Sandals model is a major contributor, and the best thing it does is that it is marketed as Caribbean destination. You do not see Jamaica Sandals, Antigua Sandals, Sandals market as Sandals. And anywhere Sandals exists, all that marketing is yours. You do not spend \$200 million trying to market Tobago and nobody knows where Tobago is. We took the decision at the level of the Government, that we will invite Sandals into our country. And we are not the first one to do it. It was done before. But on this occasion, we went about it talking to them, and saying come and look at us and see if you can find a location, and the Government will ensure that we have the plan and you bring your brand to us, and the brand will make Tobago a Caribbean destination. [*Desk thumping*]

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How many of you have ever seen a Tobago ad anywhere in a magazine anywhere in the world? Or in the newspaper? I am in California a month ago, I am reading the *Newsweek*, I opened the middle of *Newsweek*, Antigua, centre spread. I have never seen Tobago marketed anywhere, and we have the gem of the Caribbean and the southerly in the Caribbean. And today you want to hold me in some conspiracy, in some underhandedness because I was able to attract Sandals interest to Tobago. I make no apologies to you or to anybody else. [*Desk thumping*]

And I will tell you one thing, the communication between me and Sandals ownership, is one of mutual respect. Mutual respect. I speak to Sandals as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Mutual respect, no deal. No underhand deal, no under-table, not this time, we do not do that. Madam Speaker, if we took a decision that this unique product, not just a Caribbean product, eh—Sandals is a world brand. A world brand. It just happened to be Jamaican owned. World brand. If we want Sandals to be our flagship in Tobago, who would you go to for Sandals? Marriot? Hilton? Who?

If it is Sandals you want, and that is what this Government wants, it is the brand we want. We want the brand to lift Tobago, to make Tobago a Caribbean destination, like Barbados, like Antigua, like Jamaica, like Bahamas. You can only get Sandals from Sandals. What is wrong with that? And instead of joining with us as a national effort, you are undermining, nickel-and-diming, undermining. Do you know what happened last week? And one of them said today—the usual class clown, excuse that—that, not a piece of paper from Sandals. Madam Speaker, the way these things go, you advance it and you hope that it is sold. Because I am really a salesman for this country, you know. I am the country's number one salesman. [*Desk thumping*] And I make no apologies that I spoke to “Butch” Stewart, from the Opposition, when he came here to show off to Trinidad and Tobago what Sandals was doing in the rest of the Caribbean, and as Opposition Leader I say to him, “Haven’t you been invited to come to Tobago?” He said, “Yes, I came, but I didn’t really do anything in Tobago.” I said, “Well, a Government is coming”—a new Government is coming —“into office, come back and talk to us after.” That is how it went.

So, Madam Speaker, we talk—and a lot of discussions have been taking place. Questions asked, quite properly, how are we proceeding? The land that has been identified for this project, we got it from—we created a special purpose company, we put a board in, led by Tobagonians, a couple Trinidadians on the board, and,

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of course, this board is now to do the preparatory work in Tobago with respect to the site and so on, and so on. In the meantime, the conversation is going on between Sandals and the Government, and we were at the stage, interestingly enough, the very week that hurricane—the first one?

Hon. Member: Irma.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Irma. The very week that Hurricane Irma struck the Northern Antilles, we had a meeting set up here in Trinidad with Sandals. Then they had to, not come, because they got some serious damage in some of the islands, mainly in Turks and Caicos. So we postponed the meeting until last Wednesday.

They came last Wednesday, we had some discussions, involving the Minister of Tourism, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Planning and Development, and we agreed on a memorandum of understanding, which is now being signed. [*Desk thumping*] And instead of supporting the Government in a matter of this nature, what I get—[*Interruption*] you know, he just made a point there. In Trinidad and Tobago there is a new fashion now. The conversation started, “Ah doh know”; having said, “I do not know”, they then proceed to pontificate as if they know, and then say and think the worse.

I mean, Madam Speaker, they want to know what has been given, what you giving Sandals? Madam Speaker, we are not giving Sandals nothing. It is a facility, a business venture. If it is not a worthy business it will not get off the ground. It is a project that will involve equity sharing. As a matter of fact, the Government is going to carry the whole equity to build that hotel, and Sandals will brand it and manage it. That is the model. We are not investing anything in it. The Government built the Hilton Hotel when I was a boy, and since then the Hilton has been running that government-owned hotel. That is a model that we have used since independence. Why are they now coming to create some kind of argument that something underhand is going on with Sandals? Hyatt is managing that there, same thing, Government owns it, Hyatt is running it. What is wrong with Tobago having one like that and being run by the largest best brand in the Caribbean? [*Desk thumping*] “What wrong with all yuh?” What is your alternative?

You want diversification, you want expansion—not an idea! By-the-hour hotel in Chaguanas is not an idea for this matter. That has its place. We are talking about an international—we are talking about 800 rooms that will change Tobago, lift every boat in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The rising tide of that in Tobago, to

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create a location that is known to the outside, to raise standards, to provide backward linkage into agriculture, into tourism of all kinds of services. That is what Tobago is waiting on. That is what Tobago can use. Do you have an alternative?

Hon. Member: None.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: None! None! Budget debate finish, 18 “ah dem” spoke, not one of them offered one hope for Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] Not one of them!

Not one of them had an alternative to offer the people of Tobago, and they want to question how Sandals was chosen. So we suppose to advertise for Sandals. That is what they spent the whole budget debate doing, advertise for Sandals, when you know it is Sandals you want. When you have a toothache, advertise for a dentist, and you get a butcher or a heart specialist, or somebody. You know what you want. And you know sometimes in the conversation they say, “I have nothing against Sandals, but”.

It is the same thing, you know, Madam Speaker. We are struggling to ensure that we remain an oil and gas province. We have gas—at the present consumption, we have gas for another 10 or 11 years. And as you go forward, it is even getting less and less. This country is facing a crisis for gas within our border. Because until we find new gas within our border, the logical thing we did, as this Government, was to look at where we know there is gas.

We know there is gas in Venezuela. We are running out of gas here, and if we run out of gas here then “crapaud smoke our pipe”. So, we have to look to where the gas is. What do you do? We do not get involved in Venezuelan politics. We talk to the Government of Venezuela, whoever that government is. And I led a team to the Government of Venezuela, and put to them a proposal that they make available to the international market their gas, from the Dragon field, through the Trinidad and Tobago plants. And the Venezuelans were convinced, and they agreed to that. That has never happened before, and many thought it would not happen. [*Desk thumping*] Many thought it would not happen. Instead of supporting that for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago for their future. Guess what? They are inciting the Opposition in Venezuela to oppose it. But the Venezuelan Opposition smarter than that, because they know that if they ever become Government, as they hope to sometime, that gas coming through from Dragon to Trinidad and Tobago, through our plants, and getting to the international market is money for them, whoever is Government.

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So they have refused the impel treaties of those in Trinidad and Tobago who undermine them. [*Desk thumping*] And these are the issues in front of us. These are the paradigm shifts we are talking about, not coming here and talking about, you know, I went to Houston and not a paper.

4.25 p.m.

I have no *locus standi* to sign any paper with any company that is supplying oil and gas here. So you do not expect that I am going to sign any paper. But what I had was the imprimatur and the stature of Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to sit down in the boardroom in Houston with those who have to make the decision and say to them, “Your people have been stuck with my people, time for us to finish this matter”. [*Desk thumping*] And when I saw where they were and where we were—and by “we” I mean NGC, because NGC is us—the discussion between NGC and bp took place on the phone. Minister Young was on the phone to bp. BP talking to NGC. So the piece of paper that is missing from your file is at NGC file. And, Madam Speaker, I am proud that I closed the gap and I brought bp from where they were and I brought NGC from where they were and we had an agreement. [*Desk thumping*]

As a result of that, \$10 billion in investment was now committed to Trinidad and Tobago. The alternative was, stand and watch. In the meantime, Madam Speaker, they were standing and watching, plants closing in Point Lisas because the future and the present were that there was not enough gas. The minute we had an agreement with bp; between bp and NGC, I went to EOG. EOG had a position. In fact, I think it was even more favourable and instructions were given immediately, right then and there that EOG will restart their drilling expansion in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what happened.

I tried to get the Angelin project saved but by that time because of what was happening up to that point, bp had taken Angelin out of Trinidad and Tobago into Louisiana and if they tried to save it for Trinidad it would have been a delay of another nine months or thereabouts and, of course, we could not entertain that delay while people are talking about closing plants and moving plants in Point Lisas. That is what a Prime Minister does. That is what a Prime Minister does. That is what I did. [*Desk thumping*]

And that is not the end of it, eh. We are talking to some Italians now who have expressed an interest to come to Trinidad and Tobago and get involved in some kind of industrial business. We are talking and at the appropriate time we will tell you. Nucor came to see me in the same office that Ferrostaal came, talking about

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trying to express an interest in the ArcelorMittal Plant. They want to talk to the Prime Minister. Come and talk to me. I saw them, they asked to see me, I saw them. They expressed what they are going to do. I said, go talk to the liquidator and if you all have an agreement the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will back you in the same way we backed ArcelorMittal. That is where it is at. We are encouraging that.

But if you as Members of Parliament get up and tell the world that anybody who come and talk to the Prime Minister is “crookedery” and corruption and deal-making, all I could say to you all, give the people of Trinidad and Tobago a chance. Give us a chance to strive. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let me tell you something about how we went about cutting expenses, because you see this is a period that we have to cut expenses. Because if we do not realize, through the estimates, the revenue we expect and we do not do the common-sense thing of cutting expenses, we are just running ourselves into bankruptcy. I did not invent that. If you are spending more than you earn and you cannot pay your bills, you are bankrupt. And what you all are inviting us to do is to complete the bankruptcy of this country that you started. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the office of Prime Minister, where I have been for the last two years, let me indicate to you how we have gone about spending money in that office. I have five heads here: Telephone, Entertainment, Overseas Travel, Promotions and Printing, Hosting of Conferences. Hear how it went. And hear how we spent the money when we had it. In 2011, telephones in the Prime Minister office, \$163 million; [*Crosstalk*] 2012, 155—

Hon. Member: Thousand.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thousand? “Yuh doh understand English?” “Mill-yan” dollars. [*Crosstalk*] In 2017—and this is not just in the Prime Minister—this is the whole Ministry of the Prime Minister because the Prime Minister’s office is a Ministry. We have cut that down by \$35 million. [*Desk thumping*] Official entertainment, 2011, \$12.3 million; 2012, \$16.4 million; budget, \$12 million, you spend \$16 million, \$4 million more than budgeted. In 2016, we down to \$9 million and 2017, \$3 million. [*Desk thumping*] We cut that down by \$7 million.

Official overseas travel, \$35 million in 2011; \$51 million in 2012; \$19 million in 2016 and \$12 million in 2017. [*Desk thumping*] Take note of this one, Madam Speaker. Promotion, publicity and printing. You remember a paper called the *Voice*, there was something in here too. In 2011, \$116 million; 2012, \$154 million; 2016, \$72 million; 2017, \$28 million. [*Desk thumping*] Cut that down by \$44 million.

Hosting of conferences, seminars and other functions; 2011, \$58 million; 2012, \$121 million; 2016, \$51 million; 2017, \$23 million. Cut that down, year to year, \$27 million. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, let me total that for you in case you missed it. First year, 2011, for those five headings, \$387 million. The following year, 2012, \$495 million for a total of \$882 million. Hear it, eh, for Telephone, Official Entertainment, Overseas Travel, Promoting and Printing, Hosting of Conferences. When we had money that is how they spent it. That is how they spent it, Madam Speaker. And to come here today to give us lessons as to how to spend money, no thank you. [*Desk thumping*] We have cut that down, all of those five Heads from \$882 million to \$521 million, a savings of \$361 million. [*Desk thumping*] And for all those who are asking the Government to lead, that is the leadership that this Government is providing on this platform. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Changing the Paradigm.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have said publicly and I am going to say it in this Parliament again, that notwithstanding my almost 30 years or thereabouts in public life in the Parliament of this country, of becoming the Prime Minister and having the Government under my control and supervision, I am shocked at the all-pervasive nature of the corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. And that is why I am also disturbed that Members of Parliament could come here today, inside the Parliament, see a board of a state authority, a statutory authority, take action against senior public servants who have been spending public money, who they suspend or who they fired and Members of Parliament are so cavalier they know more than the board that they come inside the Parliament and come in the budget debate to defend public officials who have had action taken against them by a board duly appointed by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. “All yuh brave”. You all brave.

Madam Speaker, I want to say one thing, it is that the actions of the port board is the action of a board authorized under law, authorized by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, and anybody who wants to take issue with what the board has done I am sure that the courthouse door is open and does not require the Parliament to come and talk about Parliament privilege and democracy being—what is wrong with this country, eh? What is wrong with this country?

And you know what “provoke meh”, Madam Speaker?—I came to a joint select committee of this Parliament, first time in the history of this country a Prime Minister has come and sat before a committee of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] in that way and I brought written evidence to that committee showing

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that the Government was out looking for a boat and while a boat was available from the owner the board never knew that because person or persons unknown hid that from the board and the board eventually hired the same vessel for about US \$6,000 a day more because the vessel was obtained by somebody else and the somebody else rent it to the port at about US \$6,000 a day more. Madam Speaker, that did not bother nobody in the Opposition. What bothered them is that the board send home somebody down by the port. That bothered them.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, your original speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, thank you.

And of course my colleague from Chaguanas West, today he was on his leg throughout talking about process and Government—we are to be governed by process and Government is a series of processes, but when it suits them to defend who they figure they want to defend they have no interest in process, but the taxpayer is paying US \$6,000 a day more. What could we do with US \$6,000 a day? How much medication we can buy with that? How much golf course we could fix with that? And making a big issue about \$3 million in a \$50 billion budget to fix the single public golf course in Trinidad and Tobago.

When, of course, Barbados has five or six golf courses and that is what makes them an attractive location, a golfing destination for high-end tourists and long-stay tourists. Golfers do not come and spend one day; most times they spend three to five days and they pay at the top. Trinidad and Tobago, we have a number of golf courses here, most of them are sheep pastures and my colleague you know, he knows better. Some of them, they know better. My friend, the Member for Caroni East he knows better, he knows what a golf course should be like and a golf course is like a woman. You got to groom her every day, [*Crosstalk*] otherwise it turns into a pasture. And you are coming to make an issue over the fact that a single public golf course in the country, and I will tell you something else too, Madam Speaker, something else that they all know, most of the people who play golf in the north of Trinidad, learn to play at Chaguaramas. [*Desk thumping*] It has probably the only junior programme in the golfing fraternity in the country. So why would my colleagues come here and want to make an issue of that.

Hon. Member: Bacchanal.

Mr. Hinds: Princes Town say he want a golf course also. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, Tobago needs at least two good golf courses so that when they market the rooms as a destination every hotel or guest house in Tobago could offer a golf as an activity to any Tobago visitor. Why would the Opposition not support that? You know why?—“because they eh supporting nutten and they feel that if they eh support nutten the country go collapse, the Government go go bankrupt”, and then the population will call them back into office. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to ask my colleague from Chaguanas, when I was there and you were here and the Government came in here and make a big announcement about a company called SABIC—you remember SABIC? Saudi Arabian—a huge Saudi company. They came here one day, I was sitting right across there, and they gave us chapter and verse about a \$5 billion investment that SABIC was coming to make in Trinidad and Tobago, the largest investment—and we all said, if you manage to do that, great. I want to ask you one question, where did you advertise for SABIC? Where did you find SABIC? When you came here and make a big announcement about all these plants, the CariSal Plant and the—this one plant and the—because they know that when you are in Government, you try to attract investment in any way you can and usually these investors are looking for locations and looking for opportunities and the first thing they want to do is to talk to the Government of the day. Is that not true, colleagues? It is the same thing happening now. If someone is interested in doing something in Trinidad and Tobago to make an investment, to create investment and have jobs for people, they want to talk to the Government, we talk to them nice and we put on our charm and try to get them to come here. Not go and tell them how we are the heart of ISIS in the country and the country is an ISIS nest and do not come here. That is treason! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Unpatriotic. Unpatriotic. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have a few minutes left. Again, my colleague—[*Crosstalk*]—Madam Speaker, I draw your attention to my colleague, the Member for Naparima. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, my friend from Chaguanas West—

Madam Speaker: I just want to remind Members with respect to decorum and with respect to what is expected as parliamentary behaviour. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West, a former Minister for WASA, right? WASA fell under his portfolio and he made some statements about WASA today about how difficult WASA is and how much WASA consumes and so on. So all that is correct. And he said that WASA is in such

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bad shape and so on. WASA has not been in good shape for decades. But I seem to recall, again, I was over there and he was over here. And he had a campaign, “Water for all by the year 2000”. Water for all by the year 2000. Madam Speaker, 2000 has come and gone. Subsequent to that, they had five more years and another Government under another Prime Minister, water for all by the year when? Madam Speaker, we are still trying to have water for all in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a difficult and expensive proposition. It is a life, it is a matter of life and death. WASA has to be looked in a very serious way; and he mentioned this evening, I am glad he mentioned it, that there are arrangements in place, the RIC, to determine what happens with the utilities and the costs and the charges. The RIC looks at WASA and T&TEC and they will determine what are the reasonable costs under the circumstances of the day and they will determine what charges will go to the users.

Madam Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have a problem. And the problem is this. They have been accustomed to being lied to so often by their leaders that they do not know how to accept and deal with the truth. But we intend to tell the people of this country the truth all the time even if the truth is bad news. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we are paying for water and electricity in Trinidad and Tobago today, charges that have no relation to the cost of the service. My colleagues know that. They were in Government for five years recently, they know that. So why are you talking about riot. Leave that for somebody outside who have nothing else to do. Those inside the Parliament, why you are talking about social this—I listened to the number of instances in this debate that Members on the other side have been, you know, harbingers of, you know, riot and social discord.

I tell you something, Madam Speaker, I do not believe it. I believe that the vast majority of the people in Trinidad and Tobago are decent right-thinking sensible people and they understand the truth. [*Desk thumping*] I have no doubt that there is a fringe minority or a small minority who might want to react that way because some of them believe that somebody owes them something. You have to look after your life otherwise your life could be miserable for you. That is what I was taught. It will have riot. And how is the riot going to solve it? And who is going to lead the riot when they cannot lead nothing else, lead the riot. That is what they are telling you, Madam Speaker, they have no contribution to make.

I was hoping to hear in this budget statement and I must say this, eh. I listened to the contribution of my colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan—as an Opposition Member, we do not expect the Opposition to praise the Government or to—but, Madam Speaker, you can focus on the issues where the country can

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benefit and that is what he did. [*Desk thumping*] I say to my colleague the Member for Fyzabad, and I am saying it to the Member for Barataria/San Juan we have a problem with the integration of that Couva Hospital, I want to talk to you all about it. [*Desk thumping*] Because I am not carrying it home. All right? And you certainly did not carry it home. The people of Trinidad and Tobago need to get serious about their circumstance and any snake oil salesman or saleswoman coming to them now, “dem is people to watch”. Because we are in great difficulty; and before I close, Madam Speaker, I have two minutes left, eh, two minutes, thank you.

My colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West made a comment which has me a little disturbed. He is saying that because there is some disturbance among the employees of the casinos that that in some way will affect the Joint Select Committee business in the House. I hope I did not hear that. I hope I am wrong.

Mr. Singh: You heard wrong.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Okay, good, because I would like to say that the interesting thing about that, I do not know how many of you know the casino owners are the major beneficiaries of those businesses. Let me back up a little bit. You all forget casinos are illegal in this country? So a batch of people engaging in an illegal activity and telling me that they are going to “bun” down the country and you giving them gasoline. Madam Speaker, what we have are private members clubs that foreigners have converted into casinos; foreigners you know, not even local people, creating serious national security risk, so serious that none of the local banks will handle their money and Members of Parliament come inside the Parliament—

Mr. Hinds: Treason, treason. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—and threaten; and we are going to fix that by our Joint Select Committee work; we are going to legalize casino gambling in this country. We have a number of pastors who are saying to the Government no, no, do not do that because the *Bible* says and we ask them: Did the *Bible* say to have illegal gambling in the country and security risk and money laundering and so on and so on? The *Bible* did not say that. It is better if we have a gaming commission that controls the gambling, take out the crime from it, take out the criminality from it, take out the foreign details from it, regulate it because these same Christians and pastors they go to countries that have casinos and they eat, sleep and dream in the same place. So there is no question that we are going to be better off with gaming being properly organized and now that we are—probably days away or weeks

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away from the legislation that will give us a gaming commission I am appealing to my colleagues on the other side to join with the Government, put this thing under proper legislative control so the workers can have proper jobs, secured jobs in a legal setting and regulated environment. [*Desk thumping*] That is all I am asking from you. And if you do that, it is the Government's intention to do this immediately after the budget when the Joint Select Committee reports to the House.

And I want to say to the employees outside, do not let your employers lead you in that way. The gaming business will provide an opportunity and the Government will secure proper. Because I do not see any—anyway, let me not say that today. So to talk about predators and to talk about due diligence at WASA, I do not know what you are talking about because the Government has no intention of selling WASA to anybody. Okay? And when the Minister of Finance winds up, he will deal with that casino issue. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have been in this Parliament now since the 2nd of October and we have heard presentations from 40—so the Member for Chaguanas West was the 39th because we are missing one of our dear Member, the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. And, Madam Speaker, I must express a sense of disappointment because throughout this budget debate from the hon. Members opposite I was unable to discern any alternative plan. No ideas, a number of the budget measures they avoided completely. For example, our innovative small business incentive programme, not a word. Our innovative farmers incentive programme, not a word. The US \$100 million foreign exchange window that we will establish at the Eximbank to allow manufacturers who are engaged in exports to access foreign exchange for raw materials and essential equipment, not a word. The reintroduction of the export allowance for manufacturers so they get an uplift on their chargeable expenses to encourage them to export, not a word, Madam Speaker, not a word.

I have heard nothing, absolutely nothing for the last 10 days or so. Nothing. The Member for Siparia spoke for three hours plus, not a word on any of these issues. Nothing. It is very, very, disappointing. I was expecting a robust debate. We are in a very difficult situation in this country, very, very difficult. Just yesterday I had a meeting in the Ministry looking at our situation for the month of October, looking at income and expenditure for the month of October, because this is where this country has reached now. You know, you will hear the Prime Minister, sometimes he says it in a bit of jocular manner, that there are countries

in the Caribbean where the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have to sit down with the Central Bank Governor every afternoon, every morning and count every dollar received in taxes and determine which bills they can pay the next day. There are countries in the Caribbean like that. And we in Trinidad and Tobago are getting close to that, Madam Speaker.

Just yesterday I had a meeting with my staff to determine what would be the cash inflows for the month of October 2017 and what are the cash outflows. And for the month of October we are limiting outflows to salaries, wages, pensions, gratuities, social service grants and debt service. And that is totalling, Madam Speaker, all of that—salaries, wages, pensions, gratuities, debt servicing and social service benefits—\$3.1 billion. We are limiting our outflows in the month of October to \$3.1 billion to pay inescapable expenses, as I said, pensions, salaries, disability benefit and so on.

And, Madam Speaker, the total cash inflows for the month of October are being estimated to be \$2.2 billion. So we have outflows of 3.1 and we have inflows of 2.2. And that does not include a number of cheques that were written in the month of September that will be presented in the month of October. And, Madam Speaker, when you add the cheques that have been written in September but not yet presented in October, we get another billion dollars. So there is a billion dollars outside in un-presented cheques. We have inescapable payments for salaries, pensions and so on of \$3.1 billion. We are talking about \$4.1 billion for this month alone, and inflows of \$2.2 billion. So we are short this month, \$2 billion, Madam Speaker. That is what we in the Ministry of Finance have to deal with now in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we have to deal with and I have to come in here and listen to all of this, not a single credible intelligent proposal.

4.55p.m.

The Minister of Health, very disappointing. The former Minister of Health, I am sorry. Not you, hon. Member for St. Joseph. I apologize. I did not mean you. I meant the former Minister of Health. We found an anomaly—the public servants brought it to my attention—where private hospitals which are multimillion-dollar enterprises—I dare say some of them could run up to \$100 million in revenue; private hospitals—paying a licence fee to the State of \$150 a year—\$150 a year. And this has been going on for many, many years, and the public servants brought it to my attention when we were looking at the budget measures—the fiscal measures—and they proposed increases, at least to some point where we would generate some form of revenue. So that the licence fee for a private hospital with up to 30 beds, I believe it is, was raised from the paltry \$150 to \$25,000. And what is the response of the Member for Barataria/San Juan? He calls it a nuisance tax.

Hon. Member: He said you did not charge enough.

Hon. C. Imbert: A multimillionaire owner of a private hospital, who also happens to be a Member of Parliament, for the five years that he was Minister of Health, he was content to charge private hospitals \$150 a year, but we raised the fee to \$25,000 and he calls it a nuisance tax. It is no wonder, Madam Speaker, I have been looking at expenditure in that Ministry and it bothers me. When I look at the increase—because something clued me in when the current Minister of Health spoke about this plate that was available on the Internet for US \$18 or US \$20 and would land here for TT \$150, or whatever it is, that the public health sector, the RHAs, have been purchasing under the previous Minister. That is where that—I would have to call it—rape of the Treasury began—for \$5,000. So I heard this astonishing story of a plate used for orthopaedics, is it, or is it neurosurgery?

Hon. Member: Orthopaedics.

Hon. C. Imbert:—orthopaedics that would cost \$150, this country was paying \$5,000 for it, easy. And I said, let me take a look at the Ministry of Health under the stewardship of the UNC, and I looked at goods and services because that is where I zeroed in, that is where you purchase these things, and in 2010 the expenditure on goods and services was somewhere in the vicinity of \$660 million, but that managed to swell under the former administration to \$900 million, an additional \$250 million to buy plates and screws and other medical devices, and so on. That is an annual increase of \$250 million, Madam Speaker—an annual increase of \$250 million! And that is why the Member for Barataria/San Juan could be so cavalier. If you could increase the expenditure on buying these screws and plates, and so on, by \$250 million a year and do that “just so”, and “it is no big ting”, then it is no wonder that \$25,000 is a nuisance tax.

That is what we get from Members opposite, that kind of contemptuous approach to public expenditure, Madam Speaker. That has to stop, and I hope that the Minister of Health, having exposed this rape of the public purse, that he will not just talk about it. I am hoping, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Health will do something about it [*Desk thumping*] and identify the culprits in this fraud on the public purse.

Madam Speaker, I also—following the hon. Prime Minister, there has been a lot of talk about the increase in taxes on private members’ clubs, and so on, and I heard the offer from the Leader of the Opposition to one of the persons who represent these casinos and so on, to speak in the Senate on the taxes. Speak about

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what? There is no relationship between the gambling and gaming Bill which is to establish a commission to regulate casino gambling in this country, to put an end to the scourge of money laundering, the illegal activity that takes place in these casinos—there is no relationship between that, the intent to create a commission.

We are the only unregulated casino country in the world, Madam Speaker—in the world; in the world. We make all the reports—all the reports that, you know, the reports that the Member for Naparima likes to look at. He would not look at CFATF though, and look at how CFATF has condemned Trinidad and Tobago for having the largest unregulated casino gambling industry in the world. So I understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to allow a member, a representative of the casino industry, to speak in the Senate. To say what?

Let me give some data now because people just like to talk in this country. You know, Madam Speaker, there is something I have come across recently and I think it is very interesting. You know, we have something in this country—a lot of people in this country suffer from something called “expert syndrome”. Let me tell you what it is. “An ailment characterized by the need to expound on a given topic beyond actual knowledge. The advanced sufferers are often unaware of the condition, losing the ability to distinguish opinion from fact.” And I am told there is no cure for expert syndrome. We have lots of those in this country, lots of people suffering from expert syndrome. And the Prime Minister spoke about it. They start their contribution by saying, “I do not know, but...”, and then they proceed to pontificate.

Let me tell you what the facts are with respect to the collection of revenue from the gaming industry, Madam Speaker. In the Joint Select Committee—and it has been published in this House so I can talk about it. The final report was laid in the last session and I pulled it up on the Internet just before I came here today. We had representatives of a particular group calling themselves the Amusement Gaming Association. Now, I have learnt in that Joint Select Committee—because I have never graced the—I have never passed through the door of a casino in my life. But I have learnt in the Joint Select Committee a little bit about this industry. And these two gentlemen came saying they represented the amusement gaming machine industry. So I said—I was chairing the committee—I said, “But what is that”? So they said well, there are two types of machines. You have amusement gaming machines where the maximum pay-out is \$5,000 and then you have the regular gambling machines, slot machines, and so on, where the pay-out could be any amount; \$50,000, \$100,000 as the case may be.

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Now, apparently in all these bars in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a proliferation of these amusement gaming machines—there is a proliferation. And I am told by my staff that there are in excess of 20,000 of these amusement gaming machines in Trinidad and Tobago. And the Member for Tabaquite, when we sent that gaming Bill to the Joint Select Committee, I heard that number from him. I have heard this is a conservative number, between 20,000 and 30,000 of these. There are 5,000 bars outside there with these things in them. Now, Madam Speaker, the tax on each one of these things is—the amusement slot machines—is \$3,000. So let us use the low number, 20,000. The Government should be collecting \$60 million: \$3,000 per machine per year by 20,000 machines is \$60 million in revenue from these amusement slot machines. The Government should be collecting at least \$60 million if you use the lowest possible number. We are also told that there are 1,000 amusement roulette machines in bars from which the Government is supposed to collect \$36 million. The total conservative take from the machines known to exist in Trinidad and Tobago is supposed to be \$100 million. That is what the Government should be collecting from amusement gaming machines.

So, I asked the Board of Inland Revenue to give me the actual figures of tax collection for amusement gaming machines. For the fiscal year 2015, \$5 million—\$5.023 million; for the fiscal year 2016, \$8.53 million and for fiscal 2017, \$7.99 million. Eight million dollars is the collection for these amusement gaming machines. We are supposed to be getting \$100 million. And yet I would hear people go out and say, “This is all ah set ah ol’ talk. Everybody is paying their taxes. None of us are doing anything underhand. Everything that we do is above board. We are all legal. We are all registered.”

Madam Speaker, these are official figures from the Board of Inland Revenue and from the Customs and Excise in terms of the importation of these machines. The Government is losing over \$90 million a year from those amusement gaming machines alone. Do not talk about the other ones, you know. The estimate I have of the amount of machines they have outside there, and devices and tables—the estimate of revenue we should be getting is close to \$400 million. And what are we collecting, Madam Speaker? \$48 million.

So we are getting \$48 million from the devices in the private members’ club and we are getting \$8 million from the bars, when the two together should be giving us \$500 million. These are the facts. This is going to come to an end, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] It is going to come to an end, because what is

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also happening outside there is that all of these large enterprises are owned by foreigners. They are not owned by Trinidadians. They are owned by Englishmen, by people from Turkey, by people from Indonesia, Russia, China.

Dr. Rowley: And the Chinese underworld too.

Hon. C. Imbert: And what happens—and the Member for Barataria/San Juan knows what I am talking about because he has a MoneyGram or one of “dem kinda machine”.

Dr. Rowley: He is a money tree.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yeah, one “ah dem ting, where yuh go and yuh buy—yuh pay and yuh buy US \$100 or US \$200, whatever it is, ah cannot remember. Ah think is MoneyGram.” I will stand to be corrected if it is not. And what happens is, the owners of these casinos, they send the little people, you know. You never see the owners here, you know. You never see the multimillionaires here, you know. They put the poor little workers outside to protest. They threaten the poor little workers with dismissal if they do not go and protest; if they “doh” come here, and as the Attorney General is reminding me, “If yuh do not sign an attendance register, doh come back in the casino tomorrow.” They send the poor, little unfortunate workers here to protest while they raking in the millions and the billions of dollars.

And you know what they are doing? They are leaking foreign exchange out of this country. They are laundering the money. They are taking the money and they are going and they are buying foreign exchange wherever they can. They buy it in the legal places and they buy it in the illegal places, and hundreds of millions of US dollars, leaking out of this country every single year because this thing is unregulated.

And they all know that, you know. That is what pains me. Everybody on that side knows that. [*Desk thumping*] Everybody knows that. And all this talk about the workers will be unemployed, nonsense! “They making” billions of dollars—billions of dollars! And I am sure they are paying the workers starvation wages too. And when the commission comes in, they will have to pay the workers proper wages. [*Desk thumping*] Things will be properly regulated. The workers will have proper terms and conditions: vacation leave; maternity leave. “Ah sure dey don’t get that now.” So, Madam Speaker, this country has serious problems and you need serious people and a serious Government to deal with it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: That is right.

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Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, there is something else that has bothered me tremendously during this debate. What has bothered me as I look at the situation in terms of cash in and cash out in this country; the fact that we are running the overdraft at the limit almost every day, I have to listen to hon. Members opposite. Why do the hon. Members opposite not just own up to what you did? Own up “nuh”. Just own up, “nuh”. “Fess up”, as they say—“fess up”. [Laughter]

You know, we made a point in this debate that after the UNC used up all the cash balance in the Central Bank: they blew \$15 billion there; they borrowed \$30 billion and they still did not have enough money, we made the point that they looked around for cash and they took it out of the National Gas Company. We made this point. Madam Speaker, I said in the budget debate that they took out \$16 billion. They sent out a 10-page or 20-page release. Well, you know, when I saw that “ah tell Budgets, ah want tuh see how much dividends they take out in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015”—\$14.3 billion.

I asked them to tell “meh” how much money they spent on the Beetham Waste Water Plant—a billion dollars; how much money they spent on failed projects like that roundabout down in Couva, on a pavilion that never exist, on all sorts of Mickey Mouse projects that should cost \$2 million that they were charged \$200 million for—\$600 million, Madam Speaker.

So under the UNC they wasted \$1.5 billion. They raid the NGC bank account and they take out \$1.5 billion for those things. They expense them; all “ah dis foolishness”. I mean, that waste water plant is still—it is impossible. We cannot deal with it because even if you finish the part in Port of Spain, even if you get the machinery in, even if you get the facility working in Port of Spain, there is no pipeline from Port of Spain to Point Lisas, Madam Speaker. There is no Certificate of Environmental Clearance. There is no route for the pipeline to pass. Nothing! It cannot be done. And they burn up a billion dollars for that out of NGC cash reserves. So \$1.5 billion in NGC cash reserves burnt up; \$14.4 billion in dividends paid out over their period. How much is that, Madam Speaker?—15.9. Sorry. I was out by \$100 million. It “shouda be” 15.9, not 16.

But you see, Madam Speaker, what amazed me in the response of hon. Members opposite to the point we made that they had raided the bank account of the National Gas Company, they said, “Oh yes, we did. We did it to balance the 2014 budget.” You know, it is like “yuh ketch ah man tiefin and he say, ‘yes, ah was tiefin, is true’.” Because the point I was making, Madam Speaker, is that they increased expenditure in Trinidad and Tobago—public expenditure—to unreasonable and unsustainable points.

They took it from \$46 billion in 2010 and they carried it up to \$63 billion in 2014, and in order to do that it was unsustainable. It was impossible. This country could not afford it, and they knew it. They knew it because they were generating revenues at the time of about \$43 billion. The revenues from taxation remained constant at about \$43 billion in that period. But they kept ramping up the expenditure: 46, 50, 52, 56, 60, 63, while the revenue remained at 43, and they had to finance the gap somehow. So they borrow. They borrowed \$30 billion but they also had to—they could not borrow too much so they had to use cash. So they used the NGC cash reserves to finance this unsustainable expenditure.

And when we tell them in this budget debate that that is what you do; you destroy the capability of the National Gas Company to invest in downstream industries in the petrochemical sector; to invest in upstream production; you destroyed the ability of the National Gas Company; you take \$16 billion out of the National Gas Company which should have been used to invest in the productive sector; “yuh strip it out, and we tell dem dey do dat, dey issue a 10-page release saying, ‘Yes, we do dat’.” That was the net effect of that 10-page release: “Yes, we do dat. We took the money to balance the 2014 budget.” So they took the money out to finance the \$20 billion gap between core revenue and expenditure in 2014.

Yes, Madam Speaker. I mean, this is the situation this country faces. This is what we face, and we on this side, we are coming up with innovative solutions. And I want to thank the Member for Chaguanas West for bringing a matter to my attention. I had heard about this thing with traders in housing, you know. You know, you hear a lot of things in Trinidad and Tobago and I had heard that under the stewardship of the Member for Oropouche East, who is mysteriously absent, that a significant number of building contractors in Trinidad and Tobago were registered as traders in housing. I had heard about this, you know, but it is only when the Member for Chaguanas West put it into perspective, I understood. Because in the Housing Act, if you are a trader in housing, which is someone who constructs and sells houses like, I am told, the Member for Tabaquite may be doing that kind of thing—I am told; I hear in this Parliament from the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, and the Member for Tabaquite has applied and has been registered as a bona fide trader in housing, which is somebody who designs, constructs, finances and sells his own houses. That is a trader.

And many years ago—[*Interruption*—yes, I understand that the Member for Tabaquite might be doing that. So he is using his own financing, his own land, his own resources, his own capabilities, design, finance, construct and sell houses. Years ago, previous governments decided that in order to encourage the private sector to get

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involved in this type of activity, they would give exemption from income tax on all income earned by traders in housing. But in order to get that tax exemption you first had to be a trader, so you had to be like Caribbean Homes; this is Dr. Bahadoorsingh in Chaguanas; like the Venezuelan fella, Louis Deny, and so on.

You have to mobilize all the resources yourself. So you mobilize the land, the finance, the equipment, the labour, the materials and you sell the house too. So the governments of the past wanted to encourage the private sector to get into that business and the incentive was, if you do that, if you mobilize your own resources; build your own houses and you sell them, then your income is exempt from tax. But somewhere in that UNC period, some clever person decided to register contractors.

Dr. Rowley: HDC contractors.

Hon. C. Imbert: HDC contractors—

Hon. Member: Oh my Lord.

Hon. C. Imbert:—who do not own their own land, who do not mobilize their own resources, who do not sell their own houses. They are simply builders. They build for the HDC. So they will get a contract to construct houses which are then sold by the HDC. So they do not fit the definition of a trader in housing. They are simply builders. And you know what is intriguing? The law makes the distinction, you know. It is very clear. It says someone who is a mere contractor does not qualify to be a trader. And I have been hearing about this thing, where these contractors that were registered under the previous administration were claiming that all of their income, that all of the income they received as contractors, was exempt from tax. And we are talking about billions of dollars.

So it is certainly worthy of an investigation and I want to thank the Member for Chaguanas West for that because we have a lot of tax dodgers and tax cheats in this country. I just spoke about the casino industry. When I made the statement in the budget speech that there is a 10 per cent compliance, they say, “No, no, no, not true!” So that is when I went and got the numbers and you could see with the amusement gaming machines, 90 per cent of the revenue is not being paid. We have tax cheats all over this country.

I can tell you now, Madam Speaker, in the build-up to this budget when we were looking at projections for 2018 and we go to Inland Revenue and I said I want to see the figures for income tax collections, and we noticed a decline in income tax collections—personal income tax. So I asked the Board of Inland

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Revenue, I said, “What causing that”? But it was not apparent at first sight. So I said I want to count the number of taxpayers. You know what I discovered, Madam Speaker? Mysteriously, 30,000 taxpayers have disappeared from the PAYE system over the last couple years. Thirty thousand taxpayers have disappeared. So you had a particular number of taxpayers in one year and all of a sudden, 30,000 taxpayers gone. So I say, but that is not possible. Where these people gone?

Hon. Member: They dead?

Hon. C. Imbert: You know how we did it? You know how we “ketch dem”? We “gone and check” the people paying health surcharge, because some smart government years ago decided that companies do not have to give particulars on their employees when they send in their quarterly returns. They just send a lump-sum. They send one cheque. And I notice the Member for Barataria/San Juan looking at me, because he knows, because you are a big businessman.

Dr. Khan: No, no; “ah learning”.

Hon. C. Imbert: So that companies just send in a cheque. They “doh” have to give particulars of all the employees.

So the Inland Revenue people, quite ingeniously, said, “Leh we” check health surcharge, and that is when they discovered 30,000 people stop paying health surcharge over the last couple years, just so. And you know what it is? The companies are converting their employees from payroll employees to independent contractors and giving the employees the responsibility now to file returns, pay health surcharge, pay national insurance and so on, and, of course, they are not doing it; you know, they are not doing it.

So, there is a lot of tax dodging and cheating going on in this country. And while the casino one might seem to be the most glaring, they cheating everywhere, Madam Speaker. They cheating in everything. You know, you go in a store, they say, “You want a bill or you ‘doh’ want a bill”? If you do not want a bill, well, you do not pay VAT. That is Trinidad and Tobago. Others are taking national insurance contributions from their employees and not remitting them; deducting PAYE from their employees and not remitting it; charging VAT on goods and services and not remitting it. All of that has to end, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] because we are facing a crisis in this country.

I want to go back to what I just said, that the outflows, the inescapable expenditure for the month of October is \$4 billion and the revenue is \$2 billion.

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So even if we go and borrow \$1 billion, we still missing one. So we are going to have to find—in the Ministry of Finance we will have to find innovative ways to deal with that.

Madam Speaker, I want you to understand something, and the population understand something. That expenditure of \$4 billion is made up of \$3 billion in inescapable commitments; \$1 billion in cheques written last month. It does not include goods and services; it does not include the development programme. So for the month of October we cannot make any payments for goods and services or the development programme, and we cannot continue like this. We are going to have to start paying some of those bills in November, and we are going to have to pay them in December because you have to pay for your light bill, your phone bill; you have to pay for construction projects that are under way; you have to pay for supplies, for medical supplies.

This country is in a serious situation and people need to understand. And that is why I was so disappointed when I heard the contributions opposite. We are trying to motivate the private sector. The Member for Tabaquite will mumble under his breath, “Good programme, boy, good programme”. “Buh yuh think” he would get up and say that?

Dr. Rambachan: I have said it here.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yeah, sure. I did not hear.

Hon. Member: No, you “doh” hear.

Hon. C. Imbert: But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, we have come up with an innovative programme to mobilize the private sector to get involved in housing to deal with two issues.

5.25 p.m.

One, to deal with the backlog of housing and, two, to stimulate the economic, and recognizing [*Desk thumping*]*—do you know what bothers me? They do not caucus you know, or if they do, they do not talk to each other—that the biggest problem in development in this country is the approvals process. The biggest problem in this country is the approvals process. That is the biggest turnoff to a potential investor. You have to have belly to get involved in a construction project in this country, to go through the rigours in Town and Country; and then after you finish with that, you have to face WASA; when you finish with them you have to face the Environmental Management Agency; and if you are still alive after that you have to go by the fire department and face them; and when that done, you are facing the regional corporation.*

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Mr. Al-Rawi: You forget OSHA.

Hon. C. Imbert: I forgot health, yes. I forgot health.

So to get projects going in this country, private sector construction, you have to have belly, Madam Speaker, because they will drag you down the road for years. So we decide, we this Government—because we have people who have been in this business we understand. We know that the biggest problem is approval, so we announced—which is something that people should be grateful for—that we are setting up a committee to fast-track approvals for this housing initiative. We are stimulating the economy. So for this particular housing initiative, this one, because we know that all the private developers—and I have started to get correspondence already from people who have land and have money and want to get involved you know, and they are quite prepared to build the three-bedroom house for the \$750,000. They can do it. They are starting to write me saying that they can do it already. Budget debate is not finished and private developers are coming forward, but the problem will be the approvals.

So we on this side know this because we do not suffer from expert syndrome. This is something that we actually know. So what do we say? We are establishing a high-level task force, which in the first instance—they do not even listen—to get it going, will be chaired by the Prime Minister. Why is the Prime Minister chairing that? [*Desk thumping*] Not just because he is the head of the Government, but the current Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago is the most successful Housing Minister this country has ever had in the modern era [*Desk thumping*] because I do not want to take away from great Housing Ministers like Wendell Mottley and Montano and so on. They did their part. But in the modern era, the current Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West was the most productive and best housing Minister ever. So we understand. [*Desk thumping*] We understand the approval process.

So we are saying in the first instance it would be chaired by the Prime Minister, and once it is going and we get that time down from the current two years, and three years, you get it down to six months and four months and so on for getting all of these approvals, then we will begin to see the explosion of housing construction from two years, whatever it is now. And what does the Member for Caroni Central say? You know I talked about expert syndrome. I had to listen to the Member for Caroni Central, and he ended with some contribution on quantum physics—and I thought about expert syndrome and badly afflicted by it—talking about quantum physics that the wave of the future will be, you could sit down in some room somewhere, you do not have to travel, and with the application of quantum physics you could experience another place. I say, “What is wrong with this man?”

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The honourable gentleman must have read some article somewhere. You know they have people in this country like that. They read one article on shale gas and they are an expert on shale gas, Madam Speaker. I took three years to get a degree in oil and gas law. Three years. You have people in this country who will read one article on shale gas and they are an experts. They are experts. So I had to listen to that. Quantum physics is the study of subatomic particles. Quantum physics is the study of subatomic particles. What the hon. Member meant to say is that it is quantum computing which is the use of high speed computers to create virtual reality, but he read some little article somewhere and he is an expert all of a sudden. That is the problem that we have in this country, Madam Speaker.

I would have thought that the Members opposite—because we are not going to discriminate. We want every builder in this country, every developer to get involved in our housing programme [*Desk thumping*] and I am putting out an invitation to everybody. [*Desk thumping*] You could be the most hard core UNC, come and get involved in our programme. Of course, we want all PNM as well, and all neutrals. You know what they have to say? Oh, you are putting the Prime Minister there? Oh, that will be political victimization and discrimination. They have no vision. They are in a shallow little box. That is all they could think about. The only person on that side that could see it is the Member for Tabaquite, but as I said he mumbling and muttering, “Good programme boy. Good programme”. [*Laughter*] You think he will get up and say that? No!

Mr. Karim: The man give you the idea and that is what you say.

Hon. C. Imbert: And then, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Karim: Say thanks for the idea “nah man”.

Hon. C. Imbert: I tell you we do not suffer from expert syndrome. We have been building houses on this side for years, for years. [*Desk thumping*] We do not suffer from expert syndrome. There are things that we know about.

And, Madam Speaker, the business incentive programme. The business incentive programme where we are modelling it after the Shark Tank reality show, where persons who want to get a grant of \$100,000 to help their fledgling little business will go and sit down before successful entrepreneurs, and we are picking successful entrepreneurs across the board, because, again, this is not a political programme. This is to help every little fledgling business in Trinidad and Tobago because I want to echo the PNM motto, we have to do this together, Madam Speaker. We must do this together. [*Desk thumping*] And there are too many people who make joke, they are too superficial. They say the most inane things about serious matters.

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You know, I was talking to the public servants yesterday and we were talking some raising some financing, going to the commercial banks to raise some financing to deal with the \$2 billion gap we have in the budget for this month, and I say, “You know, well listening to what some people say about the budget, suppose I go back in the Parliament and say do not send no file for me”, what would happen? It would mean that at the end of this month we will have chaos in Trinidad and Tobago, but that is not going to happen because I am a proud member of this PNM Government [*Desk thumping*] and we have rescued this country. We have brought it back from the brink, and if I have to work 24/07 I will to make sure that salaries, wages, pensions and social welfare will be paid at the end of this month because I am a member of this team, this PNM team that you see here. But there are people who have no understanding of what is going on, absolutely no understanding, or they do not care to understand.

We have people in this country, Madam Speaker, who say touch everybody but not me. Touch everybody but “doh” touch me. Well, I am sorry, Madam Speaker, we are in a very, very difficult place, very, very difficult place. If the previous administration had taken the measures that we are taking now, this country would have been a far better place. [*Desk thumping*] If they had not exploded public expenditure from \$46 billion to \$63 billion, if they had not created unsustainable expectations among the population, we will be in a far better place. We would have been in a far better place, and now we have to pull back from the brink, we have to pull back, and that is what this budget is all about. It is about managing expectations, it is about living within your means. As I said, it is cutting your cloth to suit your coat.

I am not happy that we have had to take away the bulk of the subsidy on fuel. I am not happy about that. I am not happy. I know the effect that is going to have on people. I am well aware of it, but we have no choice. I cannot say I am unhappy that we have added additional tax to the banks. I am not unhappy about that, but I am not happy about some of the things that we have to do, some of the cut backs that we have to make, some of the taxes that we have to impose. I am not happy about it. I wish we did not have to do this. I wish we as a country had managed our resources properly so we would not be in this place.

Madam Speaker, I want to give a commitment on behalf of this Government that this PNM team that you see here, is going to work night and day to make this country better; [*Desk thumping*] is going to work night and day to rescue this country.

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Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East your original time has expired. You have 10 more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, as I said, we are going to work night and day. We know what needs to be done. You know another Member that suffers from expert syndrome is the Member for Chaguanas East, talking about Saudi Arabia diversifying. You go and do some research. Instead of reading a little article in some magazine somewhere, go and study the Saudi Arabian economy.

Mr. Karim: I was there, I saw—[*Interruption*]

Hon. C. Imbert: And, Madam Speaker, Saudi Arabia has been trying to diversify its economy since 1976. Since 1976 and they have failed. It is one of the most energy dependent economies in the world.

The unemployment in Saudi Arabia is 13 per cent. The situation in Saudi Arabia was so bad a couple years ago that the GDP per capita in that country, the country that has 25 per cent of the world's oil reserves—Saudi Arabia has 25 per cent of the world's oil reserves—it produces eight to nine million barrels of oil per day, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Karim: Ten million barrels.

Hon. C. Imbert: Whatever. Eight, nine, it does not matter. They have been cutting back. Madam Speaker, I am talking to you. I am not talking to him. You see he read some little article somewhere. Just yesterday, Saudi Arabia announced a further cutback in its production. They are producing between eight and nine million barrels a day. As I said, I studied for three years on that topic. I am not suffering from expert syndrome, but the fact of the matter is Saudi Arabia's economy is lopsided. The poverty rate in Saudi Arabia is much higher than Trinidad and Tobago. We have an unemployment of 4 per cent, they have unemployment of 13 per cent, and that is the country that the hon. Member for Chaguanas East wants us to look at? Look at that? So yes, let us be like Saudi Arabia. Let us take our unemployment from 4 per cent to 13 per cent. Let us take our dependence on oil from 30 per cent to 70 per cent, because that is what is happening.

Madam Speaker, I really would like practical solutions from Members opposite. Not just talk and old talk, practical. Look at our export allowance. We know that the number one problem in this country for manufacturers is foreign exchange. We know. Unless you can get the foreign exchange to import your raw materials and your equipment, it is going to hamper your business. [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order!

Hon. C. Imbert:—we have come up with this programme where we will be using the Exim Bank, and why are we using the Exim Bank? Because the Exim Bank manages exporters. It is primarily an institution that gives loans. It lends money for exporters. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed. I really need your assistance here.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, if we could kindly cooperate. I remind you all of the provisions of Standing Order 43. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: So Exim Bank for all the years it has been in existence—it has been in existence for over 30 years—it is in the business of looking at the business plans and the strategic plans of exporters. So we thought if we are going to create a foreign exchange window, US \$100 million, make it available to people who are in the export trade, what better institution to analyse the applications [*Desk thumping*] than the Exim Bank. So we are putting this \$100 million revolving facility in the Exim Bank, and the manufacturers, we are starting off with a threshold of 30 per cent. Thirty per cent of their business must be for export—and, again, what better institution than the Exim Bank to investigate and determine that—and they will get preferential access to foreign exchange in that window in the Exim Bank on condition that they repatriate whatever foreign exchange earnings that they earn from their exports.

I did not hear a comment from the other side on that. Not a word from the other side on that, Madam Speaker. Nothing, and I am really hoping as we move forward as a country—because we are in difficult times. They have difficult times ahead of us, and the only way for this country to survive is for our economy to grow. We have to deal with the tax cheating. That will give us more revenue, but the economy has to grow. The only way hon. Members opposite and their children, and their relatives, and their friends, and their associates will survive in this country is if our economy grows, and the only way the economy can grow is if we stimulate economic activity through the private sector. This country has tried for the last nine years to stimulate growth through deficit budgeting, through expenditure. We have tried for nine years to stimulate economic growth through expenditure. Has anybody ever taken a look at that to see whether that is a good and useful growth model? Well, I did. I did.

There is something call exogenous growth and there is something call endogenous growth. Endogenous growth is growth from within. I have in my possession a scholarly paper just published, looking at Trinidad and Tobago and looking at the growth model for Trinidad and Tobago and saying, should Trinidad and Tobago continue to run deficit budgets, increase expenditure in order to stimulate growth, or should

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it have a endogenous model where you try to go from within and you try to stimulate production from within? Do you know what the conclusion was, Madam Speaker? After eight years of trying the exogenous model, it is about time for Trinidad and Tobago to try the endogenous model, which is to stimulate growth from within. [*Desk thumping*] And that is why we are stimulating housing from within, and that is why we are stimulating small business from within, and that is why we are stimulating tourism from within, and that is why we are going to promote exports from within.

Mr. Hinds: Good governance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Good governance, as the Member for Laventille West say.

So, I am sorry hon. Members felt that it was not important to discuss the problems facing this country, it was not important to discuss the budget measures, it was not of any consequence to them to look at the fiscal incentives that have been offered. That was not important. They just rambled and rambled for the last week. I apologize on behalf of this Parliament for them [*Desk thumping*] and I am hoping that the rest of the country will not adopt that superficial approach.

I am hoping that the rest of the country will understand the problems that we are in and that they will understand that no matter what political party you belong to, no matter what class you belong to, no matter what part of the country you are from, whether you are from Trinidad or Tobago, or from Diego Martin, or from Toco, Mayaro or from Chaguanas, or from Couva, or from Toco, or from Icacos as my honourable friend tells me, no matter where you are from, whether you are from Felicity—I heard the Member for Chaguanas West talking about creating a marina in Felicity—wherever you are from, we are in this together and we must do it together in order to survive.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call on Minister of Finance, Members are aware that on Friday, October 12, 2017, we celebrate First Peoples Day. On Friday, October 13th, sorry, 2017, we celebrate First Peoples Day, and on Wednesday, October 18, 2017, we celebrate Divali. I will now call upon Members to first express greetings on the occasion of First Peoples Day and then Divali.

Greetings (First Peoples Day)

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FIRST PEOPLES DAY GREETINGS

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, I rise this afternoon on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to bring greetings and to pay tribute to our First Peoples on the eve of the public holiday which will be observed tomorrow, the 13th of October, 2017. What we do today should have been done a long time ago. We pay tribute to our First Peoples who were the first to make their mark on this land of Trinidad and Tobago. We pay tribute for their resilience, their fortitude, their grit, but most of all, for their enduring spirits.

We recognize the part they played in moulding the character of our society. More than five centuries ago, Madam Speaker, a people who lived productive, ordered lives in perfect tandem with the environment were forced by greedy adventurers to change their lifestyles to suit those of the interlopers. Today, they struggle to regain what has been taken away from them.

Madam Speaker, this one-off public holiday which they will have tomorrow is only a small step in the process of recreating a focus on the First Peoples, a focus which will be productive rather than destructive. One form which we as a nation will benefit from as opposed to one in which a people was plundered and demeaned.

Madam Speaker, it give me great pleasure as the Member of Parliament for Arima, where the largest number of first people resides, and also as Minister of Education, to wish on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago a very happy First Peoples Day to a people who deserved the greatest recognition for the qualities which the rest of the society can do well to emulate, qualities of invincibility and endurance.

Madam Speaker, I must recognize this Government for being visionary in granting this holiday, and as a critical component of our history to be shared with the national community. May the First Peoples community and the wider Trinidad and Tobago have an eventful, engaging and enlightening holiday.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, and all my colleagues on this side, as we take the opportunity to extend congratulations and best wishes to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago on the celebration of their one-off holiday which will take place tomorrow.

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Madam Speaker, the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community kicked off a week of celebrations to commemorate this said holiday on the 9th of October, 2017, earlier on this week, with a water ceremony at Grand Chemin Beach in Moruga. On that beach it is also said that Christopher Columbus arrived, and it is ironic that on that said day, also the 9th of October, 2017, the people in the United States of America were commemorating Columbus Day. But, Madam Speaker, the very first citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would have included the Amerindians of the Kali'na, Warao, Kalapuya, Tanu, Arouca and the Kalinagos, who lived here for over 6,000 years ago.

For many centuries, Madam Speaker, the First Peoples evolved with their own civilization and they were a large part of the interisland and island to main land trade network. Up till the 1930s, the Warao of Venezuela, who still exist, used to visit Trinidad regularly to trade in parrots, and hunting dogs, and hammocks and so on. Today the First Peoples exist in many ways in our country especially in the names of places such as Arima and Arouca; the rivers such as Caroni, Oropouche and Ortoire, and other places such as Paria, Tunapuna, Aripo and Toco. They have also made their mark in terms of the cuisine in Trinidad and Tobago from the point of view wild meat, cassava, pepper pot and so on.

Madam Speaker, we on this side are committed towards promoting the unity and the diversity of Trinidad and Tobago, and we have always supported the First Peoples' right to remember and celebrate their heritage. In fact, the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the Government, to which all of us on this side belong to, granted a 30-year lease of [*Desk thumping*] 25 acres of land in pursuit of their dream of a sustainable Amerindian model village.

Madam Speaker, they have survived the test of time, and the very fact that we are commemorating the existence of the indigenous people in 2017, which is a growing phenomenon worldwide in terms of their longevity and their culture and their way of life, it is important that we continue to ensure that they have an equal place within Trinidad and Tobago. We pray that tomorrow will be a day of introspection, a day of reflection and a day that we will collectively understand the contribution of the First Peoples towards the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to join with the hon. Member for Arima and the hon. Member for Couva South in offering warm greetings to the

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First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago and the nation as a whole on the occasion of this very special First Peoples Day.

Indeed the contribution of the First Peoples to the history and heritage of our twin island state cannot be denied, and serves as an example of the importance of courage in the face of opposition, standing firm in one's conviction and resilience. This strength and perseverance displayed by our indigenous ancestors are attributes not only to be admired, but to be emulated.

Undeniably, our indigenous heritage is infused in our daily lives, in the food we eat, in the streets and place names, and even in everyday items. It is quite apparent that the legacy of the First Peoples has been and will continue to be entrenched in the culture and history of Trinidad and Tobago. I therefore wish our First Peoples and our nation as a whole, a safe and celebratory First Peoples Day. *[Desk thumping]*

DIVALI GREETINGS

Madam Speaker: I now call upon Members to bring Divali greetings. The Member for San Fernando West.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On Wednesday the 18th of October, 2017, Trinidad and Tobago will join with the rest of the world in celebrating Divali. We are, of course, pleased to join with our Hindu brothers and sisters in celebrating the festival of lights. The celebration is as old as its tradition. It is rooted in Sanskrit as Deepavali, the lining up of lights. It is rooted in the beautiful reflections which I enjoyed in particular as a child as I recall vividly my grandfather relaying to me the celebrations as it was intended to have originally happened, that being the return of Lord Rama after he defeated Arjuna on his journey back from Sri Lanka when he came with his wife Sita, his brother, her brother Lutchman and Lord Hanuman, and in that journey the people of the diaspora then celebrated that return and that victory by lighting the way with deyas.

That symbolism, as it is recorded in religious text and reflections, is something which is still very germane and relevant to our world. The celebration of light over dark, the celebration of wisdom, the celebration of Mother Lakshmi, in particular as the originator from her birth of the cosmic ocean of milk as it was put, from the five days prior to the celebration of Divali coming forward.

It is that real celebration of life, light, music in the various incarnations of Brahma, the Almighty, be it in Saraswati or in Lord Rama or in Vishnu or in Mother Lakshmi. That is truly the multi-faceted reflections of our people as well.

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5.55 p.m.

This celebration of light over dark is no different from the celebration which we have in the religious reflections amongst our Muslim brothers and sisters or our Christian brothers and sisters, and indeed, Trinidad and Tobago is a very blessed place to have religious tolerance and religious love. I recall vividly, as my learned friend from Chaguanas East would, that our upbringing in San Fernando, in particular, at Presentation College in particular, was such that our school and our society celebrated each religious event. Our brothers and sisters were called upon to demonstrate and practise religious love and tolerance.

Therefore, we as school boys, as young men, at Presentation in particular, found ourselves fasting for Divali, fasting for Ramadan, fasting for Lent almost back to back. No wonder most of us came out a little bit on the trimmer side than not. *[Laughter]* So we thank the religious tolerance and love that exist in our society.

Permit me to try to do justice to a noble prayer which is offered at this time and to end by reflecting upon these words—

[Hindi spoken]—

“From untruth lead us to truth. From darkness lead us to light. From death lead us to immortality. Om, peace, peace, peace.”

Happy Divali, Shubh Divali to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, with your permission, allow me to greet your good self and Members of this House and the national community in the Hindu traditional way of Sita Rama or Namascaar. Madam Speaker, Hindus subscribe to “Maataa devo bhava” which means Mother is our first God. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, it says:

[Hindi spoken]

—for when translated, it means that the world cannot exist without Mother or “shaktee”.

Madam Speaker, Divali celebrates the character, the virtue of the Goddess Lakshmi. Hindus believe that those qualities—and I often say, whether it is in my own Divali celebrations or if I am giving a message anywhere, that the wealth of Hindus especially, enshrined in their *dharma*, enshrined in their own teachings, is that the wealth of their home is the children in that home, especially the girl

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children. It is often believed that Maha Lakshmi, who is celebrated during Divali time, resides in our mothers, our grandmothers, our daughters, our sisters and our wives. Madam Speaker, and that is why we believe, anywhere a society that disrespects women, that society would crumble. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, our cosmic mother and earthly mothers teach us, “see good in everyone and in everything”. Be good in who you are and in your character. Do good in all of your actions even though when no one is looking and good shall always follow you. Madam Speaker, as a young politician, I must admit that the Member for Siparia, the Leader of the Opposition, was one that taught me that first lesson in Hindu *dharma* of “see good, be good, do good” and good will always follow you. Again, exemplary of a mother to this nation but also a mother in our *dharma*.

Madam Speaker, Divali reminds us of the fortunes of the Goddess Lakshmi as she provides for “daan”. There are eight forms of Maha Lakshmi which is celebrated on Divali day. Divali day takes place over a five-day period and the eight forms of the Maha Lakshmi is Dhana Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, but also the Goddess who provides food and sustenance, the Goddess of children, the Goddess of health, the Goddess of happiness.

Madam Speaker, there are many stories that are associated with Divali and we are often told of the story of Lord Rama returning to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. But I would like to introduce another story that is not often told but when we, as Hindu parliamentarians, hold up that *Bhagavad Gita* in our hand and take our oath of office, there is a story enshrined in that *Bhagavad Gita* that speaks about the Vastraharan of Draupadi. Draupadi was the Queen of Hastinapur. She represented everything that was good in that kingdom. She was the wealth, she was the prosperity, she was the values, the principles of that kingdom that saw the rise of Hastinapur.

But due to greed, hate, selfishness, she lost the kingdom and on losing that kingdom, she was dragged into the public courtyard and in order to humiliate her—after all that she had done for this kingdom, in order to humiliate her, they started to unravel her sari and she said to herself, she said, “Lord, only you can protect me”. Because at that time, all the Ministers in the Government of Hastinapur, they remained silent; all the princes, they remained silent. No one spoke for Draupadi no matter all that she had done to lift that kingdom and she turned to the Lord and she said, “Lord, you are my salvation, please help me.” And as she continued to pray, nothing happened and the sari started to unravel, being disrobed, and it is only when she let go of that sari and she allowed God to take over, only then piles and piles of sari started to come out and she was unable to be unmasked or disrobed and dishonoured.

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Madam Speaker, the story of that is resonating with two days after Divali, we celebrate something called “Bhai Dooj”. “Bhai Dooj” which is a brotherly act of tying that bond of protection and the message in that, Madam Speaker, is that we must always protect our women because we see Lakshmi, through again, our sisters, our mothers, our grandmothers, our wives.

Madam Speaker, during Divali, one of the most popular “bhajans” is “Bando Charan Kamal Raghunandan” and Kamala is another name for the Goddess Lakshmi. Mother Lakshmi, Madam Speaker, is often revered during this time and she is the light. She is the “shaktee” that many Hindus believe. And it is during this time of Divali that it is believed that Divali is celebrated on the darkest night of the year. And we are often told that it is during the darkest time, especially the darkest hour, when the sun will shine brightly.

Madam Speaker, I really want to congratulate on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, my colleagues on this side, to pay tribute to the Hindu community for all that they have done in terms of building Trinidad and Tobago, side by side, the other communities in this country. I want to pay particular emphasis to the contribution that they have made towards education and also inclusion when it comes to the cultural and social tapestry of Trinidad and Tobago. They have toiled long and hard to get us where we are today. Madam Speaker, I really want to also pay tribute— Lakshmi Girls’ Hindu College, two years in a row, has won the President’s Medal. And I am almost certain they, too, again, will do very well this year. But it tells you about the power, the glory of Maha Lakshmi that we celebrate during this Divali time.

Madam Speaker, I would like to say on behalf of all of us on this side, Shubh Divali 2017 to our Hindu brothers and sisters and to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and may Maha Lakshmi provide that light, that honour and grace, that will retain and return good governance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and enrich their lives so that the darkness will be removed. Sita Rama and Namaste.
[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I join with fellow Members in extending greetings to the Hindu community and indeed the entire nation as we commemorate Divali, the festival of lights. As we all know, Divali is a special time for Hindus all over the world. It was brought to our shores by Indian indentured labourers and has become an intrinsic element in the sociocultural fabric of Trinidad and Tobago. It is an observance that brings together Hindus and non-Hindus annually to participate in the festivities.

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As we celebrate, let us take some time to reflect upon our lives and renew our faith and our inner light. Let us remember that we can overcome all obstacles with tolerance, cooperation and collaboration. And let us continue to build a better and brighter Trinidad and Tobago. Shubh Divali to all. [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 81(8), I beg to move that the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2017, be referred to the Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of the Bill together with the Estimates.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, this House shall now go into Standing Finance Committee to consider the Bill and the Estimates.

House resolved itself into Standing Finance Committee.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements along with the Appropriation Bill have been referred to this committee for consideration.

The documents before the committee therefore include the Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure which identifies:

1. The Heads of Expenditure;
2. The chart of accounts and classification of expenditure Sub-Items, under Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases Sub-Heads;
3. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure;
4. The Sub-Item details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly which identifies:

1. The statutory board or body for each Head of Expenditure;
2. The abstract of estimated revenue and expenditure for the year ending September 30, 2018;
3. The abstract showing the Government subvention for 2016, actual expenditure, 2017 estimates, 2017 revised estimates, 2018 estimates and

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4. the increase or decrease of the 2018 estimates over or under the 2017 revised estimates;
5. The chart of accounts for income and expenditure;
6. The classification of expenditure Sub-Items under the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads; and
7. The Sub-Items details relevant to each statutory board or body for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Draft Estimates of Development Programme which includes:

1. The summary of estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2018 for Part A the Consolidated Fund;
2. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund;
3. The Sub-Item Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding;
4. The summary of estimates of Part B, the Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2018;
5. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Head 701, the Infrastructure Development Fund;
6. The Sub-Item Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2017. The Bill provides for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th of September, 2018. The Bill seeks to authorize the sum of \$42,853,342,711 from the Consolidated Fund. The Schedule details the sum to be approved for each Head of Expenditure.

In accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the consideration of the clauses of the Bill will be postponed until after consideration of the Schedule which lists the Heads of Expenditure to be approved. The Heads will be considered in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition. That has been circulated? Yes, okay.

The proposed work schedule. Hon. Members, there are 40 Heads of Expenditure to be considered over a five-day period. Therefore, I propose that the Committee meets each day from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., or for so long thereafter, to consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure. And I would particularly like to just engage us a bit longer in consideration for the Tobago House of Assembly.

Hon. Members, I crave your indulgence to have the Committee agree on the time for the examination of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Administrative Services, Tobago. According to the list, they will be on day three which is Thursday, October 19, 2017, and in order to allow for the arrangements to be made for the representatives to come from Tobago to Trinidad. I would want to suggest that we take them in the order of the Tobago House of Assembly and then the Central Administrative Services Tobago to be examined on that day, and really what I need to find out from us is agreement whether we take them at 10.00 a.m. or at 1.00 p.m.—[Crosstalk]—10.00 a.m.?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, may I suggest that, because they are coming from Tobago, that we take them at 1.00 and I think that would be easier for them. That is my understanding. In addition to that, Madam Chairman, we would like propose that on Monday, we start at 1.30. I know you have said every day from 10.00 but on Monday, we would like to start at 1.30 please.

Mr. Lee: I have no problem with that.

Madam Chairman: So that the understanding is on Monday we start at 1.30, and therefore we sit until we complete eight Heads.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, sorry about this, on Thursday also, we will have to start at 1.30 and it would mean therefore, we will go later on those two days—later than the proposed time. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Well, I think, Members, just for clarification, the proposed time anticipates that we will do eight Heads by eight o'clock. Okay? If we do not, we do not stop until we do eight Heads. Okay? So that will cover both days. So therefore, it means for Tobago, the time we communicate for them is 1.30 on Thursday.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That I understand is a better time for them.

Madam Chairman: All right, okay. So that in terms of the speaking time and really, what we are trying to do is to set the table here so that we can start promptly on Monday. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1),

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the speaking time in the Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. Each Minister will be invited to make a brief five-minute opening statement on the Ministry's or Department's priority areas for the upcoming year.

Hon. Members, the procedure for each Head of Expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by the Chairman.
2. The Minister will then be invited to make a brief opening statement.
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule.
4. For each Head of Expenditure, the Chairman will call the Sub-Head following by the Item. The Chair will not call the Sub-Items. Discussions can be ensued on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item and clarification will be sought then. Once the committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained.
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the Development Programme.
6. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule.
7. The procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

And therefore, I—[*Interruption*]—Yes, Whip.

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, so on Monday, we start at 1.30 until we complete eight Heads?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Lee: On Tuesday, we will start at 10 o'clock.

Madam Chairman: Yes, yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Tuesday will be 10 o'clock.

Mr. Lee: 10.00 to 8.00.

Madam Chairman: Tuesday at 10.00 until eight Heads are completed.

Mr. Lee: Wednesday, we do not sit?

Madam Chairman: Wednesday is Divali, it is a national holiday, we do not sit.

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Mr. Lee: And Friday will be 10.00 to 8.00.

Madam Chairman: And Thursday will be 1.30 and Friday will be 10.00 until we complete eight.

Mr. Lee: Then the following Monday.

Madam Chairman: And then we come back on the following Monday.

Mr. Lee: At what time?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, can I advise closer to Monday what time we will come back?

Madam Chairman: Can I remind, though, of the 7.50 deadline?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Ma'am, and I will advise.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Members, would there be anything else?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Okay and therefore, Members, at this stage, the meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is suspended and we resume on Monday, October 16, 2017 at 1.30 p.m.

6.17 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*