

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON SEPTEMBER
23, 2015**

SESSION 2017—2018

VOLUME 16

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 10, 2017

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Ms. Ramona Ramdial, MP, Member for Couva North, has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period November 1st to the 30th, 2017. The hon. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP, Member for Tobago West, Mrs. Vidya Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, MP, Member for Oropouche West, and the hon. Maxie Cuffie, MP, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES
(ESTABLISHMENT OF)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I also have some correspondence from the President of the Senate:

“November 08, 2017.

Dear Honourable Speaker,

Establishment of the Joint Select Committee

I wish to advise that at a sitting held on Tuesday October 24, 2017, the Senate concurred with the House by agreeing to the following resolution:

Resolved:

‘that the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016 and the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, be referred to respective Joint Select Committees for consideration and that these Committees be mandated to adopt the work of the Joint Select Committees appointed in the Second Session, Eleventh Parliament and report by March 31, 2018.’

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Accordingly, I respectfully request that the House of Representatives be informed of this decision at the earliest convenience please.

Respectfully,

Sen. the Honourable Christine Kangaloo

President of the Senate.”

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

(Member for Diego Martin West)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, at the first sitting of this Third Session held on Friday September 29, 2017, the Member for Siparia, and Leader of the Opposition was granted leave to raise a Motion of Privilege in accordance with Standing Order 32. I indicated then, that I would give my ruling at a later sitting. I have since carefully deliberated upon the Motion that was presented by the Member for Siparia. The facts are, that the Prime Minister and Member for Diego Martin West is reported to have made certain statements to members of the media while being interviewed at a public event held on September 16, 2017.

As we all know, Members of Parliament regularly engage in public discourse outside of Parliament. Members speak at political rallies, town meetings, media conferences and television and radio talk shows and I wish to seize this opportunity to remind all Members that our words, whether uttered inside this august Chamber or spoken in another forum, as well as our conduct, ought always to maintain respect, dignity and decorum. Indeed, a wealth of case law has developed over time in relation to words spoken by parliamentarians outside of the Parliament and their legal implications and effect.

My role, as guardian of the privileges of this House, is to balance two principles: the principle that Parliament should be protected from improper obstruction of its functions and the principle of freedom of comment of Members of Parliament and citizens to criticize the institution or Membership of the Parliament. In determining whether a *prima facie* case exists in the instant circumstance and while balancing the aforementioned, two important principles, the following learnings assisted with my deliberations.

During debate on a breach of privilege in the House of Commons, and in relation to freedom of comments, Gladstone stated as follows:

“Breach of Privilege is a very wide net, and it would be very undesirable that notice should be taken in this House of all cases in which honourable

Members are unfairly criticised. Breach of privilege is not exactly to be defined. It is rather to be held in the air to be exercised on proper occasions when, in the opinion of the House, a fit case for its exercise occurs. To put this weapon unduly in force is to invite a combat upon unequal terms wheresoever and by whomsoever carried on...Indeed, it is absolutely necessary that there should be freedom of comment.”

In 2000, Speaker Hunt of the New Zealand House of Representatives ruled as follows, and I quote:

For a statement to constitute a contempt by reflecting on Members it would have to allege corruption or impropriety on the part of members in their capacity as members. Hard-hitting and contentious comments and statements to which Members might well object, fall within the boundaries of acceptable political interchange.

Applying the learnings above, I am of the considered view that while some may find the statement attributed to the hon. Prime Minister objectionable, it is insufficient to meet the threshold required to find a *prima facie* case of a breach of privilege. The statement made is too remote to attribute a reflection on the Members, Presiding Officers or staff of the Parliament. It is vague and lacks the specificity required to qualify as a reflection on a Member or on the House. I wish to quote from the Practice and Procedure of the *Rajya Sabha*.

“...speeches or writings containing vague charges against members or criticising their parliamentary conduct in a strong language particularly in the heat of a public controversy, without, however, imputing any *mala fides* are not treated by the House as a contempt or breach of privilege.”

Upon analysis, the statement does not go beyond the realm of political comment and it is too wide to be interpreted by a reasonable person to have brought the Parliament into disrepute and odium or impute any *mala fides*.

As Speaker of the House, I find it inconsistent with the dignity of the House to take any serious notice or action in the case of every offensive statement which may technically constitute a reflection on the House. I myself have heard comments made by many other Members in the public domain, which, if held to a strict interpretation of privilege could well fall into the category of a reflection. It is for these reasons that I find no *prima facie* breach of privilege warranting the attention of this House and I so rule.

PAPERS LAID

1. Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Audited Financial Statements of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of National Enterprises Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Audited Financial Statements of Caroni (1975) Limited for the financial year ended June 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 2 to 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Children Authority Fund for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Children Authority Fund for the year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the nine (9) months ended September 30, 1998. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Mayor's Fund of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

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Papers 6 to 11 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

12. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
13. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
15. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the year ended 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
16. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
17. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
18. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
19. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
20. Response of the Registration Recognition and Certification Board to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
21. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
22. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and

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Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

23. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
24. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
25. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
26. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Eighth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and Other Financial Statements of the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial years 2009 to 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
27. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security on an Inquiry into the Operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre and the issue of DNA Sampling in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
28. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security on an Inquiry into Prison Security and the Status of the Investigation into the Port-of-Spain Prison Break of July 24, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
29. Response of the Service Commissions Department to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security on an Inquiry into Prison Security and the Status of Investigation into the Port-of-Spain Prison Break of July 24, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
30. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to the Second Report of the Public Administration and

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Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the Current Expenditure and Internal Controls of the Office of the President. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

31. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Public Examination of the Draft Summary of the Recommendations and Conclusions of the Forty-First Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
32. Final Report of the Police Manpower Audit Committee. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Paper 32 to be referred to the Joint Select Committee on National Security.

33. Report of the Team appointed to Review the Operations of Petrotrin and make Recommendations for its Restructuring. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Paper 33 to be referred to the Joint Select Committee on Energy and Energy Affairs.

34. Annual Report of the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act for the period January to December 2012. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
35. Administrative Report and Audited Financial Statements of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited for the period October 01, 2012 to September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
36. Annual Administrative Report of Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the period October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
37. Annual Administrative Report of Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the period October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
38. Annual Report of the Teaching Service Commission for fiscal year 2013. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia)*]
39. Administrative Report of the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology for fiscal year 2014. [*Hon. A. Garcia*]
40. Annual Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the year ended September 2016. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]

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41. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period March to September 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
42. Eighth Report of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission on the Exercise of the Commission's functions and powers for the years 2008 to 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
43. One Hundred and Sixth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
44. Annual Report of the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT) for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
45. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the fiscal year 2013. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
46. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the fiscal year 2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
47. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
48. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
49. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2010. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
50. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
51. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
52. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

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53. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
54. Annual Administrative Report of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
55. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of the People and Social Development for the fiscal year 2012/2013. [*The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn)*]
56. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of the People and Social Development for the fiscal year 2013/2014. [*Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn*]
57. Annual Administrative Report of the former Ministry of Community Development for fiscal 2010/2011. [*The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
58. Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority for the period October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]
59. Annual Report of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
60. Administrative Report of the Office of the Prime Minister for the period October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
61. Administrative Report of the Betting Levy Board for the year ended June 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
62. Administrative Report of the Betting Levy Board for the year ended June 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
63. Delegation Report on the Regional Parliamentarians' Forum – Follow-up to the United Nations High-Level Political Declaration on Ending AIDS hosted by Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS and United Nations Development Programme held in Kingston, Jamaica from May 30 to 31, 2017. [*The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Landslip Repair Works
(Agostini Village)**

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Question No. 1 to the Minister of Works and Transport. In view of the recent protest action taken by the residents of Agostini Village, Rio Claro because of the threat of a catastrophic landslip in the area, could the Minister advise how soon repair works will commence?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the soil test and surveys were carried out and the design work is ongoing. We expect work to start in the second quarter of fiscal 2018. Thank you.

**Flooding in Mayaro/Rio Claro
(Support Grants for Victims)**

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Question No. 2 to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Just one minute, Member. Member, it is Urgent Questions, so you will have to read the question.

Mr. Paray: Could the Minister state when will support grants be given out to affected communities, in the aftermath of destructive flooding in the Mayaro/Rio Claro area and the large number of persons affected?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, having received clearance to enter the affected areas on the 23rd of October, 2017, immediately commenced the assessments of the households. We have visited 2,615 households in affected areas thus far. As of the 9th of November, 2017, which was yesterday, we would have distributed 127 relief cheques to the respective regional offices.

In terms of Rio Claro/Mayaro, the Ministry is currently preparing 78 cheques and those cheques are supposed to be provided to those areas by Monday. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Forestry Division Employees
(Outstanding Payments for)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, please indicate why employees of the Forestry Division have not been paid for several fortnights?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I am answering on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Thank you very kindly for the question. Madam Speaker, at the end of the last financial year, Cabinet approved an allocation of \$22 million to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to settle all outstanding wages to workers in the reforestation programme. With the new financial year and the approval of the budget at the end of October 2017, wages are due now for two fortnights and the Ministry is awaiting releases to pay the workers.

Madam Speaker, the workers were paid for August and September and are now owed for two fortnights in October.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, supplemental?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. My information from at least two workers was that the Government was four fortnights in arrears and I am not disputing what you are saying, but this was the information from the—so I want to ask, I mean, there is a lot of hardship involved here—

Madam Speaker: Member, you have 15 seconds to ask your question.

Dr. Tewarie: How can this be resolved? When will they be paid?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, as I said, the information that is before me is that there are two fortnights owed and that is two fortnights in October and we are awaiting releases for those two fortnights and they will be paid as soon as we get the releases.

**Docking of Oil Tankers
(Legality of)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): To the Minister of Planning and Development: Given the recent oil spill, could the Minister indicate whether it is legal for oil tankers to dock at Pier One in Chaguaramas?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the CDA has jurisdiction over the land of the Chaguaramas peninsula up to the high watermark,

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but does not have jurisdiction over the sea. Such jurisdiction lies with the Commissioner of State Lands and the Maritime Services Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

However, the board of the CDA at its meeting held on November 02, 2017, agreed that no lease shall be granted to a company who wishes to conduct business of oil storage or oil bunkering, or storing of oil-related chemicals. Pier One's permitted use according to its Deed of Lease is:

1. To establish a cruise ship facility for embarkation of passengers and cargo and which will cater extensively for social gatherings, conferences, excursions, day, night and sunset cruises and a wide range of watersport which will include, sailing, wind surfing, canoeing, diving, snorkeling paddle boating, fishing, where possible, and swimming;
2. To establish a marina facility for servicing pleasure crafts and ships and;
3. To establish for the better enjoyment of these facilities: a bar, a restaurant, sport facilities, a clubhouse, a jetty and a car park.

Given that the spirit of the lease speaks to servicing pleasure crafts and ships, advice was sought from Senior Counsel on whether the tenant could in fact service oil vessels.

The board of the CDA at its meeting held on November 02, 2017, agreed that no lease shall be granted to a company who wishes to conduct the business of oil storage or oil bunkering or storing of oil-related chemicals. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, supplemental.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you for the answer and I simply ask, could we now expect then that no oil tankers would be attached to the Pier One jetty?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, that is to be expected.

2.00 p.m.

Unavailability of Blood Investigations (San Fernando General Hospital)

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Health: Could the Minister provide the reasons why critical laboratory blood investigations which are required for saving patients' lives are unavailable at the San Fernando General Hospital?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. Of the tests currently not available at South West, not all are critical. For example, to test for marijuana and cocaine are not critical. The two that we are concerned about, hon. Member, are creatinine and troponin. In the example of creatinine, arrangements have already been made for North Central to take over that testing for the time being. In the case of troponin—and let me just explain. Troponin is a protein produced by the cardiac muscle and you test those levels to determine whether somebody has had a heart attack or not. In San Fernando, that test would normally take between 12 to 18 hours.

The new technology we now have at Eric Williams, we can now give a person a result within two hours, because we have recently bought a high density troponin machine. So, no-one at San Fernando is being disadvantaged. As a matter of fact, we will take the samples from San Fernando, send it to Eric Williams with the new state-of-the-art technology to test for troponin and people in San Fernando will get their results even faster than what currently applies. So that is what we are doing, and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, supplemental?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, are you aware that the delay in the investigation for creatinine, particularly in patients who have impending renal failure, there is possible death of the patient while waiting for the result? And secondly—

Madam Speaker: One question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, one question.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And I agree with you fully and that is why we are also engaging the private sector for creatinine so nobody will be disadvantaged. I thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, you have a supplemental, yes?

Dr. Gopeesingh: While the patient is waiting for the results and the doctors are waiting for the results in the hospitals, are you aware that the patients die while waiting for the results from the private labs because these take sometimes a day or two for the results to come back to the hospital doctors?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I have absolutely no data to support that very, very dangerous statement that you have made. If you have that data, please supply it to me.

**Outstanding Monthly Salaries
(School Social Workers)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): To the Minister of Education: Could the Minister state why the Ministry of Education has not paid School Social Workers—about 60—their outstanding monthly salaries to date?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. At present, school social workers are on month-to-month contracts. They were paid up to the 20th of September, 2017. The Ministry of Education was awaiting releases from the Ministry of Finance. Releases have since been obtained and the information that I have is that those payments will be made very early next week. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, supplemental?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Does the hon. Minister remember that in about April of 2017 you indicated that these school social workers will be given three-year contracts—

Madam Speaker: Member, I would not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right, okay. Thanks.

**Displaced Sea Lots Fire Victims
(Measures for Relief)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Social Development and Family Services: Based on recent reports that 36 residents of Sea Lots have been displaced due to their homes being destroyed by fire, could the Minister state the measures taken to provide relief to these affected residents?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherry-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, through its National Family Services Unit and Social Welfare Division has been liaising with the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services in order to identify the persons so affected. Those who have been affected to date, the Ministry would have met with those affected persons. We have provided them with food support; we have also provided information on the benefits that they can access as a result of the disaster they would have faced, and this includes rental assistance. However, Madam Speaker, all of the affected

persons we have spoken to thus far have indicated that they have received or accessed alternative accommodation so they do not require the rental assistance.

We have also informed them about the school supplies grant which would replace all uniforms and books to a maximum of \$700 for primary school children and \$1,000 for a secondary school. We also would have provided information on the fact that house repairs—they can access the house repairs grant, the school supplies grant and the replacement of household items. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, supplemental question?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you advise how many persons have, in fact, applied for the house grant?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thus far, none of the individuals have applied for the house grant.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Is there any indication at all that any would not be eligible to apply because of a lack of a land deed?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Princes Town.

Princes Town Presbyterian School (Commencement of Construction)

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, to the hon. Minister of Education, question No. 8: In light of recent demolition of the Princes Town Presbyterian School, could the Minister indicate when would construction commence?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Works and Transport had ordered the demolition of the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 2 Primary School. This was done during the July/August vacation period, 2017. Pupils are now housed at the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School. At this time I am unable to state when the construction of the new school will begin. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Commencement of Remedial Works (Naparima Mayaro Road)

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, through you, to the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, question No. 9: In light of recent protest on the Naparima Mayaro Road, could the Minister indicate when remedial works commence?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, remedial work on this road is expected to commence at the beginning of January 2018 through the PURE Programme. This will include road works and drainage. In the meantime, patching work is ongoing. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town?

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you indicate whether or not there has been any soil testing with respect to this particular area? Because this has been an ongoing problem that requires really a long-term solution and therefore we have seen in the past where this continues—

Madam Speaker: Fifteen seconds, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath:—so if there is any additional soil testing that is being done with respect to long-term.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you. Madam Speaker, before the PURE unit engages in any work, once it is required, bore holes are done to ensure that the soil is stable, and to at least recommend to the contractor what is required. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time for Urgent Questions is now spent.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**School Feeding Programme
(Failure of Government to Manage)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 17 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House at its sitting today, 10 November, 2017, for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public

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importance, namely, the failure of the Government to manage a crisis with respect to the School Feeding Programme. The matter is definite because it directly and adversely impacts on the nutrition of thousands of students in need of school meals, as the facilities of many caterers which are now existing are faced with possible closure as a result of long outstanding payments for May, June, September and October, 2017 to school feeding caterers.

The matter is urgent because it currently affects the nutrition, health and welfare of thousands of school children who need the meals at school on a daily basis throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The matter is of public importance because the National Schools Dietary Services Limited is in possible breach of the contract with caterers with the non-payment for services rendered to the Ministry of Education, with approximately 1,000 lunches and 50,000 breakfast meals being provided on a daily basis by these caterers to approximately 800 schools.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I find that this matter does not qualify under Standing Order 17. The Member may pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

STATE SUITS LIMITATION (NO. 2) BILL, 2017

Bill to repeal and replace the Crown Suits Limitation Ordinance [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

REGISTRATION OF TITLES TO LAND (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL, 2017

Bill to amend the Registration of Titles to Land Act, 2000 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

LAND TRIBUNAL (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL, 2017

Bill to amend the Land Tribunal Act, 2000 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

LAND ADJUDICATION (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL, 2017

Bill to amend the Land Adjudication Act, 2000 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 3(1) of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, Chap. 74:01 (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that where proposals for general or supplemental appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an Appropriation Bill or a Supplementary Appropriation Bill, the President may, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in any such Bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of a tax or the variation of an existing tax and from the date of the publication of the Order in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, the tax as imposed or varied shall be payable;

And whereas it is provided by section 3(5) of the Act that an Order varying an existing tax shall cease to have effect if the Order is not confirmed with or without modifications, by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next twenty-one days after the commencement of the Order;

And whereas the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017, (hereinafter referred to as “the Order”) made under section 3 of the Act, provided for the variation of taxes in the written laws mentioned in the Order to the extent and in the manner set out therein, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2018”;

And whereas the Order was published in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette* as Legal Notice No. 117 of 2017 on the 23rd day of October, 2017 and commenced on the 23rd day of October, 2017;

And Whereas it is expedient to confirm the Order:

Be it resolved that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017 be confirmed subject to the following modifications in paragraph 5(f) -

- (a) by deleting sub-subparagraphs (iii) and (x); and
- (b) by renumbering sub-subparagraphs (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), (viii), (ix) and (xi) as sub-subparagraphs (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), (viii) and (ix) respectively.

Madam Speaker, this is a copy of the legal supplement that was published in the *Gazette* on the 23rd of October, 2017, and I think it is necessary to explain how this process works. In the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, there is a requirement, or a provision, for the publication of an Order that would vary existing taxes or impose new taxes. The Act requires that this Order be brought to the House of Representatives, and not the Senate, after a period of four days has expired and before a period of 21 days expires. So that this Order was published

on the 23rd of October and the 21-day period therefore would expire, if my maths is correct, on the 11th or 12th of November.

Hon. Member: We are on the 18th day today.

Hon. C. Imbert: We are on the 18th day today. Thank you, Attorney General. So we are well within the timeframe. This is a bit of an anachronism and a bit of archaic legislation because this law was enacted many years ago when we did not have the current process of examination of the estimates in the Standing Finance Committee, or at least we did not have the current period of time that we spend in the budget debate and then the examination of the estimates. So it has created quite a bit of a difficulty for us in the Ministry of Finance because you are allowed to publish the Order while the Bill is still before the House of Representatives. So I was entitled to publish the Order up to the Thursday, the last day of the Standing Finance Committee, but after that, when the Bill went to the Senate, the time expired for the publication of the Order, and this is why we published it on the 23rd of October.

This is something that will have to be changed because what it causes, because of the new and different time frames now, is that you find yourself very pressed for time in terms of when this Order is to be published and when you have to come to the House of Representatives to confirm it. So in the future—I am just giving notice—we may bring proposals to stretch it out maybe to 30 days or 40 days, or something like that, to give us the breathing space. Because after the budget exercise we are all quite exhausted, having been here for so many days, you know, from morning to evening. So that is something we are going to change.
[Cell phone rings]

Madam Speaker: Somebody's device is offending.

Hon. Member: Throw it in the fire.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am glad it was not mine. It happens to the best of us. So as I was saying, this is something we are going to change. We are going to make proposals to change the time periods for the confirmation of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, but in due course, not right now. So that now we are within the existing time frames. And in this Order, arising from the fiscal measures announced in the Budget 2018, you would see from the Order that the Order makes adjustments to the taxes payable on gambling tables and other devices. It makes adjustments to the taxes and duties applicable to motor vehicles and motor cycles and it makes adjustments to the taxes on cars, for motor vehicles and also on taxes imposed on amusement

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gaming machines.

Madam Speaker, when I presented the budget on the 2nd of October, I highlighted the urgent need for a paradigm shift in order to place this country's economy on a sustainable path. In order to achieve this shift, it is critical that the Government seeks to control expenditure and maximize revenue collection as a means of balancing our fiscal accounts. The provisions in the Order that I just spoke about are consistent with that objective. Section 3(5) of Provisional Collection of Taxes Act provides that when Order varies a tax, as we see in the resolution before the House—well, we do not see it in the resolution but this is in the Act—that that tax shall cease to have effect if the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order is not confirmed with or without modification by a resolution agreed to by the House within the next 21 days. If the resolution is not agreed, then the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order ceases to have effect. It lapses. So we must pass this Motion—we must approve this Motion today.

Let me go now and give some details on what exactly is in that Order. I will start with the gambling and gaming industry. It is believed that there are now more than 20,000—and I will have to rely on persons who know a little bit more about this than I do, like the Member for Tabagite. He has cited some numbers in this House. But it is believed there are more than 20,000 amusement gaming machines in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order that we are debating, amended section 20B of the Liquor Licences Act, and increased the gaming tax payable annually on amusement games—this is the amusement slot machine-type device that I am told one would see in bars and so on. I have never seen one. I do not frequent bars. But the gaming tax payable annually was increased by the Order from \$3,000 per year to \$6,000. This increased gaming tax is applicable to amusement games operated on licensed premises under the Liquor Licences Act. It is intended that this measure will come into effect on the 1st of January, 2018, so it is not in effect now, and it is expected to increase revenues by approximately \$60 million per year, with full compliance.

Establishments licensed under the Liquor Licences Act are entitled to operate up to 20 amusement gaming devices. At the time when the provision was introduced many years ago, the machines were designed to allow just one player to play at a time. I am told—again, I have to rely on reports because I do not know anything about this; I have never used one of these machines—

Hon. Member: “Yuh sure?”

Hon. C. Imbert: Definitely sure. But I am told that this is—

Hon. Member: Not even privately?

Hon. C. Imbert: Not even privately. I am told that this is no longer the case. Within recent times the establishments licensed under the Liquor Licences Act have begun to operate electronic roulette devices which permit—and I heard the Member for Tabaquite say, “Um hmm”. As I said, he is a repository of information with respect to gambling—which permit as many as 12 players to wager as frequently as every 20 seconds. Now, this is interesting. So we now have roulette devices in bars and recreation clubs and restaurants, I assume—*[Interruption]* well, this tells me 12—allowing as many as 12 players to wager as frequently as every 20 seconds—three times a minute.

Now, Madam Speaker, after I was visited by some persons at my private residence, a lot of people contacted me to provide me with information that I did not have before. And I was told that one of these roulette machines, because of the fact that it is spinning every 20 seconds—three times a minute; I understand a ball spins around a rotating device and it falls on a number and if you put your bet on that number you win. I am told that when you do the calculation, if you have one of these roulette devices, with workers operating on a shift system, seven days a week, two shifts a day, if you calculate the number of times that the roulette machine will display the winning number and you work out the odds, and the number of bets on these roulette tables, that a single roulette machine—one roulette machine that is operated 24/7—well, not 24/7 but on a double shift system, maybe 12 hours a day, I expect—one roulette machine after paying the wages of the workers and the overheads of the club, and the tax imposed by the Government—one roulette machine can generate somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1 million—one machine. When you do the maths—because three times a minute the ball is dropping in the slot and this thing is operating 12 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Now, if that is true, that one roulette machine can generate at least \$500,000 in profit for its owner, then I think it is not believable—because I am told that when you work out the wages element, let us say this device generates \$1 million in gross revenue, the wages element—*[Interruption]* No, that is the profit I am talking about. The wages element, I am told might be \$150,000 per year. They did the calculation for me, that the wage of the worker; how many hours they work; how much they would get in a day, and they do a dual shift system, so you have two workers; they work out the wages of the two workers operating that machine, they say it would be about \$150,000 a year, total. And when you take the gross

revenue of the machine, the wages of the worker, overheads in the club and any other expenses they may have, you would earn profit of at least \$500,000 on each one of those machines.

So why on God's earth would—if the tax is raised from \$60,000 to \$120,000 and you are making \$500,000 on the machine, why on God's earth would you send home the worker? That worker that you are paying \$150,000 or \$75,000 is generating \$500,000 in profit. It does not make any sense. So that I was giving this information to show how the concerns that are out there are not realistic. Because why on earth would you retrench a worker that is earning for you, \$500,000 a year on one single machine? But let us move along.

Madam Speaker, the Liquor Licences Act prescribes a flat tax of \$3,000 per amusement game. I am told that the tax is applied on a per seat basis for electronic roulette devices. In this regard, the total tax charged per device is \$36,000. So you have a roulette table with 12 persons, so it is \$3,000 per seat per roulette table. So the total tax charged per device is currently \$36,000 per year. But given the peculiar nature of this particular device—and I am told that is the real money spinner—it ought to receive distinct treatment from the other electronic gaming devices. To this end, a flat tax of \$120,000 will be applied to electronic roulette devices. The new tax is at paragraph 6 of the Order which amended section 20B of the Liquor Licences Act.

Previously, the term “electronic roulette device” was not defined in the Liquor Licences Act as it fell to be included in the class of all amusement games. However, given the decision to provide a separate tax treatment in respect of these devices, a definition has become necessary. The Order thus includes a definition of the term “electronic roulette device” by an amendment to section 20B of the Liquor Licences Act. The electronic roulette device that I am speaking about means a gaming device that automatically spins a ball around a mechanical roulette wheel and determines the outcome of a round of play via electronic sensors.

This new tax for electronic roulette devices will come into effect on the 1st of January, 2018, and is expected to increase revenue by approximately \$84 million, once there is full compliance. With respect to gaming tables and other devices, I am told, Madam Speaker, and it is clear, that the gambling industry in Trinidad and Tobago is booming. The amount of money circulating from players in the industry is estimated to be of the order of TT\$15 billion. The country, however, does not receive its fair share of taxes from the gaming sector, despite the size of the industry, the number of people involved and the revenue generated.

In fact, the taxes collected for the last fiscal year were in the vicinity of \$58 million. So you have an industry where the estimated amount of money circulating per year is in the order of \$15 billion, but the taxes collected, only \$58 million. If you do the maths, you will see that is a miniscule percentage.

2.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, in view of this unregulated industry, with these minimal tax collections, the decision was taken to increase the taxes on gaming tables and other gambling devices listed in the Schedule to the Registration of Clubs Act by 100 per cent. This is in paragraph 2 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which amended the Schedule to the Registration of Clubs Act. Again, this measure will come into effect on the 1st of January, 2018 and is expected to increase revenues by an additional \$331 million per year with full compliance.

I am told, Madam Speaker, that electronic roulette devices that I spoke about are not only being used in bars and recreation clubs that are licensed under the Liquor Licences Act, but are also widely used in members' clubs. However, electronic roulette devices are not now specifically listed in the Schedule to the Registration of Clubs Act but are included as part of the line item "every other table or device not mentioned above". In this regard, the devices have attracted a flat tax of \$30,000 annually. As I said before, these devices can accommodate as many as 12 players at a time, and as I said, giving a win every 20 seconds and earning as much as \$500,000 in profit for its owner.

In order for there to be parity in charging to tax of these devices, with those found in establishments under the Liquor Licences Act, the Schedule to the Registration of Clubs Act will be amended to add electronic roulette devices as a separate gaming table to the list of gaming tables and other devices. The tax of \$120,000 per year will now be imposed on these electronic roulette devices. The roulette devices will therefore not be in the category of tables or other devices not previously mentioned, which attract a lower device. Paragraph 2 of the Order provides for this and again this will come into effect on the 1st of January, 2018.

Madam Speaker, we have also increased the customs duty on all mechanical games of chance by 100 per cent. The rate of duty was 20 per cent, it will now be 40 per cent. This increase was achieved by paragraph 5(f) (ix), (x) and (xi) of the Order. You will also note that the resolution before you intends to confirm the Order subject to paragraph 5(f) (x) being deleted. This is because there is confusion over exactly what is a video console as it relates to a gambling machine, or a video console such as a play station, a PS4, or one of these toys that

children use to play—and men too and women—video games. So we thought it necessary to remove the particular item in the Order, in this Motion, so that there will be no confusion as to whether video games like Nintendo and so on would attract the new duty of 40 per cent. This increase in customs duty on mechanical games of chance is expected to increase revenues by an additional \$5 million.

Now, Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion and a lot of things published. I do from time to time read the newspapers and I did see an advertisement from an entity calling itself the Members Club Association. I saw in their newspaper advertisement that in response to an allegation that the owners of these clubs are in hiding, the advertisement says that by law private members' clubs are owned by club members. Well, I will deal with that in a short while because that is a fiction. That is an absolute fiction. But in order to give some understanding of what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago, I have in my possession the current list of all members' clubs in Trinidad and Tobago. There are 221 members' clubs at this time, and if you went back into the records you will see there has been an explosion in the numbers of members' clubs over the last couple of years. So there are 221 members' clubs in Trinidad and Tobago, but in terms of bars and recreation clubs there are, believe it or not, 686 that are on the records at the Board of Inland Revenue.

So when you add the two together, you are talking about 900 more or less establishments where you have gambling and gaming devices of one kind or another. What is interesting, this is the Board of Inland Revenue records, 686 bars and recreation clubs and restaurants and so on that have these things, and 221 private members' clubs—which is just a fancy name for a casino—but when you check with the list of private members' clubs that are registered with the Financial Intelligence Unit you only get 97. So, the Board of Inland Revenue has 900 members' clubs/casinos, plus bars, restaurants and so on; nine hundred, 900 on the records of the Board of Inland Revenue, 97 on the records at the Financial Intelligence Unit. I leave that for Members to draw their own conclusions. What it means is that 800 of these organizations are not being monitored by the Financial Intelligence Unit at this time—800 of them.

Madam Speaker, I also saw in this advertisement—I mean, you know if it was not thing to laugh for you must cry, or thing to cry for you must laugh. I see something here about the casino industry in Las Vegas making its first profit in 2008. I say things to cry about, you know, you have to laugh. I have in my possession a paper published by the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. It is a 2013 paper and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, gave details on the revenue generated, or the revenue earned by casinos in

Las Vegas in 2013, US \$14 billion, TT \$100 billion. That is what is declared. You know it could be more. So when I look at this and I see that—and this is 2013, eh. It could be more now. So \$14 billion in casino revenue in 2013—US, eh. US \$14 billion—and I hear this thing about Las Vegas only declared a profit. “Come on, geh meh ah break.” I also checked other States in the United States. Philadelphia, I am told, is the second largest revenue earner in terms of gambling and gaming, and casinos in Philadelphia, they generated in excess of a billion dollars last year and paid US \$200 million in taxes to the State of Philadelphia.

So publication like this neglect to report that in these countries substantial taxes are paid by the casino operators and casino owners. Just use substitute State of Philadelphia alone, they would have paid somewhere in the vicinity of TT \$1.4 billion in taxes on revenue of about TT \$10 billion. So, about 14/15 per cent of their gross revenue was paid in taxes to the State of Philadelphia. So it has nothing to do with whatever profit they make. The fact of the matter is that 15 per cent of revenues in the State of Philadelphia are paid in taxes every year to the State Government and, of course, when you check the other numbers, the revenue generation in the whole United States from casino gambling, you are talking about US \$100 billion. A hundred billion dollars US; that is what you are talking about. So I mean, I really cannot respond in any great detail to these numbers here because they are not consistent with the facts. They are so far from the facts it is not funny.

Madam Speaker, I also want to go back to this comment about these casinos that are owned by the members. I am told—again, I have never been to one—that you can just walk in, sign a book, they give you a temporary membership card, you go and lose all your money, and then you go back out and you are no longer a member. You are a member for a couple of hours until your money done. I have in my possession a decision delivered on May 24, 2017—so it is a very current decision—and it is in the matter of *The Companies Act*, and *Forty Four Limited and Club Princess Limited between Dallas Corp., Thomas Baker and Alnando Corporation, Sudi Ozkan, Zafer Unal, Christlyn Moore*—a famous name—Forty Four Limited and Club Princess Limited. This was a dispute over the ownership and the revenues from a casino in Trinidad, the same casino that they say is owned by the members, and it makes very interesting reading because that is not so at all.

I go to page 4 of the judgment delivered in May 2017, and the factual background reported by the judge is that in and around 2004 to 2005 the second defendant—and Charles Frost—would be Sudi Ozkan, met to discuss and agree to establish a casino business in Trinidad. If you will listen to what others say you

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would be told there are no casinos only members' clubs, but in this judgment, the judge is reporting that these two individuals met to discuss and agree to establish a casino business in Trinidad. The agreement stipulated that the business was to be equally owned between the two of them and the profits equally shared from the business. Now, how can you have profits from a business with two shareholders who are sharing all the profits when according to this, the members' clubs are owned by the members? So you are telling me this members' club only have two members? Ridiculous!

So it went on to speak about the dispute between these two people who had established this casino in Trinidad, and the dispute was over the issuing of shares and the payment of dividends and profits to someone who had inherited the estate of the person who owned 50 per cent of this business. At the end of the day, the judge ruled in favour of the claimants and ruled that Alnando Corporation, Sudi Ozkan, Christlyn Moore, et cetera, were required to issue 50 per cent of the shares in this business, this casino business, to Mr. Baker from the United States, and this is the Club Princess Casino.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So Christlyn Moore is an owner?

Hon. C. Imbert: I cannot answer that question, Madam Speaker, through you—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am just asking.

Hon. C. Imbert:—but what I do know is that this casino business, which was owned by two people, was the subject of a dispute over how they would share the profits from this casino business which is Club Princess in Trinidad and Tobago.

So I cannot see how you could have a court action with the cause of action being that the other owner of the business was depriving the first owner of dividends and profits from this business, that two of them owned—that going on in Trinidad and Tobago and a judgment delivered in 2017, and I am reading this ad [*Member displays ad*] that is telling me—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, remember the rule with respect to display please.

Hon. C. Imbert: What is that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Display.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not supposed to display anything?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, I am terribly—I am terribly sorry, Madam Speaker. I was not aware. What you have here is this advertisement from the Trinidad and Tobago Members Club Association published in the daily newspapers. So you have this advertisement here telling you that they have no owners. They have no casino and they have no owners, but you have this judgment where two owners of a casino—a big one—in Trinidad and Tobago—I think they have one in Movie Towne, I think they have one in Chaguanas, I think they have one in San Fernando. This Club Princess, it is a big one.

Mr. Charles: Those are members' club.

Hon. C. Imbert: So why is the judge talking about the argument between the two owners of the Club Princess casino in Port of Spain? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Naparima is speaking to me sotto voce across the floor, but it is referred to as the Princess Casino/Members Club. So now you know. Okay? So all of these stories that you hear out of there are just preposterous. I mean, if one roulette machine is generating \$500,000 in profit, they are not going to send home any workers. That is just talk. That is just an attempt to terrorize people, and if they do it, it is just pure wickedness [*Desk thumping*] and they will have to hire them back because if the machines earning \$500,000 or \$100,000—the machine cannot work on its own, Madam Speaker. These are not robotic devices you know. They have to have somebody there operating the roulette table, and that is where all the money is generated, I am told, is on the roulette table. The slot machines and these other things they generate some revenue but nowhere close to the roulette table where as much as 12 people sit down and you have a winning number being announced every 20 seconds. Unbelievable! I understand it is some kind of exponential Play Whe; that is what somebody told me; this is what this thing is like. Some kind of super Play Whe. Play Whe on steroids because every 20 seconds you are getting a number; that is what I am told. I do not know anything about it.

What I do know, Madam Speaker, though, is that gambling is addictive and I would just like to put into the record an article written by Natasha Schüll who is a cultural anthropologist, an associate professor in the programme in Science, Technology and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is the author of *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*, Princeton University Press 2012, and just a few little things here. She said:

“Slots are commonly misperceived as an innocuous form of gambling because they offer relatively low stakes, are easy to play...have...been popular among

women and retirees, and outwardly resemble youth”—video—“games. In fact, the opposite is true. Studies by a Brown University psychiatrist, Robert Breen, have found that individuals who regularly play modern video slots become addicted three to four times faster (in one year, versus three and a half years) than those who participate in traditional forms of gambling like cards or sports betting. Breen calls these machine the ‘most virulent strain of gambling in the history of man.’

As I learned from interviews with hundreds of gambling addicts and game designers over nearly two decades of fieldwork on the US gambling industry, the particular addictiveness of modern slot machines has to do with the solitary, rapid, continuous wagering they enable. It is possible to complete a game every three to four seconds, with virtually no delay between one game and the next.

To my surprise, the vast majority of those I interviewed harbored no illusions of winning big; instead of playing for the jackpot, they played for what some call ‘the zone’ - a trancelike state of absorption that can suspend the pressures and anxieties of everyday life. Some players become so caught up in the interaction with the gambling machine that their awareness of space, time, and monetary value fades.

‘The consistency of the experience that’s described by my patients is that of numbness or escape.’ Robert Hunter, clinical director of the Problem Gambling Centre in Las Vegas, told me in an interview, ‘They don’t talk about competition or excitement - they talk about climbing into the screen and getting lost.’”

And that is just a little extract.

So, Madam Speaker, we think it is necessary to regulate this industry, but in the interim, while the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill makes its way through the Parliament, we believe that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago, should get their fair share of this \$15-billion industry. Let me move on now to other aspects of the Order.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 a suite of policy initiatives was put in place regarding the purchase of vehicles. The purpose of the initiatives was geared towards encouraging the population to switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, thereby reducing Trinidad and Tobago’s carbon footprint. Exemptions were thus provided in respect of motor vehicles in terms of the MVT, value added tax, and customs duty for electric vehicles with engine sizes less than

179 kilowatts and for hybrid vehicles with engine sizes less than 1999 cc. Incentives were also put in place to facilitate a shift towards the use of compressed natural gas, or CNG as it is also known. The initiatives at the time also included a 50 per cent increase in taxes and duties on luxury vehicles and that was defined as vehicles exceeding 1999 cc, but this was limited to passenger cars, and passenger vehicles did not include taxis, goods vehicles, agriculture vehicles, buses, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, this measure did not have the intended effect. Trinidadians and Tobagonians are very clever and they started to import luxury hybrid vehicles. So you began to see Mercedes Benz and BMW with 1999 cc as hybrids coming in. We have estimated that the revenue foregone just in 2017 alone on these luxury hybrids, BMW hybrid, is of the order of \$250 million. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Not a mustang.

Hon. C. Imbert: No, that is not a hybrid. So, Madam Speaker, we decided that this cannot be proper public policy. The intention never was to allow the importation of luxury vehicles tax free and duty free. So we have now reduced the engine size of hybrids and CNG vehicles that will qualify for exemption to 1599 cc, a 1.6 litre engine, and this is spelt out in the various paragraphs in the Order. So now if you want to bring in a hybrid, it must be 1599 cc or below in order to enjoy a waiver of taxes and similarly with a CNG-powered vehicle, and we believe that will be more consistent with proper public policy.

With respect to tyres, we found, as I indicated in the budget speech, that a loophole was allowing persons to bring in tyres and classify them as used tyres, when in fact they were new, and thus avoid duty. So they were classified as used, but they were in fact brand new tyres. The duty on a used tyre was 5 per cent, the duty on a new tyre was 30 per cent. So we have harmonized the duty on tyres to 30 per cent to avoid that kind of tax evasion.

Madam Speaker, we also have removed all the taxes on motorcycles 300 cc and below to encourage the use of this form of transportation to make it more affordable, to encourage fuel efficient vehicles. *[Interruption]* Yes, I did hear about that and, of course, we can do that. So the measures in the Order are essentially an increase in gambling and gaming taxes, a reclassification of hybrid and CNG vehicles to make them vehicles 1.6 litres or below, harmonization of the taxes on tyres, and a removal of taxes on motorcycles 300 cc and below. This is all part of our revenue raising for the 2018 budget and we also see it as part of our public policy initiatives.

I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate on the Government Motion before us, which seeks to effect measures already passed in this House via the Appropriation Bill.

Madam Speaker, it is my intention to respond briefly to some of the issues raised by the Minister, but to speak to the Order which indeed spells out the effect of the change being initiated by the Minister via a Motion in the House. The Minister has already read in its entirety the Motion, so there is no need to read this Motion again only to indicate that there are serious concerns about the issue of timing. The Minister indicated that these matters involving timing and the publication of the Order, and the timetable for debating the Order via the Motion are issues that arose because of the changing nature of the timetable of the debate of the Appropriation Bill and the subsequent discussion in committee for the Standing Finance Committee. That has a serious implication in this matter and I will also come to that in a bit.

Madam Speaker, the matter also involves the taxes on motor vehicles and a suite of changes that will be proposed by way of increasing cost in some cases on vulnerable groups that access vehicles. But to raise a few issues first by way of introduction, there can be no doubt that the gaming sector has become one of the key drivers internationally of revenue, employment, investment; it has been a key area for real estate development across the globe apart from, by definition, certain middle eastern territories. By definition, across the entire globe you can actually see there has been an expansion of this sector to the extent that several countries throughout the world and several regions have been taking steps over the last two decades or so to bring regularization, to bring a legal framework to control this sector, but also to ensure that they generate revenue from the sector.

Madam Speaker, there is also a concurrent policy challenge here and this is that this area is also an area that has a certain emphasis as well in social policy, because there are serious concerns in this area about social policy issues and, indeed, public health issues; they arise here.

3.00 p.m.

This is why the area is a bit more complicated as a new development area than, let us say, the maritime sector or the IT sector by itself. This transcends legal issues; it transcends financial and fiscal issues; it transcends social policy and public health policy. So it is a very complicated area. But what do we know of the area? What we know of the area is that we do not know enough of the area. That is what we know. Because, Madam Speaker, we do not have an extensive amount of literature and policy documents on this area and we have a few reports which I will touch on in terms of regularization and taxation and so on.

But I took note that the Minister stated in his presentation, he confessed that, “Look, I do not frequent bars, I do not use these machines, I do not know nothing about this. Everything I told you today is what I hear from somebody.” [*Desk thumping*] So that is his disadvantage, that he does not frequent bars or understand the machines’ workings. I would think that in some development context, a Minister would probably want to familiarize himself with an area for which he has such a great concern with, in revenue generation, as indicated that it generates \$15 billion in revenue. Now, unless I am mistaken, that is probably more than the oil industry. That is probably more than the flagship state enterprise in the oil sector. And they generate profits, monster profits, which is clearly more than the energy sector.

So I would think that the Minister would have told us that “I took, over the last two years, the opportunity with a team to meet and interact with the stakeholders and I did visit this place and I did visit that place and I did have the opportunity to see 12 people playing every 20 seconds”. I would have thought he would do that but the Minister told us, “I do not know anything about this, I do not frequent bars”. And, Madam Speaker, when you read the list of these taxes here that are being imposed, this is not the work of a sober man. This cannot be the work of a sober person. But the Minister has told us, “Well, look, I do not know about these things, I get my information”. And that is the first concern we have. It is the very first concern.

You would have thought that a Government coming into this situation here, would have commissioned some study, either from the policy point of view through the Ministry or even from the University of the West Indies [*Desk thumping*] or UTT, if you are not closing it down. Because, they commissioned, I think, to rewrite the history of the Caribbean or Trinidad and Tobago, you could have commissioned through the Ministry of Finance policy related research that when you come to Parliament, you could say, “Yes, these five persons have done a research project. This is what they tell us and in the absence of any other

research, we have to go by that.” So there is no research. There is no domestic generation of policy documents.

There is no domestic report on even financial issues. The Minister made a fascinating admission. He said. “Look, in this country today”—and he gave us the figure. He said there are 221 members’ clubs of which I think Queen’s Park Oval is one and Harvard Club is one. Right. So there are 223 members’ clubs of which he does not tell us how many involve gaming and gambling, eh, because the members’ club could be the Harvard Club that plays tennis and cricket and so on. Two hundred and twenty-one members’ clubs but we have 686 bars and recreation clubs according to the BIR, but then told us the FIU, Financial Intelligence Unit, has 97 private clubs. Mr. Minister, you are to blame, they all fall under the Ministry of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] You are to blame. This is the Ministry of Finance: FIU, BIR. What have you done in the last two years to suggest to us today that I am working to track down these missing entities? I am working to get them under the coverage of FIU because the implication is very clear. The Minister has an implication there. They are escaping FIU which means that there is something dastardly there, re: money laundering and other criminal activities. But it is your job to ensure that these recreation clubs that are involved in gaming find themselves properly under the Financial Intelligence Unit which is also under your purview.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government ought to have done this by way of some proper research in Trinidad and Tobago before coming to the House and just shouting out numbers at the top of their head. This is policy by “vaps”. [*Desk thumping*] You come to the “ta”—“ah go tuh say you come to the table” but you come to the House and you shout out information: “\$15 billion here, 500 on a machine here; two people working on this machine but every 20 seconds, they take ah chance”. But who told you that? The Prime Minister once tell us “he was on ah boat and somebody tell him something about the port and he made public policy”. You need to be informed by proper documentation and proper research and empirical data. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will be drawing from a report in my hand which I will just say because I intend to depend on it: “The Global Regulation of Gambling: a General Overview” by Janne Nikkinen from the University of Helsinki and it is a 2014 document. It is a global report that I will want to draw from. So we have a report. We also have a report from Ireland as well, Madam Speaker, which I will also use, “Economic Assessment of a Regulated Casino Gaming Sector”. There are reports available and I imagine when I looked at the global report, Madam Speaker, do you know almost 50—no, well, about 25 pages is the bibliography.

So we have a lot of material here. But in Trinidad and Tobago, we do not have material and the Minister, who admits that he knows nothing about the area, he has never been a participant and so on, comes here and just calls figures, calls numbers, calls people's names, calls this one, calls that one and it is a wrong way to go about dealing with the sector. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Hon Member: "Vaps."

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Madam Speaker, what the Minister did not acknowledge is that the people in this sector, and I can begin by telling you that there is a particular club on Ariapita Avenue, I think it is called Xanadu, if I am not mistaken, or something like that. They have put up a notice on their board that they are closing December 1st. That is a fact. So the club is closing. It is not a joke, it is the fact. We are not guessing, they have been closing. And Madam Speaker, I am told that there are six establishments closing, 650 persons will be without a job come Christmas. That is a fact. There is a notice there. You know, we can get the notice and look at it and so on but that is a fact.

Now, if they are trying to—you know, you are suggesting that people are fooling employees and so on, they put up a sign that they are closing, "they gone", and this is an emotional area now. Madam Speaker, there were persons who came in front of the Parliament during the budget debate. I think on Divali evening, they marched to the Prime Minister's private residence, without sweets, I think. They came to him on a public holiday. I thought it was Divali that they visited him at his private residence. Unless I am mistaken, two persons associated with this sector have been banned indefinitely from coming to the Parliament because of a certain incident. So it is an emotional issue.

I had the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to reflect on the contribution of a Senator in the other place during the Appropriation Bill debate and Madam Speaker, the kind of statements that were made there: an evil tax and we had testimony from several employees in this sector, they had their names quoted. This, you see—and it is related as well. Taxation is one thing. You want to tax and this is called compensatory revenue generation. There are two types of revenue generation: continuous where you have PAYE and so on; over years and decades you collect tax from royalty, but you also have something called compensatory taxing which is, because of your economic decline, you want to grab everything you see. Any sector that appears to be making money, you grab it. It is an approach, compensatory revenue generation, where anything you see, "I tax you". So you see anybody gathered together doing something and generating revenue, "I tax you". So clearly the gaming sector is one ripe. So the Minister is

really trying to reach—with his stature, he is trying to reach up and grab some revenue from the gaming sector because he believes that it is a lucrative area, and he believes that people are making money there and they ought not to and we need to grab taxation from them, but it is not properly conceived.

And there is a betrayal of the workers in this sector by putting taxes like this on the table. [*Desk thumping*] There is a serious betrayal. This matter has engaged many governments before, including the People's Partnership. We brought a Bill to Parliament that deals with the regularization of the sector involving issues of taxation, of social policy, of a fund to assist with what is called problem gambling because we recognize that this issue is—there is a serious concern with problem gambling where it can lead to domestic violence and abuse at the home, in the society and so on. It is something we all recognize. This debate is not about if you support gambling or not, “yuh know”, this is not about it at all. This is how do you work with a 9,000-people sector, [*Desk thumping*] to manage the regularization of the sector with absolutely no significant job loss but also collect revenue and provide a social policy framework to deal with the problems, the social issues that emerge and the public health issues that emerge. That is the issue. This is not whether you support gambling or not and it ought not to be used like one group of people evil and have no moral scruples and have no religion and they support gambling, and the next one, a pious and self-righteous, “they doh support gambling”. That is the most—almost moronic way of looking at it.

But you see, Madam Speaker, while a Joint Select Committee is in session, while the work has been saved and all parties are on the table discussing the regularization of this, the Minister comes like a thief in the night and slap “ah 100 per cent” on the gaming sector that has serious consequences for its survival. [*Interruption*] And the Chairman of the committee. This is to act in bad faith, this is to undermine the work of a parliamentary committee. This is to destroy public trust in the work of that committee and its eventual report. How will you expect people to support you in a Joint Select Committee when you pull the rug from under their feet by saying, “Listen, you all continue to talk about gaming and regularization, we passing ah tax on this eh”? What is the use? What is the purpose? And that gaming Bill is very important for another critical matter that the Government has on the horizon which is their blacklist, grey list, whatever list that they find themselves on. That is a serious matter. So undermining the trust and destroying the confidence of that sector in the gaming Bill is a serious problem that the Government has put itself in, very serious.

Madam Speaker, the issues concern taxation, and I think it is 100 per cent and just for the record, I have the differences. If I am just to use, Madam Speaker,

about two or three examples, I do not want to spend all the time just calling the name of the table and that type of thing. To use a couple examples, Madam Speaker, the blackjack table from \$60,000 to \$120,000; the dice table from \$35,000 to \$70,000; the electronic roulette machine, I think the Minister indicated that is another 100 per cent increase. The slot machine as well, I think that has also gone up in terms of the—from \$12,000 to \$24,000; amusement machines in bars, the licence that covers that and the charge from \$3,000 to \$6,000. So we are in agreement that you have an increase in 100 per cent but they are not taxing revenue, they are taxing machines. [*Desk thumping*] They are taxing machines, not revenue. There is no point here—so what you do is every time you see a machine, you say “I tax that machine, I do not care how much you raise from it, because somebody told me every 20 seconds, 12 people put a bet”. Somebody told me that, I do not know myself, I never went and see it. [*Crosstalk*] No, the Minister says he never went and see it. I have been there, you know, I see it. I have not seen the 20 seconds but I was concentrating more on the two-dollar and one-dollar business.

Madam Speaker, the Minister cannot in a real Parliament, in a serious place, say “I tax table because somebody tell meh every 20 seconds, they take a bet”. I mean I do not know what level of madness is this. And putting 100 per cent on a machine, not revenue. Now, the Minister, if even he wanted to be like a thief in the night, if that is your nature and you cannot help it, then what you can do is put a regime in place that attempts to monitor the payment, the revenues that are generated from machine one to the next, and say, “Listen, we tax you 25 per cent now on the revenues to be derived from X machine and A, B, C machine”. It would have been a more useful approach and ensure compliance.

But you know what the fundamental problem is here? This Government and this Minister cannot even have compliance with the existing tax regime. [*Desk thumping*] They have a 10 per cent compliance with the existing tax regime and now want to throw another tax regime. So Madam Speaker, the first offence here is that you are taxing machines, you are not taxing revenue. So what will happen here is that they will get rid of machines because you also put, I understand, a tax on the importation of machines from 20 per cent to 40 per cent, so you get rid of them. You get rid of machines and by definition, workers are associated with the machines.

The Minister stood up in Parliament today, he told us, he said, “You know one of these machines, they have two people working there”. Somebody told him because he has never seen the place, he never went there; somebody tell him two.

Madam Speaker, when you go into some of these places, you have two people working on shifts so another two come, another two come, and then you have supporting staff. Layers of staff, whether they be waiters or bartenders or caterers or whatever, supporting staff because of the number of people coming in. It is not just a question of two people manning a machine because somebody told you that. There is no empirical data. When will we reach a point where we can have empirical data upon which to make public policy? So tax the machines man, go down, and the effect of that is six establishments close down by Christmas, over 600 to 700 people out of a job for Christmas at this time.

And who are these people? They are your own constituents. In some cases, they are your own voters that you trample and stampede upon. Let me tell you something, this is not Caroni 1975 Limited that you are closing down you know, this is not that at all. And this is why today Madam Speaker, regrettably workers went to the home of the Minister. They had to call police. I understand there, the Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and others need to have police patrol by their homes. “It have ah Minister, we doh know if they living in the East or the West, but they ha police by dey house”. So when you expect police to be patrolling areas in high-crime areas, they have to protect Ministers at their homes because you cannot consult or engage or have a participative environment to make change with people.

You see, Madam Speaker, the Minister also made a few other comments relative to this and at the heart of this is another issue which I want to come to. This is a country now and this debate and this measure has a policy direction linked here. The measure has a policy direction. It is an attempt to tax people because you believe that they make plenty money and “they rich”. At a meeting in San Fernando some time ago, no less a person than the Prime Minister called the name of an owner, a key player in this industry, and said this person had to offer to help bailout Donald Trump and “the person rich and look at the people, they doh want to pay tax”. So the Member for Diego Martin West walks around with 43 bodyguards and then exposed another citizen of this country to criminal activity. [*Desk thumping*] That is what happened here. But it is an attempt to portray people as filthy and disgustingly and illegally rich so we must go for them. Madam Speaker, you cannot have employees unless you have employers; you cannot have workers unless you have managers; you cannot have anybody, you cannot create employment.

Now, the Minister looks at this sector and “we talk so much about diversification”. As one speaker said on a Monday night forum, “we talking about

diversification since Adam was a little boy”. This is an area that the Minister should have looked at to see how we can work with this sector to create more jobs, [*Desk thumping*] to generate more revenue, to create more business. In this global report I am quoting from, do you know, Madam Speaker, in some states in the United States, they are creating now, casino operations on boats in the river, in the Mississippi or somewhere because they believe that that is another area to develop, gaming industry on the river, on the seas and you link that to employment generation? Do you know how many caterers operate; how many people are employed; how much police and private security are employed; how many car park attendants; how many car park attendants are recruited for this sector? But what you do, you say “they getting plenty money, we tax them, tax them and you close down. Is tax, tax, tax and you close them down” and the very people you are trying to govern for are unemployed. That is the effect of this. They talk about 9,000 people in this sector. They have an indirect support staff in this sector of about 30,000 employees. You affect all of them because you want to tax, tax, tax, and that I think is almost criminal.

What in your measure today, if I may ask the Minister—you gave us your Motion and then your Order. Name one item in this Order, one item in your Motion that will lead to job creation in this sector? [*Desk thumping*] Name one. Name one that will lead to generating more revenue. And the private bars, Madam Speaker, I, too, have complaints about this matter. In my own constituency, all the bars, they have these machines. I went into one of these places in my constituency a couple of months ago, it did not have a place to sit down, you had to stand up because there are only machines around. So I called the proprietor and I asked him, I said tell me, what is happening here? You throw away all the table and chair, nobody could sit down here. He say ah want to tell you something. You have these machines, you earn some revenue, you share at the end of the month and you have a stable revenue base at the end of the month. [*Desk thumping*] So it supplements their sale of beverage or snacks and so on and they make a living. They hire people to come in the evening and clean up, people to pick up bottles and so on.

Today, you have increased by 100 per cent their taxes on those machines in those bars and recreation clubs. So, they will say, look, that is too much to pay, get rid of them and you have more depression, more economic decline, particularly in rural areas. The effect of that is more delinquency, more abuse of drugs, more abuse of alcohol, more family-related domestic problems. Those are the consequences, intended or not, from your taxation. That is what it will lead to. This notion that people out there have so much and we could tax them all, it is

wrong. And the sector now has a modicum of organization because you have committees and unions and so on. All they are saying is to meet and treat with us.

You know what is remarkable and we discovered when we were in Government? Every player in this sector tells us we want regularization, we want regulation, we demand a legal framework because there is also an illicit, illegal subsector which you are not touching incidentally. “They does operate opposite police station now.” There is an illegal and illicit subsector but you are taxing the legal sector. The sector that is already subject to taxation. *[Interruption]* Yeah, you get them into extinction and then the illegal ones continue. *[Desk thumping]* Or is this more of a dastardly plan so that foreigners can come in now who can afford this; foreigners can come in here and start occupying the space that would be left available when six to 20 businesses go out of circulation? Is this part of it? Is it part of Sandals casino and gaming sector as well, that you want to get rid of people? Because there is a real estate crisis as well. When these people close down their businesses, who is going to rent from the malls and the shopping centres and the areas there? *[Desk thumping]* Who? So there is an all-round economic decline involved.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance, with his technical team and so on could have taken a more holistic view of this. There are different approaches suggested, Madam Speaker; different approaches that deal with taxing and raising revenue from this sector. And the Minister, without knowing it, I do not know if he knows what he is saying is correct or not, just to add to him, that in the state of Nevada—which he raised and the state of Nevada is home to Las Vegas—the state revenue generated in 2012 was US \$868 million, state revenue. You know what caught my attention in this global overview of the gaming sector? Do you know when countries embark upon this, this type of measure to tax—not 100 per cent tax to throw people out of business but reasonable taxation. And I repeat, the gaming sector, those in that sector, Madam Speaker, are saying clearly we understand you have to tax and we are prepared for that, let us discuss that and get to the point where Government gets its revenue and the business continues, people have their jobs and so on.

Do you know in the United States and in other countries so defined, and Florida is clearly one, when they tax on gaming, the sector, they actually say in law where that money is to go to. It is to go to education; it is to go to social welfare programmes; it is to go to cultural and sporting activities; it is to go to this. The Minister is telling us how much millions he will raise, where will that money go to? So we agree with you today on this high-handed authoritarian

approach, where the money going? It will go for what? Upgrade the golf course? It will go for what? For paintings? It will go to do what? So that the Minister, if he had any interest in being decent, would have come to the Parliament and would have come today and say, Madam Speaker, I propose that 60 per cent—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you intend to avail of it. You can please proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So thank you, Madam Speaker. The Minister, I am saying, could have come to the Parliament today and tell us that 80 per cent of the revenue raised from taxation will go to local government or will go to the children's hospital or will go to complete the Ramai Trace school or the school in Princes Town, will go to pay some social welfare programme to deal with addicts or addiction related to problem gambling. You could have told us that. But this money that you will collect will go to what? It will not be linked to any specific programme, any specific target. The Minister will jump up later and say, "Well, this goes into the Consolidated Fund and we will pay wages with it, we will pay for schools and health service" and so on.

In fact, there is a health issue that I was reading about this because when you have the problem gambling that leads to now addictive gambling, it creates now mental health issues, and there is a greater demand upon the public health institutions and so on, if not managed properly, and they do not have drugs and they do not have facilities in the hospital. So, maybe 20 per cent of the revenue raised here should go to the health sector for the provision of proper equipment and medication which they do not have. But when you take it and you try to cream it off, throw it in the Consolidated Fund and say, "Listen, we going to China to enjoy we self. A trip coming up, we doh know what the meeting is about and we doh know who else going to this meeting but we hear the Head of Government going but they cannot tell us who else going and what they going to discuss." It is a fascinating trip. World leaders are assembling but we do not know who is the other world leader.

Madam Speaker, where will the revenue go to? That is a critical issue that we want to put on the table. Where will it go to? Will it go to cars? Would the revenue go to increase the housing stock now that you have taken \$20 million in housing stock to give to Ministers and other officials? Will it go to build low-cost housing? And the Government admitted yesterday they broke the law when Cabinet unilaterally altered a report from the Salaries Review Commission. Only Parliament can change that, not Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, would the money go for low-cost

housing? Would it go to house Ministers and cronies at the Ministries; OJTs? Where would the revenue go to? And they have three or four Attorneys General there and they do not know that the Cabinet cannot override the Salaries Review Commission Report. “They doh know that.” And just to correct because I know they—[*Interruption*] they can disturb me. In 2014, the People’s Partnership altered a report from the Salaries Review Commission in the Parliament [*Desk thumping*] on the 14th of March, 2014, when we rejected a recommendation from the SRC but Parliament had to do that. Parliament had to do that. A Cabinet cannot change the terms and conditions of an office holder under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission. They cannot, and that is a matter that will go elsewhere, I am sure.

3.30 p.m.

But, Madam Speaker, I have touched on some of these issues and the betrayal of the Government. And you know, the gaming sector is telling you, if you want to raise money, tell us. Online gaming, online gambling is a major area now. If you want to deal with the social policy issues, do you know, I am not suggesting, but do you know, in some territories and states and countries, they actually say in certain areas they do not have locals going to gamble? So if you are so concerned with the social issue, as they pretend to be, you could look at a certain area and say: “Look, this area is for the tourists and tourist attraction in Tobago, and the north/west of Trinidad” and you restrict locals from gambling.

You could look at it, Madam Speaker, and say: “Look, there is an age.” You adjust the age of people who have access to these clubs and so on. There are many, many policy interventions you could look at if you really had the social issues at heart. But you do not. You see M-O-N-E-Y and you say I want a piece of the action. “Gimme, gimme, gimme. I want tax, tax, tax.” That is the approach. It is not social policy.

Madam Speaker—and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, you know, he will get some more visits from those workers I am sure. You know, it is regrettable that the visitors came to his home and so on, but I am sure that they will want to visit him at other locations that he frequents and the way they are going to lose their jobs and be impoverished and destitute, they may want to live in the Ford Mustang. They may want to live in the Ford Mustang as well. Number seven. They may want to seek number seven out and live there, you know. So, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Or on the yacht.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Or on the yacht. Madam Speaker, I just want to make a few

comments on the cars and so on, on this matter, because other colleagues of mine, I am sure, would have to speak and would speak on that.

Madam Speaker, I want to indicate, which it is public knowledge and it ought to be, that it was the Government of the People's Partnership that first took substantive policy initiatives to ensure that we reduce the dependency on fossil fuel in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, it was the Ministry of Energy in 2013/2014, that had the whole idea of incentives for hybrids and electric cars as a focus of policy intervention. Today, Madam Speaker, the Government has taken action which we believe will have some downside and some fallout, in terms of affordability of vehicles to specific groups of income categories.

Madam Speaker, to remind you, it was the Trinidad and Tobago Government under the People's Partnership that first outlined a comprehensive national framework for climate change—Madam Speaker, that was sent to Paris—Trinidad and Tobago submitted its climate action plan ahead of the 2015 Paris Agreement. And when we did that, we had identified three key areas to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. And they were industrial, power generation and transport. And, in the area of transport, we promoted the compressed natural gas initiative, and I think it was introduced on buses as well when we were there, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, we have a proud record on that issue but we are informed, Madam Speaker, that as a result of these initiatives today, this has an impact, because they have reduced the bandwidth where taxes and tax exceptions would be possible, and I do not want to get tied up here with 1943 and 1921 and 1763, and so on. I will use cars as an example because the cars are known and everybody out there would have a sense of the engine power of the cars, and so on.

Madam Speaker, do you know for the poor man, a Serena or a Nova, these are used as taxis. So a poor man who is retrenched, who has no job, who wants to earn a little living with a taxi in his area, the cost, because they have moved the bandwidth and to go with 1999 cc now, they have increased it, a taxi/car, that you want to buy because you want to eke out a living because lost your job in the Ministry of this or the Ministry of that, the cost of that Serena will move from approximately \$150,000 to \$300,000 as a result of this.

Madam Speaker, I am also told, that a vehicle, for example, like the X-Trail SUV, hybrid, that has become very popular with middle-income families and so

Provisional Collection of Taxes Order
[DR. MOONILAL]

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on, and you know we now have laws, and I must say good laws, that you must put children and babies in their seats and so on, I support that 1,000 per cent. I support that, Madam Speaker. But when you have laws where you are now compelled, as you should be, to protect children and babies and so on, it requires you to have a different type of vehicle. This is a country that is ridden by crime. This is a country that is ridden by flood. You cannot have low cars that one foot or 18 inches, or something off the ground. You cannot drive anywhere in Trinidad with that. You cannot drive “nowhere” in Trinidad with these low cars because of flooding, because of crime. And the X-Trail SUV, for example, if you fall in a pothole the car could disappear, these small cars. You know what they have done? They have increased the taxes now because the X-Trail SUV, which was a popular vehicle among the middle-income range of people, particularly families, because you want to secure your children and your babies and so on, you have put a 25 per cent increase on the X-Trail SUV. So I am told, that instead of \$205,000 for one, it goes to \$290,000/\$300,000 for one. So that that now is out of the reach of lower-income people/middle-income people.

So there is this attack on all sides towards working people and middle-income people. [*Desk thumping*] There is this all-out onslaught. Pay more for tyres. Pay more for the cars that were before affordable to you. Pay more tax on everything that we do, because the Minister of Finance has a framework where anything he sees—listen, they will go into the bars where they are playing all fours, see these people playing all fours at a table and decide to tax every table playing all fours, you know. If you give them the chance they will do that. They will do that anywhere there is an activity. They will threaten doubles man, roti man, bake and shark, nuts man, when they realize that they may have a handful of one dollar bills, they will tax them. And this is the risk because you have no vision, you have no plan, you have no development focus. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the last two years, as I wind up, if you can tell me one thing that they have built I will tell you one thing that they have not destroyed. Every sector, every area. [*Desk thumping*] They talk big about diversification, they talk big about that. Which area have you contributed to diversifying? What? Where? Marijuana cultivation? What have you done in two years in any one sector to say it is now showing growth, more jobs, more revenue, more taxation, more investment? The Unicomer opened the other day. That was an investment done under the People’s Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] You look at this country, all the malls, all the hospitals, C3, everything was done under the People’s Partnership.

Two things they tried when they got into office. They turned the sod to build a car park in Port of Spain. “Ah doh think dey parking cars as yet.” They turned the sod. No, they did not turn the sod. “Dey say dey was doing ah walkover in de Beetham. Anybody see de walkover?” They had a PPP for the housing project in St. Joseph. “Officials of the Government and the private contractor fight and the PPP collapsed into a P.”

Madam Speaker, that has collapsed as well. And while this is happening, the Minister of Finance comes to the House today and “tell us I doh know about dis sector. I never went to ah casino. I never went into a bar. I doh frequent there but somebody tell me that has happened. Somebody tell me every 20 seconds it have ah gamble and I working on dat. Five hundred thousand on a roulette machine dey making. I coming fuh dat. Yeah. It is he say, he say, dat he say.” That is how they project public policy.

And this is why the Minister of Finance finds himself with a private matter with \$55 million to pay. This is why he finds himself there, “Because somebody tell him dat somebody tell him dat somebody tell him. And then de judge tell him to pay \$55 million.” So when you have an approach like this, you are bound to get yourself in trouble.

I am asking the Minister to reconsider this ill-conceived Order. Because if it is not approved by the House, it will cease to be law. It is law, I believe. It will cease to be. Reconsider your ways. Atone for your sins. Repent. Depart from your sins and let the casino workers with their soul and their heart, and these poor people, many of whom are your constituents, let them impose upon you some decency, some heart, some love for this Christmas season.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it taxes every fibre of my being to listen to the contribution of the Member for Oropouche East on a continuous basis, and I will tell you why, Madam Speaker. I will tell you why. I will tell you why the exercise to conscience, the exercise to morality, the exercise to intelligence is such a difficult one for certain people.

Madam Speaker, we are here to treat with a matter of law. The law that we are treating with today is the Order before us to be dealt with by Motion. It is, as put out by the Minister of Finance, pursuant to section 3 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, that is, of course, law set into the books of Trinidad and Tobago by Act No. 1 of 1963.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

From 1963, we saw an amendment to that piece of law in 1977. And section 3 of that Act says, with clear detail that where proposals for general or supplementary appropriation of public funds are made to the House of Representatives and are embodied in an Appropriation or Supplementary Appropriation Bill, as the case may be, the President may, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in such Bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of any tax or the variation of any existing tax and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* or such later date as may be specified as the commencement of the Order, the tax imposed or varied by the Order shall be payable. That is what section 3 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act sets out. It sets that out, and has been law since 1977, that particular provision. There is an expiry, pursuant to subsection (3)(5) of the same law, where if you do not take the step for confirmation by the House of Representatives it will in fact lapse.

But then we hear the Member for Oropouche East come along. The Member for Oropouche East suggests to Trinidad and Tobago that there is something wrong with taxation in the fashion that this Order seeks, that this Motion seeks to approve. And if we were to accept a word of what the Member for Oropouche East says, then how do we explain the fact that he, as Leader of Government Business, when he sat in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, participated in the same Orders to do the same things, year on year? How does the hon. Member suggest to this House that taxing the gaming industry, as he has put out, is something that cannot happen? The hon. Member said that the Minister of Finance who sits as the Chairman of the Joint Select Committee, to deal with the gaming legislation as we are now meeting, that it is wrong, in his submission as I understood it, for the taxation issue to come on the table now, because that JSC is afoot.

Well then if that is true, how on earth is it possible for the last Government to have brought the gaming legislation as they did, and in every year of Sitting, they dealt with the amendments to the law as this Order seeks to do? Every year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they came by way of Order. They increased the taxes on baccarat table, black jack table, Caribbean stud poker table, dice table, poker table, roulette table, rum 32 table, the favourite one, sip sam table, slot machines, every year. And the rationale and the foolishness of the approach offered by the hon. Member for Oropouche East is to be found in the fact that, taxation has nothing to do with the substantive amendments to regulate the gaming industry.
[Desk thumping]

The hon. Member comes to the House today and says, “This country needs data. Let us deal with data. This is a Government by vaps. Where is the data?” He has the temerity, most respectfully, to say that, when in five years and three months of Government as he sat, not a scrap of data on the industry was managed. Today, the hon. Member very flippantly says that the Government is going to have to deal with its little black listing or grey listing. You know how he is comical in his submission, just making it up as he goes along, the hon. Member does.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he touched upon two extremely important events, which tie into the very point that I just made. And the point that I just made was that one, there is an incongruity and there is in fact a mutually exclusive arrangement between taxation and substantive law. Number two, there is in fact data that the country has considered for several years. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the little small marks of black list and grey list as the hon. Member put it out, the hon. Member is referring to something which he ought to know well. Trinidad and Tobago has obligations in the gaming sector in particular, to meet the requirements of our international entities, which have rated us after review, and there are two of them in particular.

The first one is the Financial Action Task Force and the second one is the global forum. The Financial Action Task Force consists of 190 countries. Thirty-seven of them sit in a parent body, the Financial Action Task Force and the balance of them sit across nine FSRBs, FATF-Style Regional Bodies. And those entities and countries—because there are entities from each country that sit at the table, Finance Intelligence Unit, the police force and the revenue collection authorities, the Law Enforcement agencies, Ministers of National Security, Attorneys-General, all sit in these events—and these countries have rated Trinidad and Tobago upon the tenure of the last Government’s performance. And the Financial Action Task Force completed its ratings of Trinidad and Tobago in something called the fourth round mutual evaluation, based upon the work in January 2015. And as a result of that rating in January 2015, it was observed that the last Government did absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing, to improve the effectiveness and technical compliances of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Charles: “Wha you do?”

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And I am hearing the hon. Members opposite say: “Wha you do?” And “What you did in two years?” Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am able to say now, first of all, I am bound to correct another irresponsibility by the Member for Oropouche East. Can the Member for Naparima please just keep it quiet? It is an inability to control oneself when you engage the way you do, hon. Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Naparima, again, right. I have not made mention of anything but I have been taking note of it. Please. Go ahead, Member.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. One must learn to contain oneself. We sat down and listened quietly. Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, please. You had your opportunity. Let us proceed. Hon. AG, kindly proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Members asked sotto voce, across the floor, “what have you done in two years”, relative to the remedy that is required to the absolute fiasco that was left by the last Government in the Financial Action Task Force? I am very pleased to say that as confirmed by the Financial Action Task Force in the plenary held in Argentina last week, it ended, Trinidad and Tobago was observed to have made massive success, so recorded in writing by the Financial Action Task Force, to such point where they have removed us from the obligation to report to the ICRG grouping at FATF and referred half of that work to the Financial Action Task Force sub-body, which is the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

Further, in their published post-observation period report, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago came in for open compliment by the international agency for the work conducted in the last two years, specifically in respect of the criminal justice reforms, the caseload and management that was undertaken, the levels of effectiveness demonstrated in the operationalization of the anti-terrorism laws, in the forfeiture, in the civil claims.

Because we heard the Member for Oropouche East a little while ago say perhaps the Minister is inclined to being a thief in the night. I want to remind that there are thieves in the day, and thieves in the day have found themselves into the contemplation of our international agencies because they have looked with great interest at the work that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has done specifically, in relation to anti-corruption, money laundering, bid rigging, and money laundering as a major context of what the FATF does.

The Member for Naparima has repeated across this floor, on umpteen occasions as we have started, that Trinidad and Tobago is grey listed. The Member for Oropouche East said it. This is a fundamental ignorance demonstrated by Members opposite. The

fourth round mutual evaluation of the Financial Action Task Force has no grey listing. The grey listing only happens—grey listing, dark grey listing and black listing—under the third round mutual evaluation. And Trinidad and Tobago is only under enhanced follow-up, where we are obliged to put certain mechanisms into effect. So I am obliged to correct the record, lest the irresponsible statements that the Member for Oropouche East is wont to offer find themselves into the international media again, as his statement about there being, as it was reported, 400 FTF fighters, foreign terrorist fighters, found its way into umpteen newspaper reports abroad. That is why my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East says all the time that there is a need for patriotism and that we must be aware of people who are unpatriotic.

The second matter that I am obliged to correct, coming out of a statement again made by the Member for Oropouche East, in his flippant remark to black listing and grey listing, or whatever it is—so unconcerned is the hon. Member to actually find out what it is, it comes out as a flippancy—is the work under the global forum. And in fact, that is where the hon. Member is, perhaps, even slightly closer to reality. Because it is the global forum that has put Trinidad and Tobago into the worst form of reflection by saying that of the 142 countries that comprise the global forum, Trinidad and Tobago is the only jurisdiction, of 142 pooled jurisdictions, to have not made significant advance with respect to the global forum and the common reporting standards. And, again, that is squarely because of the lack of diligence, or care, or plan, or operation by the last Government.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What happened for two years?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And I would come to the two years. Because under the global forum, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a fact that the last Government in 2010 allowed us to go through peer review. In 2011, the last Cabinet allowed us to be rated and then applied to the global forum. In 2014, the sole activity for the global forum was to send Minister Howai to Berlin in Germany to give a high-level commitment to say that we will be ready to operationalize the law by 2016.

And do you know what the global forum in its review of Trinidad and Tobago, ending at 2015, January 2015, under the last Government said? You did absolutely nothing. You had an obligation to put into law 13 Inter-Governmental Agreements of the type that we had with FATCA and you did not do it. You had an obligation to deal with double taxation and amendments to Inland Revenue and you did not do it. And what was fortunately well-retrieved by a combined effort between the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Attorney General was Trinidad and Tobago's ability to be taken seriously, both at FATF and at the global

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forum, because specifically with respect to the global forum, we applied for fast tracking. We applied for a deferral of obligations until 2018. We have the ability to enter into a multilateral convention, which will obviate the need for 13 Inter-Governmental Agreements to be done. And fortunately we have received communication in writing from the global forum saying, and as published in their report, that Trinidad and Tobago is taking active steps. So thank God that we have a diligent Minister of Finance working to an agenda to accomplish the work that the last Government refused to do and that the Office of the Attorney General is right alongside it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in speaking to the need for this Order to be affirmed by way of this Motion, and in dealing with the content and rationale of section 3 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, it is clear that the Member for Oropouche East continues to make it up as he goes along. The Appropriation Bill, which anchors the law in section 3 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, which is what this Motion is about, says that these provisional taxes are applied to statements in the budget, in the Appropriation Bill.

The hon. Member rolls out and says: "Let us talk about the poor man." I do not know how the hon. Member even vaguely remembers the poor man, bearing in mind the matters that we are dealing with. But the fact is, in the Appropriation Bill, in the speech of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East the Minister of Finance, the hon. Member is now proved to be completely inaccurate, and I am being polite when I say that, because he stood up here and flippantly told the hon. Members of this House that the poor man and the maxi-taxi and the "fellas" who are now unemployed and want to run "ah lil taxi, all ah dem cars going up and ah not going to call out cc and all kinda thing. I gonna call out de make ah de car." That is what the hon. Member said. Listen to page 10 of the budget contribution of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Madam Speaker, I would have to mention in this House previously that in some respects the measures put in place have had the desired effects of increasing the supply of fuel efficiency and clean energy vehicles. There arose however, an unintended consequence whereby individuals took advantage of the tax waiver on hybrids import, luxury vehicles at the engine size lower than 1999 cc. This has caused a significant leakage of tax revenue.

Further, notwithstanding our current financial challenges as a country, the importation of motor vehicles has remained unabated with 35,000 vehicles imported in 2017, the same amount or marginally less in 2016. It should be noted that the country has effectively lost \$500 million in foreign exchange in

2017 alone.

And the hon. Member specifically says:

That is, there was an increase in MVT and Customs duties on vehicles exceeding 1999 cc.

And listen to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

But did not include taxis, maxi-taxis, good vehicles, agricultural vehicles, private school buses and vehicles used for public purposes.

So how do we take the Member for Oropouche East seriously? Out of his mouth flippantly and in his usual comedy, glibly talking he says: “De taxi man go suffer and transportation will suffer.” The law does not apply to taxis, maxi-taxis, public vehicles. They are for private vehicles only.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what annoys me about the Member for Oropouche East? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: What annoys me about the hon. Member is that he just makes it up as he goes along. Could not be bothered to read the very Order, which is the subject of the Motion on this Parliament, which clearly sets out—if you do your homework—that you are not talking about taxis and maxi-taxis and public transportation.

The hon. Member then goes on to talk about the Paris Convention or what the last Government did, et cetera, absolutely sure about nothing, because the Paris Convention is speaking to reducing the carbon footprint for the country, and which the hon. Member for Naparima is now blurting out, “which you all have not ratified”. But before you ratify something, you have to check the cost and you have to check the logistics.

4.00 p.m.

And I want to put onto the table now, the cost of managing the implementation, which will be done, for the Paris Convention, has been measured at close to 200 million...

Mr. Imbert: US \$2 billion.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: US \$2 billion. And whilst the country is committed, having dealt with the treaty, whilst the country is committed to doing this, the fact is, you have to make sure that you do not end up in an error of ways which will cause a

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catastrophe in your country, because you must check the material and the cost first. Because when you implement a treaty such as this, is it that Point Lisas Industrial Estate is automatically going to have to comply? Who pays the cost? Is it the Government? Is it not? It is the same way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Members opposite put us into the very situation that we are in right now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will hear on the airways, you will see on the streets, people crying to be paid their salaries. Salaries have been paid late because money was not available for the payment of salaries. That is no laughing matter. What caused us to be in that position is very relevant to this debate. What caused us to be in this position, is that our contribution of revenue from our oil and gas sector, by way of corporation taxes, usually stands at 33.6 per cent of our GDP. But as a result of decisions taken by the last government, we have dropped into—
[Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We have dropped into the last two years where receipts have fallen to 1.3 per cent. And therefore, this particular Government has the obligation as it is doing, to find revenue by way of borrowings, [Interruption] by way of bonds and by way of increased collection of taxation. And it is in this—Member for Siparia, help me out, “nah”.

Mrs. Persad Bissessar SC: How?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: A little quiet, “nah”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Members. Member for Naparima, hold on, I am on my legs. You continue to make some chatter, I am hearing you, and Member for Siparia, you are very close to him, so please, ensure that he simmers down. Go ahead.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when your revenue falls to such a catastrophic basis—because the last government could not understand the need to put a cap upon the continued carryover of losses which the oil and gas companies are in fact carrying over, what happens is, you turn to taxation and in levying the taxation as it relates to the gaming sector in particular, which the last government did every single year in Appropriation Bills as this Government has done, and in causing the increase as we have done by 100 per cent in certain of the activities, what we are doing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is ensuring that we actually have money to pay wages. And whilst the hon. Members opposite may not be interested in where the money comes from, this Government has an obligation to make sure that people can feed their families

[Desk thumping]

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I declare openly that I did significant work for the gaming sector when I was in private practice, I am properly aware of how they organize themselves. Under the registration of clubs—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, hold on. Member for Oropouche East, I am hearing you, I am hearing you.

Dr. Moonilal: I did not mean for you to hear me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am hearing you.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: You rude you know.

Hon. Member: Disgusting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members. Proceed AG. Hon. AG.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Registration of Clubs Act, the last government anchored into law, in 2014, some very important provisions which give life to the very aspect of taxation that they are complaining about right now. It was in 2014 that the last Government came to the House and specifically introduced into law sections 23A, 23B, 23C, amendments to sections 23 and 25 of that law, and that law is law which we are amending today, in terms of consequential amendment in the Motion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me explain what I mean. A private members' club is defined in law, it is under the Registration of Clubs Act; that is Chap. 21:01:

“‘members’ club’ means a club not constituted for the acquisition of gain, the members of which contribute to the funds out of which the expenses of conducting the club are paid and are jointly entitled to all the property and funds of the club;”

That is what a members' club is in law. To carry out gambling as is done in a members' club, every gambler has to become a member, because the law says if you are not a member, or if you frequent it in terms of membership more than four times and you do not have seven days in between, you are a visitor with a member rule, that you can shut down the club. So the persons that go to casinos become members. According to the law, all of the members are entitled to all share in the profit of the club.

Hon. Member: Big joke.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: All, but the last government put into law, in the context of the law and in particular—I want to refer you to it— that not only must we have

licences issued 15th of January of every year, et cetera, but that persons cannot become honorary members, you cannot frequent it as a visitor, there must be gaps in the law. People who are habitually admitted as members without intervals of at least seven days, between nomination and admission are in trouble. But they go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say that there is to be taxation. Section 23:

“Subject to this Section, there shall, commencing...be charged on all gambling tables...”

And this was amended in 2014—

“and other gambling devices used or to be used on the premises of a members’ club desiring to carry on gambling activities therein, a tax to be known as a gaming tax at the rates specified in the Schedule.”

And it is that Schedule which we are amending.

So whilst the Member for Oropouche East stands up and somehow inexplicably says, “You cannot tax while you have to develop the law”, they introduced a law in 2015, on the last day that Parliament was going to sit, passed it in the House of Representatives, came up to the Senate. They were doing the law and there it is right there in black and white, amendments to the Act in 2014 and again in 2015, where they are saying they are introducing a tax and it is in the law. They put it in the law, so how does one make sense of the utter nonsense that the Member for Oropouche East puts out—

Mr. Imbert: Just talking.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Make it up as you go along. Frighten people. Telling the Minister how his constituents come outside his house. When there are videos circulating of the same people—

Mr. Imbert: UNC activists.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—who came outside the hon. Minister’s house, in yellow emblazoned jerseys marked UNC, holding placard with Devant Maharaj—

Mr. Imbert: Shaking Kamla’s hand.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Shaking the Leader of the Opposition’s hand, as she was Prime Minister then, bawling “We support the UNC” and then coming outside the Minister’s house to say, “Well, we vote for you”. Come on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, come on. They know better, the Opposition, than the incredible submission by the Member for Oropouche East, the original make it up as you go person in this House and I make no apology for saying that. That is not improper motives; that

is recognizing a lack of ignorance and intelligence on submissions of the law, on submissions of the law. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Member, address the Chair.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it goes further, the hon. Members, listen to what they put in again. Again, the law amended by Act 4 of 2014.

“For the purpose of this section,”—this subsection (10) of 23B—“a ‘gambling transaction’ means a transaction where a payment is made in money or moneys’ worth to, or by a members’ club, whether or not the purpose of the transaction is for payment, issue or redemption of moneys’ worth or for gambling.”

And they go further at subsection (5):

“Notwithstanding any rule of law to the contrary, but subject to subsection (3), an action shall lie for recovery of any amount claimed in respect of any gambling transaction conducted by a members’ club.”

So they have the taxation, they broaden the taxation, the last government. They make sure that you can actually sue for gambling, which you are not supposed to do in breach of the law. But you cannot share in the profit, as a member. And to be allowed to gamble, you have to be a member or a visitor on limited occasions.

So they deepen the law, they create the tax, they amend the Liquor Licences Act, they amend the Registration of Clubs Act, and then they come to this House and say “Well ‘huh’ you cannot tax”; taxation is wrong, you have to have the law first; let us deal with the regulation in the law. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you listen to those submissions against the actual comparators of law, when offered when they were in government and as now they stand in Opposition, it is just, say anything, make it up and oppose for the sake of opposition. That is all that it is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is in fact an excellent paper which comes from casino enterprise management law, it is publication in October 2010. It is an article by Glenn Light and Karl Rutledge, it is entitled “Gaming Policy Models, Part IV: Taxation of Gambling Revenue”. And as the Minister of Finance reflected upon regimes in the United States et cetera, in Pennsylvania, again tax revenue is at 55 per cent and the merits of having a taxation for the purposes of revenue generation are set out. Because Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us explain why this particular position of taxation is one that can be borne:

1. The fact is that the members' clubs operating as private members' clubs but really as casinos, have been recognized to be that.
2. The position is that they earn significant amount of revenue.

When the hon. Minister of Finance is talking about throughput, revenue throughput versus profit are two different things. And when you have 200-plus entities, you have to make sure that you are actually causing the regulation. I want to tell the hon. Members opposite, the incongruity between the Board of Inland Revenue's numbers, which is in the 200s and the FIU's registration which is now up to 100, because the FIU has actually caused their analysis as at November 2016 to be known and their statistics demonstrate one gaming house.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your original time has expired. You have an additional 15 minutes. Care to avail yourself?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: So the FIU's statistics as at November 2016 demonstrate gaming house, one; pool betting, 13 establishments; National Lotteries Control Board, there is one of them; private members' clubs, 86; total 101. But the casino-style operators as they put it, at 200. By raising the bar on taxation from entities that are well healed, where Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am able to say with certainty, the return on investment for a casino is 12 months. Let me explain that. If you take your investment, you decide you want to open a casino, you get an establishment, you outfit it, you hire people, you buy all the devices, you pay your taxes to start up, you get your licences, et cetera, the time frame to get back the money you put out is approximately 12 months.

There is nowhere else in this economy that the return on investment is 12 months and, therefore, in an environment where there is money laundering, in an environment where there is a potential for criminality as proven by cases in law, and I just need to refer to one case in law which actually happened by way of a guilty plea in the United States of America. It was the United States Government versus one David Migliore and in that particular case there was an admission of guilt. US \$1.286 million in taxation, by way of evasion, was paid over and the gentleman spent 46 months in jail in the United States. But his earnings were as a result of Trinidad and Tobago private members' clubs, where moneys were paid into shell companies in the United States of America and there were proceeds of

cash everywhere. That is one case, in one country, the United States of America, on money made in Trinidad and Tobago.

And when you are dealing with 12 months to make back your money, the workers need to understand the need to tell their employers that they know that they can pay the positions that are being offered by way of increase in taxation.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a serious criminality in the unlawful roulette gaming in Trinidad and Tobago. We are talking about issues of alleged murder; we are talking about threats, harassment; and we are talking about significant criminality. These matters are under investigation as I speak and, therefore, I cannot go too deep into them, but in our obligation to regulate this industry, the hon. Minister of Finance has done a very important thing. He has secured a building, he has secured bodies and he has secured an army of personnel to check establishment by establishment on the foot and ground in Trinidad and Tobago as we go through the exercise of investigating every property in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In dealing with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what happens is you will identify the casinos, the amusement bars, the positions and, therefore, the reporting back into the new and improved structures of government means that you will enforce the law. When you enforce the law you tie in, as we are intent upon tying in, to our campaign which will meet this Parliament shortly, of dealing with white collar crime and dealing with follow the money, and dealing with it not as we are doing only in relation to litigation, which is afoot against known criminals in this country or persons who have breached certain laws in this country, because there is criminality and civil—not only in respect of persons like that who are known—but also in terms of legislation as we deal with legislation.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion before us, therefore, ties entirely back to the very flippancy again on the FATF obligations and on the global forum obligations—because contained in the recommendations and immediate outcomes that global forum recognizes should be applied using the FATF standards—we are obliged to treat with private members' clubs. As you know, we are in a joint select committee. I sit as a Member and, therefore, I am not permitted to prematurely deal with the work that is inside the joint select committee. The legislation is borne upon the back of consultation. It is borne upon the back of drill down of statistics and, far from what the Member for Oropouche East actually said, the Minister of Finance is, for the first time in the history of the Ministry of Finance, providing statistical information to Trinidad and Tobago,

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which is why I want to give a compliment to the Minister of Planning and Development, because it is the Minister of Planning and Development that is pushing the National Statistics Institute, something which has stood outstanding for years [*Desk thumping*] which the IMF, which the international agencies, et cetera, have said: “You have got to get your metrics right.”

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are not just mere words, because the words are demonstrated in the fact that the Office of the Attorney General has come to this Parliament on every Bill that we pilot with statistics in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We lay out—whether it is in respect of our children, our prisons and our court system—who and what we are, based upon Trinidad and Tobago’s information.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand in full support of the very hard work and hard task that the Minister of Finance has done and has to manage. I ask the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have patience in terms of the receipt of their monies by way of salary, et cetera. I ask them to never erase from their memories the bad decisions that took us to this position that we are in right now, where the price of oil, even though it is at roughly \$56, \$57 a barrel, means nothing to us because of the corporation tax write off that is permitted pursuant to a terrible decision of the last Government. I ask the people of this country to bear in mind why we need taxation of this type, why we need to find money to pay salaries. You see, it is very easy for people to sit back and hope you forget, you know, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot forget, every day that we manage this situation, every day when there is a cry coming at your constituency doors—we all have—hon. Members opposite and on this side, when cries come to your Ministry for assistance and you just do not have the money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, far from the other side saying this is something not to be done, the frontline speaker for the Opposition has just said that they want it withdrawn and not supported, this needs to be supported now. If we are to pay a salary on time, we need revenue. It was a very famous Jamaican Prime Minister who said it takes cash to care, and he was right. When you are left in an environment where some are well fattened, well heeled, roll in to the Parliament, and we hear now talk coming from other sectors, et cetera, about poor men, you know, I find that embarrassing. I find that an indignity to hear some voices talk about that knowing what happened.

We are going to move beyond the realm of just knowing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is going to be proved, and all that I can say is that this country has a due process

and a balance about it. I call upon the Opposition to do the correct thing, which is to support law which they have done themselves; law which they have promoted in a manner in which they now condemn only because they are in Opposition; and law which they know is required and that we get on with the business of Trinidad and Tobago, because we have people to feed and needs and interests—as public servants as we all stand in this Houses—to meet. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The AG indicated at the beginning that this was a matter of law—and we have no argument with that—and he proceeded then to deal with a number of legal matters. I must admit I am not equipped to deal with all the legal matters that he raised, but I do want to make some corrections to things that he said that might affect the perception of the general public about the conduct and management of affairs and governance of the People's Partnership Government when we were in office and, secondly, about the challenges that the present administration now faces being the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The first thing that I want to mention is the issue of the Global Tax Forum, and I say that because I want to correct something that he said. He basically gave the impression—and I hope that I am interpreting it right, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that we had a deadline to meet in 2016, and we were in danger of missing that deadline, and were likely to be blacklisted and the Minister of Finance went up to Germany and made commitments which, in fact, were not acted upon.

Now, you would remember that in 2015 we had an election and what it means then is that a deadline of 2016, in the midst of an election year, becomes very, very difficult to meet on something as important as global financial commitments that have to do with the honouring of international obligations. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold a sec, hold a sec. I am in the Chair, Member for Naparima. Right? So do not speak before I get the opportunity to. The Member for St. Joseph, the finance Minister, I would like to hear the Member in silence please. Kindly proceed, Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes. On that basis, therefore, the Minister of Finance did go to Germany, but he did not travel alone. He went with a representative from the Board of Inland Revenue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the reason for that is because of two issues: one, he wanted to make sure that the BIR understood, first of all, what was going on in the global forum in Germany; secondly, what were the commitments that he was going to meet and, thirdly, to deal with the issue of the reality of continuity in a situation in which an election was imminent in 2015. On the basis of that, they got the global forum in Germany to agree to postpone the deadline to 2017. [*Desk thumping*] The 2017 deadline, therefore, was something known to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as Government, because the head of the BIR was the continuing person who remained with the information regardless of which Government was in office. [*Desk thumping*]

So the obligation to meet the 2017 deadline in a situation in which the People's Partnership lost the election in 2015 remained with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, now the Rowley Government of 2015. [*Desk thumping*] From 2015 to 2017 is nearly two years, depending on which month you choose. It might be more than two years, but depending on which month that you choose. So in that period the Attorney General, the Minister of Finance and others who were working on this had two years in order to meet the deadline or to rectify the situation, and the deadline of 2017 was suggested and agreed upon because the BIR gave the Minister of Finance the assurance that the 2017 deadline could be met. [*Desk thumping*]

So the first thing I want to correct is that we are responsible for something that was meant to be achieved in 2017, because we made the commitment. The second thing that I want to correct is that they did not have the time or, could not somehow do it because of things that we had not done on done and, therefore, clearly this is an obligation of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. They were in office from September 08, 2015 and it is the obligation of the Government and it was the obligation of the Government to meet the 2017 deadline and to achieve the objectives for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The second issue that I want to deal with is the matter of this Statistical Institute. I have no problem with the Minister of Finance complimenting the Minister for seeking to establish the statistical institute and to make it a reality, but I think the Minister knows very well that when she came to office, the Statistical Institute was approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Manning Cabinet.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Our Cabinet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member. [*Crosstalk*] Leader of Government Business, I am on my legs and I would not tolerate the crosstalk. Member for Princes Town, I am on my legs and I will not tolerate the crosstalk also. Right? We have two more minutes—just under two minutes—we will break for tea. So continue Member.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I just want to finish this point. It may have been that the Statistical Institute, as an entity, was established by another Cabinet, but all the actions taken to establish the institute, including preparation by the same IMF who were involved in it and the Cabinet Note which indicated how that institute would be established—how it would be formulated and how the board would be formed, et cetera—all of that had gone to the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Cabinet and that is a fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

There was one other matter I think that it was necessary to address, and that is the issue of—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Rather than go to your next point, at this time we will suspend for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. When we broke for tea I was just going to make the point that the Attorney General in his contribution pointed out that there was nothing wrong with taxation, with which I agree—we agree on this side—and that the taxation measures of the kind identified here, that is to say by table, by instrument, et cetera, was in fact put in place by the People's Partnership Government. I do not deny that because the legislation is there. He said that we, in fact, deepened the law having to do with this particular business which is the gambling business. I want to say that we do not have a problem with taxation per se, but when you take the methodology, the approach of taxation here and when you marry it to other issues of taxation that were raised in the budget that is where we begin to have a problem. I think the Attorney General was, perhaps, a little harsh on my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East in making it out like he was totally against the business of taxation.

Now, there were many issues raised by the Minister of Finance which I would like to deal with, but I would like to deal with them during the course as I raise issues in this particular debate on this Bill. Now, when you read the document in which—when you read the Motion, you see that the Motion says very clearly that the purpose of this Motion is for the purpose of raising revenue to meet expenditure, Madam Speaker. I want to ask the question in relation to that general statement: Is it better to live within our means—the Attorney General bewailed the fact that money was difficult, that it was short—or do we find money to hang our hat higher than we can reach as a country? I think this is a fundamental issue because it presents the dilemma of revenue and expenditure.

If you re-prioritize the pattern of expenditure to suit a more modest revenue then your whole approach to the financial aspect of the management of governance becomes very different than if you look where ever you can without interfering with the pattern of expenditure and simply cut expenditure a little bit, you then have the challenge of finding revenue where ever you can to meet the expenditure that you have. I think this is a fundamental issue that the Minister of Finance, in my view, given the two years and more that he has been there, has not really resolved.

Do you manage the budget so that we live within our means and, therefore, live within our revenue or do you set the expenditure and then try to find the revenue? It is this approach to the taxation, where taxation becomes central to the management of fiscal policy that we have a problem with, because the end result of that can well be arbitrary taxation as we feel we have here in this particular budget, not just this one instance of the gaming tables and accessories, but the issue of taxation itself. I think that it is reasonable looking at what is happening here to argue that there is an element of arbitrary taxation which we are being asked to support here.

Now, let us look at the Order published in the *Gazette*. In that order, taxes are payable by gambling device and there is a catch-all phrase for every other table or device not mentioned above. So anything you use for gambling is taxed. Now gambling is a business. It involves investors. The investors do it to make money and they do make money. Gambling ought to be regulated. We brought a Bill to support the regulation of gambling which is now before the joint select committee. Gambling has to be managed in an economy and in a society because there are social impacts and gambling, as any other business, must be taxed. I do not have any problem with those issues. Gambling is a business. People invest in it as a business, they make money. It ought to be regulated; it has to be managed and it has to be taxed. I am clear on that.

The tax here is different though. All right? It differs from corporate tax which has now gone up by 5 per cent for all industries in the country, which has gone up by another one per cent for every \$1 million profit that you make, or at least for anyone making a million dollars profit or more, and it has gone up for banks by 10 per cent. So that the tax on the banks is really 11 per cent more and tax on any business making a million dollars is six per cent more. One may say that there is a punitive element in the tax for successful businesses.

The assumption behind corporate tax and, generally, business taxes is that businesses will comply, they will file their tax returns and the more people paying tax—that is to say the wider the net, Madam Speaker—the more revenue one can collect. But, in this instance, taxes are based on the declaration of tables, on the declaration of machines and on the declaration of devices, and it will require inspection of the premises, I am sure. I suspect that another method of taxation might well be to tax every transaction.

The Attorney General—no, the Minister of Finance mentioned the roulette tables spinning every 20 seconds. Now, that would mean taxing every bet, and it may in fact be too difficult to track. I do not know. It might leave room for error. But a dollar tax or two dollars tax on every bet that is made in a casino or a gambling place would probably yield more money than this method of taxation. I simply want to present that point of view to the Minister of Finance, to this honourable House and to the population. It will yield a lot of money.

I heard the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda some days ago speaking on the manipulation of visitor tax by Sandals Hotel in that particular country, which is a matter of some relevance in Trinidad and Tobago today. So, it might be that if you had a transaction tax that it might be possible to manipulate that transaction tax. I do not know. But I am sure that it can be done and I am sure that the Government is concerned about how you get an honest system to work efficiently. I am clear about that.

When you read the budget speech and the Minister's statement on the gambling houses—I do not want to read the speech here, it is about three or four paragraphs. I do not want to read it here—when you read that and you see his stance in this particular thing what this means, it says very clearly that they feel or the Minister, anyway, feels that this is an industry that should be heavily taxed. I mean, I do not have any problem with that if they are making a profit. Okay?

In this instance, it seems to me an assumption is made about the value of each device in terms of income and that may well be the subject of debate. I am not

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sure that with the 100 per cent increase on each one that each one equally makes a significant amount of money. So that by taxing each of these things like that, there might be in the assumption an unfairness. There is no way of knowing which machine or device or table makes how much money. I think that is also a problem with the taxation methodology.

I do not know whether casinos and other betting establishments make a lot of money. The Attorney General says they make billions of dollars. The Minister of Finance points out that they really are quite lucrative and that they pay little taxes. I do not know what the numbers are. I do believe that they should pay their fair share of taxes. I would be fooling myself if I claim to know whether these taxes are too low or too high or just right, but when I look at them carefully, I want to make a few points related to that—I do not know. Time will tell, I suspect—but the jump in the rates of taxes from what it was to what it will be is truly enormous. You are talking about 100 per cent increase in most instances. While a fair share of taxes is desirable, the system of taxation must also be fair, and I think that is a reason for concern. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, what I do know for a fact is that we are living today in a declining recessionary economy. Taxes on all businesses in this country, including the taxes just imposed in the budget, are too high in Trinidad and Tobago. The high cost of doing business and the threat of lower profits will prompt the passing on of cost to the consumer so that all citizens will eventually bear the negative effect of high taxes in a shrinking economy where loss of jobs, loss of income and higher prices are very real.

One of the bad things about the gambling industry is not, let us say the social effect and so on here with which we acknowledge, but is that it is unregulated. I am glad that legislation is coming for that, legislation that we initiated that has been continued and we are very glad for that. It enjoys a kind of unofficial status—[*Crosstalk*—no, no, why would I do that—and that is the nebulousness about these gambling houses which are called private members' clubs and so on.

But the bad thing about the industry is that it is not supported by a thriving tourism industry, Madam Speaker. From an economic point of view, we need to understand what this means. So that the demand for gambling is limited, by and large, to the local population. The buoyancy of the industry is affected by the state of the economy which is bad now, and growth and profitability are stymied by the absence of a tourism industry. So there are no foreign gamblers, foreign investors, so to speak, in the day-to-day gambling business.

5.15 p.m.

It is also true that the runaway unpredictable crime situation has made a significant night and entertainment economy—which generally is associated with things like the gaming industry, and which would normally support a gambling industry—impossible. So between the absence of a viable tourism industry and the absence, because of the crime situation of a night industry, that has entertainment and leisure, and this and that, and the other, and the gambling, these gambling houses, in a way, are in an industry all on their own. So that this industry is not located in any kind of developmental context which takes things like business clusters, economic growth, job creation, social impact and other considerations into account. It is an industry on a limb, first unofficial, now to be regulated and effectively taxed, but without a supporting framework and infrastructure. And that leads me to the sixth item on the Schedule where the Liquor Licences Act is being amended by repeating and substituting clauses.

I had earlier, as I spoke here a few minutes ago, raised the issue of not just a fair share of taxes but a fair system of taxation. The gaming tax applied to liquor houses is \$120,000 in respect of the roulette wheel, which is \$114,000 more than they were paying before. Now that is a big jump for a small industry in which their main business is not really gambling. Their main business is either food or alcohol, or maybe pool tables, a sports bar, things like that, and you have this, and you have this sudden jump of over \$100,000 for them, because when you look here you see the increases which are about 100 per cent for everyone in the big casinos and, basically, the taxes have doubled for every table or device. And, secondly, you have the challenge in the smaller businesses of these roulette wheels being taxed by 100 per cent—not by 100 per cent but going up by a significant amount of money to \$120,000 from a miniscule sum before.

Now there is a moral argument and a sociological argument against gambling, but this is a collection of taxes Bill for an industry that already exists, Madam Speaker. So we need not go there now, and, in fact, I will not deal with it. Whatever my personal views, I will simply deal with this matter as a taxation matter. For our purposes a gaming house is a business enterprise, gambling is an industry, and, as I said, it needs to be taxed. But I want to examine the approach to taxation for this industry and how this relates to the approach to business taxes generally. In this Bill, the taxes have been doubled for the big establishments, and there may be arguments about whether the taxes are too high or too low still—the Minister argues that it is too low still—and whether all these businesses who employ people and keep money circulating are in fact going to survive. I expressed my concern for the jump to \$120,000 for those people with liquor

licences because it is an exorbitant fee. It is a very, very stressful fee.

Which business, big or small, can make that kind of jump in terms of the revenue it must give to the State and survive? And, therefore, this is a major problem. And I am not sure that the roulette wheels in the small establishments should be treated in the same way as those in the big gambling houses, because even if you look upon this in moral terms or in sociological terms as a sin tax, you still have to apply the issue of not just a fair share of taxes but a fair taxation system, and I feel that it is important for this to be considered regardless of the industry. Once we legalize the industry it is legitimate, and once it is legitimate we have to apply those kinds of principles to it.

Now if you have a revenue-raising tax that is a sin tax and it is exorbitant two things can happen, one, a number of small establishments may give up their machines or close their establishment which will have a negative impact on local communities—I am not talking about the sociological effects now, I am talking about business—as well as the national economy. And it is possible with the higher taxes that some businesses may decide that they do not want to pay, they do not want to be in the business; it is possible, I do not know. But the second issue is that the anticipated revenue from these increased taxes may not materialize, and that is another issue. The Minister knows that he had a problem generating the revenue he projected in the 2016 budget, that he had a problem generating the revenue he projected—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 15 more minutes. You may proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes. Thank you. Thank you for the time, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] He knows that he had a problem in 2017 with anticipated revenue, and it may well be that he may find himself in the same position for a third year in a row. I remind him, as he himself knows, that the deficit last year was \$12 billion-plus and, therefore, this issue of the relationship between revenue and expenditure is important. And I raised the other issue at the beginning of my contribution during this section that it is a big difference whether you generate revenue to meet expenditure or whether you design expenditure to meet your revenue sources.

Now what is the point of taxes if they undermine your collection targets? What is the point of taxes if they make the economy worse? Is it too much to ask that taxation measures make sense? The taxation policy of any country should support growth and development, and if it does not do that then there is a problem

with the policy. Taxes which can build confidence and stimulate business activity and investment will generate needed revenue because benefits will spread with positive impact on investment, jobs, growth, and the circulation of money. Taxes which kill businesses will depress the economy and the Government will undermine its own objective of generating revenues, what is the point of it? The other thing that is not clear is whether, notwithstanding these taxes now being imposed on tables, machines and devices, in all manner of enterprises, regardless of size, volume of trade, earnings or profits, whether corporation or business taxes based on declared profits will also apply. I suspect they will. Will they, Minister? They will have to pay corporate taxes as well?

Mr. Imbert: They do not pay.

Dr. B. Tewarie: They do not pay?

Mr. Imbert: If we pass the Bill, they “go” pay.

Dr. B. Tewarie: They will now pay. So they are taxed on their tables and devices, and they also pay corporate tax.

Mr. Imbert: If “yuh” pass the Bill, [*Laughter*] or support the Bill.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Now I want to alert the Government to the fact that what we have seen in the last two years is increased taxes in every sphere and more taxes everywhere. With that we have seen a loss of business and consumer confidence leading to no investment. The Courts investment is—I think my colleague mentioned the C3 investment, the water park investment in Chaguaramas, all of these were initiated and begun in the time of the People’s Partnership. I mention only these three because there is no need to mention more.

We now know through the IMF, and no thanks to this Government and the state agencies now personally managed by the Minister of Finance, because I know he takes an interest in these matters, and this is contrary to the principles of good governance, that the decline last year was minus 6 per cent, we just learnt from the IMF. And the projection—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: It is in the Review of the Economy.

Dr. B. Tewarie: It was not when we came to the budget. It was 5.1, I remember when I looked at the numbers there, Madam Speaker, but it is now six per cent according to the IMF, and we told them it is going to be more. And the projections for 2017 had been revised to minus 3.2, and that was moved to a deeper decline from minus 2.3. So, things are not good. They are good only in the

banking and the financial sector, and many of those banks are generating their revenues, in fact, from outside. Not that they are not making money here, but a lot of the new revenue is from outside.

So, we have to be careful how we manage the taxes. If the taxes have the effect of not stimulating the economy and we have no other measures to stimulate the economy and get us out of the recession that are actually working then we have a problem, and it is only a matter of time before the combination of high taxes, closure of businesses, loss of jobs, the contraction of the economy puts us into that kind of situation in which the worst can happen, Madam Speaker, and we need to be sensitive to that. And I am saying it in good faith, and if you want to take it as advice, I am giving it as good advice, it does not have to be taken. So the citizens of this country can anticipate another year, perhaps, of revenue shortfall—I am almost certain of that—despite the higher taxes from everyone. We will have another year of deficit, Madam Speaker, another year of decline and another year from the people's point of view of suffering, and I think that is what we have to manage. Besides the taxes the main challenge for us is how to get out of the recession, how to get the investment, how to grow the economy, what to do to cause stimulus to generate confidence.

Now there are other complex issues here, and I wanted to read from the IMF report but I will go on to some other things and maybe make reference to it. Another issue is the issue of exemptions on automobiles and on motor cars, and motor cycles. I would not go into the details of the benefits except to say that the benefits favour smaller, less powerful electric and hybrid cars and motorcycles. This raises issues about the sustainable development framework for the country, the move to reduce carbon emissions, which we applaud. It is something that we also did and you are building on it—government continuity should really be like that—and incentivizing behaviour in the direction of cleaner, greener automobiles. But automobiles are all imported and it is a huge drain on foreign exchange in the country, which is under pressure of depletion on the one hand, and pressure as well as price on our TT currency in relation to others.

So how do you deal with this huge foreign exchange issue? Well, we could go back to donkey cart, or we can have a rational transportation policy; a meaningful adjustment of the exchange rate which would increase the price of cars since you have gone ahead already and increased the price of fuel, and there is a lot of dissatisfaction on the ground by used-car dealers who feel discriminated against by both taxation policy and the management of foreign exchange allocations. So the hybrid and electric car incentives may facilitate movement to cars with cleaner

emissions but it will not reduce foreign exchange demand, it will not improve foreign exchange allocation, it will not reduce 700,000 vehicles which we have on the road, it will not improve the traffic jams every morning and evening with its immense cost of time and productivity, it will not improve the public transportation system, and it will not make that big of a dent on sustainable development good practice, even though it is in the right direction. Although I do not wish to be unfair, it is a positive step to incentivize this.

The incentives on motorcycles, what can I say? With the current state of the economy, the lack of a plan of solutions from the Government, and no seeming light at the end of the tunnel we might all end up riding motorcycles and bicycles, which might be good for our health, or some may even go back to the donkey cart. It all depends on the bigger questions I asked, whether we are going to manage within our means and whether we are going to use taxation policy with a little bit of conservatism and with a little bit of restraint. Because the foreign exchange situation without decision action, without new non-energy diversification investment geared towards exports, without significant reduction in imports and new initiatives in import substitution, the foreign exchange situation here is not nice.

Madam Speaker, after next year with depletion at the current rate and no progress in earning more foreign exchange, or in reducing foreign exchange demand, we may well end up with the insecurity of very limited import cover and a deepening crisis. So we need a public transportation solution. We need a rapidly restructuring economy which earns more foreign exchange, and we need a productive economy that supplies more of the goods and services that we use here, what we might call, import substitution. I could give you some solutions, Madam Speaker, but I do not think the Government will take me seriously, I do not think they would listen, and in any case we need confidence to make these things happen. With the imposition of taxes on high-end vehicles I have no problem, except to say that I hope the decision by the Minister to exempt these larger cars before was done without regard to favour as he now tightens the loophole.

Value added tax is amended in this legislation and in the provisional taxes Order. The Customs Act is also amended by this Order. The IMF makes a recommendation in this document based on their Article IV Consultation in October for increased VAT and a more comprehensive VAT. I am asking the Minister here, he may want to reply, if he is likely to take this recommendation and if we can expect another amendment to the VAT legislation before the

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economy begins to grow. This is what I am concerned about. Is a more comprehensive and a higher VAT going to be introduced before the economy begins to grow and before jobs are created in the economy?

On the question of the Customs Act, and without anticipating any legislative action that may be taken with respect to the proposed Revenue Authority, I wonder if the Minister of Finance knows that Customs has the power to make or break businesses in this country, and that they have the power to restructure ownership of business in the economy if Customs is not managed with fairness and if decisions are arbitrary and skewed and subject to either corrupt practices at the level of customs officers, but also to political interference at the level of the Minister or other high officials.

Why do I make mention of these, Madam Speaker, because whatever policies this Government is pursuing at the present time it does not take into account the fact that we are in a recession. There is a severe lack of confidence in the economy which they have exacerbated by their wild behaviour, imprudent pronouncements, and sheer ineptitude, in some cases. It does not take into account that actions need to be taken to simulate jobs and to grow the economy, because we have seen no evidence of the action to be taken. And matters of business confidence and the investment climate are affected by Customs decisions, but Customs decisions can also affect the structure of business ownership in Trinidad and Tobago and this economy. And so when you take into account government policy, the foreign exchange allocation question, taxation initiatives, property tax, Revenue Authority, and strong-arm tactics by the State and its agencies, if you have all of these conspiring to make the issue of partisan interventions with implications for business ownership a big hot issue, this can be very, very explosive.

I will say more on this at another time. I am sure I will have the opportunity, but I alert it because all of these policy measures have very long-term and far-reaching effects which I do not know if they are being taken into account, or if they are being taken into account then there would have to be some malevolence to it. So I raise it. This is the Parliament of the country, I raise it here because it is an important issue, and the IMF, in its recommendations here, suggests things in IMF style which may be good to read and understand, but if implemented injudiciously could well lead to difficulty. I close on that, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017. Madam Speaker, when we look at the Order before us it seems that the most contentious area is in fact section 6 which speaks to the gaming tax and the appropriate measures introduced in the Bill. Madam Speaker, gambling, while not new, is in fact a growing phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago. When one understands the state of the economy, and not only in Trinidad and Tobago but throughout the world, we are going through economic stringent times, Madam Speaker and, therefore, Governments throughout must find measures with which to improve their revenue collection, and, therefore, this Government determined that one such measure is to look at the gaming industry, which to a large extent has been unregulated for quite some time, Madam Speaker, very much unregulated. One cannot stamp out gambling because gambling is a very old vice, Madam Speaker, as old even, I suppose, second to the oldest profession which we are fully aware of. But it is a very old vice, Madam Speaker, but therefore we cannot stamp it out, it goes back through our very history, but what we can do, Madam Speaker, is to regulate the environment. And one of the ways by which we can regulate that, and this Government is a thinking Government; one of the ways by which we can regulate the industry is by putting the appropriate taxes in place, and this is the measure that we are trying to adopt.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to go down a different angle. As the Minister of National Security I want to look at the angle, the nexus between the gambling industry and crime. You see, Madam Speaker, one of the reasons why we have to regulate is to a large extent to see whether or not we can curtail the effects or the nexus between gambling and crime, and criminality and violence in Trinidad and Tobago, like in any other jurisdiction. Studies have shown that it does have a debilitating effect on the law enforcement agencies. There is also a sociological impact on the very nature of your society and your population itself, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when you look at the gambling industry there is a bit of a mix between addiction and corruption; a cocktail mix that lends itself to crime; that lends itself to violence; that lends itself to criminality in almost every jurisdiction. So, Madam Speaker, it is important for us to be very much concerned, especially in the security environment as to the very nature of the gambling industry in Trinidad and Tobago, because, you see, it puts a serious amount of pressure on the security apparatus in terms of the use of manpower resources to track, to investigate, to monitor, and even to make certain arrests, but it also impacts on the very fabric of our society, as I mentioned a while ago.

Madam Speaker, it is said that money is the root of all evil, and gambling is

about money, nothing more, nothing less. Gambling is about money. As a matter of fact, I have been informed that \$1 per bet could bring in a revenue of almost \$9 million.

Madam Speaker, let me give you some illustration and some stats in terms of the revenue with gambling throughout the world. I am looking at a more world scenario. The Endracater from Italy, their gambling, their revenue is about \$1.7 billion per year—\$1.7 billion per year; Costa Rica, sportsbook betting, \$12 billion wagered per year; bets in Thailand, \$21 billion to \$27 billion in wages per year; casino profits in Japan, \$1.9 billion per year; in Canada, \$13.9 billion; in Israel, \$2.8 billion; in Australia, \$1.4 billion; in China, \$562.4 billion. Madam Speaker, it is about money, and where you are talking about money, as we said money is the root of all evil, there is a nexus with crime and criminality, and in Trinidad and Tobago we are no different.

Madam Speaker, the Georgia State University in the United States of America in a study on gambling and crime determined that gambling is strongly related to criminal activity. They found that over 50 per cent of problem gamblers, and those who you call addicted gamblers, Madam Speaker, in their study commit crimes. In addition, the study showed that crimes committed by problem gamblers, while non-violent, often include, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, larceny, sale of drugs, and/or stolen items, shoplifting, burglary, and petty theft or robbery. Sixty-three per cent of gamblers, anonymous members in the study, reported writing bad cheques, and 30 per cent reported stealing from their workplace. Madam Speaker, there is a direct nexus between crime, criminality and gambling. It has been shown by several studies, I just mentioned one. And in fact, the vast majority in that same study admitted that they have been involved in a number of criminal activities to support that addiction.

There is also a nexus between the gambling and alcohol that the study proved. They said that over 80 per cent of pathological gamblers were also involved in heavy drinking, heavy alcoholism, again leading towards a direct nexus with crime, most of the studies have shown. Madam Speaker, when we look at the cartels around the world that have shown, and again I am showing you the nexus, Madam Speaker, because the history has shown the relationship between gambling and crime. The Sinaloa cartel in Mexico, the biggest gang in Mexico right now who is known as El Chapo. He has now been captured. They have smuggled cocaine, marijuana, and so on, but also heavily involved in the gambling industry in the USA, and to some extent in Arizona. The Yamaguchi-gumi in Japan, the largest of Japan's yakuza groups, Madam Speaker, has its base

and origins in Kobe, heavily involved in gambling. The Solntsevskaya of Bratva, Russia, the term “Russian mafia” is known well—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: I think they are here, you know.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: They could well be here, because when I—Madam Speaker, it describes a range of criminal or brotherhood, they call it Bratvas or brotherhood. The largest of it is from Solntsevo district in the southern outskirts of Moscow. A group well known in Europe, one of the most powerful criminal involved in heavy gambling and casinos throughout the world. Who knows, we are still doing the intelligence check, they may well be here; intelligence yet to confirm, but they are all over the world, Madam Speaker.

5.45 p.m.

They have, again, a family of Israel, both brothers were imprisoned some time ago, prolific gambling and embezzlement in the United States. Gambling is about money, money is the root of all evil.

Madam Speaker, we have seen a number of protests here about the gambling industry and so on. There are alternative forms of employment. I have seen through the immigration listing and so on, a number of emigrants in Trinidad and Tobago who are finding employment in Trinidad and Tobago. There are employment opportunities, Madam Speaker. The gambling industry is not the only industry that we have seen reduction in employment or terminations, there are other industries that are suffering the same fate. There are always alternative forms of employment so one cannot use the argument that because of the tax of this gaming industry, employment is being lost. To my mind, based on the revenue streams that I just mentioned, the owners of these very institutions need to take a second look because I am certain that the profits are not transmitted or filtered down to the very workers who are fronting for them at this point in time, Madam Speaker.

The owners need to take a look, and we have to identify the owners because when you look at the kind of cartel arrangement in the gambling industry, we have to and we must—and this is a task for law enforcement as Minister of National Security, I guarantee, we will find the owners, we have to because we have to differentiate whether the owners are involved in any kind of mafia or cartel-type of arrangement which follows the gambling industry. We have to, because there is, as I said, a nexus between the crime and criminality and violence as a result of gambling.

We have seen the response of the local banking industry with the casino phenomenon. If one were to visit several restaurant areas in Trinidad and Tobago, bars, rum shops, one can certainly see either day or night a number of people huddled around the roulette tables, the one-arm bandit as they call it. You can see them huddled around there, some of them no other form of employment, but trying their hands at the gaming industry. You see individuals participating in illegal “Play Whe” or the normal “Play Whe”. So that gambling is becoming—and you look around, if you look at over the last couple of years, you can see the proliferation of gambling institutions throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

There was a time when a casino was a very strange thing in Trinidad and Tobago; you could have identified one or probably two. Now, there is almost a casino on every corner, in every part of Trinidad and Tobago, in the remote areas, in the towns, in the cities. One must ask ourselves, what is the attraction there? One understands that housewives will spend time in the casinos. And there is nothing about class you know, Madam Speaker, various structures in the society, whether you are from the poor, the not so poor, the middle class, the upper class, wherever, there is an attraction to the gambling and the casinos in Trinidad and Tobago.

I mean, we have seen and we have heard a very senior person being murdered just after leaving a casino, it sent shockwaves throughout the society. Madam Speaker, we have to understand and I will continue saying it, money is the root of all evil and gambling is about money. It is about money.

Madam Speaker, we have seen a new type of crime developing as a result of the, again, proliferation of these casinos throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and it causes us to believe that the gambling industry has opened the door for other heinous types of activities. People have lost their lives due to transactions gone bad, institutions have been robbed in search of winnings and sometimes in the more legitimate establishments, the type of individuals who participate in activities, as I mentioned a while ago, one would wonder what is the level of attraction that cause them to be involved in this kind of vice. And it is a vice, it is a vice like any other vice, a vice that leads to addiction and corruption and definitely on the road towards crime and criminality.

Madam Speaker, when we look at this tax on some gambling-related crimes in Trinidad and Tobago, I draw some, permit me just to draw some reference from some of those that were done in Trinidad and Tobago. And I quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* an article by Jensen La Vende published on Tuesday 25 July,

2017:

“A Chaguanas man was killed by a security guard yesterday afternoon, after he and another man attempted to rob a casino.

According to police reports, around 3 pm Vishnu Dowlath, of Enterprise, Chaguanas, went to the Lucky Phoenix along Tobago Road, Enterprise and attempted to rob the casino. However, one of the guards confronted him, there was an exchange of gunfire and Dowlath was hit. Dowlath died...”

Casino, money, evil, crime.

Newsday article by Naline Seelal published on Friday 29 September, 2017:

“One of two men who attempted to rob a bar at the corner of Gordon and Broadway streets in Arima was shot dead ...by an off-duty policeman, who at the time, was gambling at a roulette machine in the bar.

According to the reports, at...4.45 p.m PC Manmohan was gambling when two young men one armed, entered the bar and ordered everyone to lie on the ground. PC Manmohan who has a licensed firearm, confronted the bandits and was shot at. He drew his weapon and returned fire, hitting one of suspects who slumped to the floor...”

Gambling environment again, Madam Speaker, gambling environment, the attraction because money is there.

Trinidad Guardian article by Radhica Sookraj published on Sunday, July 07, 2017:

“A large amount of liquid cash floating in the economy is luring businessmen from Eastern Europe to...”—this is the article, you know, Madam Speaker—“...luring businessman from Eastern Europe to set up private members’ club in T&T.”

You see the nomenclature? Private members’ club in Trinidad and Tobago, a disguise certainly, and that is one to the avenues in which they break the law or get beyond the law, I should say, the private members’ clubs.

Many believe that regulatory controls, and this is the public saying that, and this is what we are attempting to do, to regulate the industry so that we take some of the profit out of it and pay the taxes that are due to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have to, we must be able to regulate the industry.

Madam Speaker, another example I will quote, this one is published by Gail

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Alexander on Wednesday, June 10th. I think this was as long as 2015, I am going back in time, but yet it will contribute to the debate.

“There is strong belief that T&T’s casino sector has been infiltrated by organized crime elements...”

And this is a statement based on investigation by the reporter.

And therefore, regulation is important if we are to take away the crime from the gambling environment. We must be able to do that, Madam Speaker, because there is a contribution from the gambling environment to crime and criminality. Because, again, when people who are addicted to this gaming industry, this gambling aspect, they have to find some way to support their vice, because most of them live beyond their means, and we all know in gambling that you win some and you lose some, as a matter of fact, you will lose more than you win, and therefore, they have to find a way to support their vices.

And one of which they do, as we mentioned before, through robbery, forgery, bad cheques. Sometimes we have seen people in terms of the sociological aspect, whole families are destroyed based on the addiction of either a parent or a sibling. They have sold part of their real estate, part of their products, part of their league, so as just to support their addiction. It is an addiction just like any other addiction and it also leads to the commission of crime and criminality and violence to some extent. I have shown where a number of people have died as a result of this addiction to gambling.

As I mentioned a while ago the cocktail is really between the addiction and the corruption because there is also corruption involved because there is cause for somebody to protect them in their nefarious activities.

Madam Speaker, there is also an area of money laundering that takes place, another area of crime that is closely linked to the gambling industry, and as I said, not only in Trinidad and Tobago. The whole question of money laundering, in fact, was very prevalent in the gambling industry for years throughout its history. So one of the areas where, I said, you bring in dirty money and you take out clean money. As a matter of fact, it is one of the places where money laundering started, in gambling industry. And so it is an area, again, that we have to look very closely at.

The Financial Action Task Force—I am sure that the AG may have touched on that—under recommendation 28 requires that certain listed business should be subject to regulatory and supervisory measures. Private members’ clubs or casinos are identified as a listed business under section 1 of the Proceeds of Crime

Act, Chap. 11:27 of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. So they are subjected to recommendation 28 of the CFATF regulations.

And accordingly, Madam Speaker, recommendation 28 requires that private members' clubs are to be subject to comprehensive regulatory and supervisory regime that ensures that they have effectively implemented the necessary anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism measures. At a minimum, casinos should be licensed. Competent authorities should take the necessary legal or regulatory measures to prevent criminals or their associates from holding or being the beneficial owners of a significant or controlling interest, holding a management function in or being an operator of a casino.

Madam Speaker, we do not know, we go under the impression that private members' clubs are owned by their members. That is not true, Madam Speaker, there is always an owner; there is somebody who owns everything. So this camouflage about it is owned by the members, well if it was owned by the members, I do not think we will see any strike or anybody protesting because the owners, the members, based on the revenue stream that I mentioned, if this was owned by the members, those members would have been so handsomely rewarded that they would not have been protesting, they would pay their taxes and say—they would not, if you follow it logically. But they are owned by someone or somebody and those are the faceless people that we will uncover, we will uncover from the Ministry of National Security's standpoint. Those who remain faceless, they may be nationals, they may be non-nationals, but we have to uncover them if we have to get to the root of this system of gambling within Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we have to be able to put competent authorities to ensure that casinos are effectively supervised under the AML/CFT requirements. And so then the areas must be regulated, there must be regulations. When we look at our own crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago some of those that are related, some of the serious crimes that are involved in gaming machines and so on, involve break-in offences, fraud offences, general larceny, possession of arms and ammunitions, robbery, shooting and some, even murder. We have seen murders in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of people going to collect revenues from the gaming industry, from the slot machines and so on, and those who are bent on nefarious activities await them and pounce on them and murder has resulted.

The police reports have shown that a number of these offences—and they contribute to our statistics; they contribute in all the areas of serious crime within

Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, this initiative by the Government to introduce taxing on this gaming industry is designed as part of the regulatory framework, it is designed as one in which to streamline the industry, put a certain kind of pressure on the industry. It is almost like a cleaning, to some extent. And while there is resistance to this, there are even further regulatory measures that should be adopted because, as I mentioned, there is that nexus; there is that relationship between crime, violence and criminality and the gambling industry. And we have seen brothers kill brothers, sisters kill sisters, siblings, households wreaked because of the gambling, because of that addiction and because of corruption which, I said, are the two cocktails.

Madam Speaker, I believe and I sincerely believe that the measures that are adopted to regulate this industry would help us in treating with crime and violence, would assist us because it will take away, to a large extent, the profits; it will take away the profits out of the gaming industry, it would reduce their profits significantly. But, more importantly, we in the Ministry of National Security have to also do some work which we intend to do, because we have to understand the dynamics. To a large extent, the gaming industry in Trinidad and Tobago is not operating in isolation.

In today's world we treat with a network of criminal enterprises, there is a network of criminal enterprises in terms of transnational organized crime. And research has shown throughout the world in a number of jurisdictions there is an interconnectedness, there is a communication, there is a transfer of money and so on between those industries especially in the gaming industry, especially in the gaming and gambling industry. And we have seen that there are a number of foreign interventions who bring, what we consider, their networks that tie the Trinidad and Tobago situation, because as I mentioned a while ago, the gaming industry in Russia, in China, in Thailand, in the USA, in Colombia, in Brazil, in Asia, in the Caribbean and in Africa, it is a network and that is why sometimes to a large extent, the profits of these very institutions do not even remain or even contribute to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The larger part of the profit leaves this country, Madam Speaker, and what we get are basically at the end, the dregs.

And that is why when you see the people are protesting they are at the lower scale of the revenue, the lower scale of the wage earners in the gambling industry, but we have to identify the bosses. We have to identify the owners and they are the ones who must face the regulations, because at the end of the day, Madam

Speaker, the contribution to crime, criminality and violence, there is that nexus [*Desk thumping*] which allows us—so we have to do something about it.

Madam Speaker, so what I would say as the Minister of National Security, I will support the measures in this Order because they will allow us as another measure to treat with crime, violence and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to give my perspective on this issue of the increase in taxation which will come into effect on January 1st by means of this Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017. And the first point I want to make about this is, in fact, the knowledge of the hon. Minister of Finance and which he alluded to, indicating that in the future he may have to consider extending the period of when the Order is gazetted, between the time the Order is gazetted to the time when the Order comes to Parliament. And this here, when the Order was gazetted on the 23rd of October, and you have been given 21 days to have it passed so that the tax could become valid from the 1st of January. And he knew that there is a time period of only 21 days when the Order is gazetted, and that 21 days brings us from the 23rd October to the 13th of November, if my calculation is correct. When I indicated that in a little crosstalk, the Attorney General indicated that it is somewhere further down the line, but that is on Monday.

Mr. Imbert: No. He did not say that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Okay. All right. Well, if he did not say it. But the question is, Madam Speaker, this Order is brought here for discussion as a Motion and it has to be passed before the 13th of November which is Monday. So if there is a difficulty today and the Order has to be confirmed with or without modifications and today is Friday, you have the weekend and Monday is the last day, if there are modifications to be made and we have not agreed on the modifications, what—he says that there is none, but how do you know we are not making modifications on this side? We may probably consider asking for some modifications in it, [*Crosstalk*] and therefore, what will happen to your decision to have this passed?

Madam Speaker: Direct your contribution. Do not be distracted at all. Continue.

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Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, I want to indicate here that there is a certain degree of gross incompetence by the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] and his team. I mean, he is an OJT Minister of Finance, but it is two years now, this is the third year; you would have expected him to learn—

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—the hon. Member, and you would not expect the hon. Member to be coming for the third time since he is the Minister of Finance to indicate now that he may have to consider an extension of the period of time for putting the order on the *Gazette* and bringing it to us here for discussion.

But that is an important consideration, and you cannot push Parliament to do things in the way that you are doing it with just a weekend to pass again, Saturday and Sunday, Monday to come, if it is not done, all your efforts to introduce this taxation from the 1st of January would be thwarted. So that is a fundamental mistake and a responsibility which the Minister of Finance has not taken seriously, and he has obviously admitted to his mistake and he is now seeking, probably on the fourth time he is bringing it, to bring an amendment before so that the 23 days or probably move that to 35 or 40 days as he mentioned. That is the first point I wanted to make.

This Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017, involves about five different areas and changes to a number of the Schedules, and the first on the Order Paper is the Registration of Clubs Act is repealed and the following Schedule substituted, so that is the Registration of Clubs Act being repealed. Then you have the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act being amended in the Fourth Schedule, and then you have the Value Added Tax amended in Schedule II, and the Customs Act is amended in section 45B by repealing subsection (2) and substituting a number of subsections.

All of this is for the Government and the Minister of Finance to enable the Government to have a greater income and an increase in the revenue to meet their expenditure expectations. This is a norm for all governments, but the issue of the way that this Government is dealing with the revenue increase seems to leave a lot to be desired, and the Minister of Finance knows himself that his expectations from previous fiscal years 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017 have not met his expectations as the Minister of Finance. And we wanted to remind him that in 2015/2016 he had predicated that he would have received VAT to the tune of \$12 billion, whereas in the previous year VAT receipt was about \$6 billion. And we indicated to the Minister that that is an unreasonable expectation which will not be materialized and, he obviously, the Minister would have felt that.

So why are we not getting the revenue being generated from the expectations of the Minister of Finance? And he knows fully well and the Government know that their methodologies and their system for collection of taxes leave a lot to be desired; it is weak. The IMF has told them that, they know that themselves, but what have they done to improve their collection of revenues and taxes particularly over the last two years? In fact, they have done nothing, it remains weak, and they are trying all sorts of systems now and all sorts of things with heavy taxation in certain areas which will bring no relief and no increase in the revenue.

And we have heard this Revenue Authority and strengthening of the Board of Inland Revenue from since as early as 2003, Madam Speaker, from a previous PNM incarnation. And when they came into Government they spoke about a Revenue Authority to help them improve their taxation collection, but two years have passed and the Revenue Authority obviously is not going to be fulfilled, because there are a lot of objections into the methodology of creating this Revenue Authority when that Bill come into the Parliament.

And there were discussions in 2009 to 2010 that workers will be displaced and there was a possibility of loss of jobs in the both sectors of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs department. And people became apprehensive and frightened of the loss of jobs. Now, if we were to use the Revenue Authority to help us generate more revenue and that is not going to be fulfilled and that would not come to fruition, what will the Government be doing to create the greater revenue that they want to create?

So they have to find something else and the Minister has not come up with any creative idea or the Government has not been able to put out any type of policy and programme to increase their revenue from an efficient and effective tax collection system. It is weak and needs to be strengthened and we see nothing on the horizon for strengthening that with any type of programme or any type of policy and programme for bringing in the greater revenue and making it much more efficient and effective. So, we wait to see what the Government will do.

6.15 p.m.

Increased taxation in these areas where you are throwing people out of employment, and it is a well-known fact, it has been established that with the increase in taxation in the gaming industry, thousands of workers would lose their jobs. They have been protesting because they are frightened, and as my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East indicated earlier this afternoon, hundreds of people are losing their jobs just from the closure of one members' club or members' casino club. So, you have

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to rethink this, and then why did the Government or the Minister of Finance not decide to have consultation with them before the thought and the implementation of this on the budget statement of 2017?

The people have been clamouring for some degree of consultation, and you would not have experienced the difficulty that you are experiencing now with protests if you had taken the time to have some consultation with the stakeholders in the gambling and gaming industry. You do not bring them to their knees, and that is why they became angry, and they perhaps were so angry that they picketed the Minister's home. They were so angry that even in the sacrosanct Parliament, we saw evidence of the anger and frustration by a number of individuals who are deeply affected in the gaming industry, because of the increased taxation in that sector on the tables and the equipment used for the gambling industry.

So, even though there is a Joint Select Committee that is looking at this issue, they would have expected that the chairman of that committee would have probably had some discussions with them earlier on, and they were begging for it, for him to get a deeper appreciation. Because, as he indicated this afternoon, that he has not been in any casino, he has not been in any members' club, he does not know what is going on there, but they would have educated him, so that he would be in a position to appreciate the dilemma that faces them and would have been able to deal with the matter in a manner that is more appropriate for a government, rather than to hurt the people and to anger and create pain and suffering to the individuals and the workers in that industry. They are workers.

Then, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister opened up one of his statements—in his opening statements, speaking about \$15 billion circulating in the gaming industry and more than 20,000 amusement machines. I wonder if the Minister is speaking from empirical data or is it a guess or whether he has the information that there are approximately 20,000 amusement machines? Now, can you give the House the undertaking that that statement has been substantiated by empirical data? No. I want to proffer that he is making that statement in a vacuum. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please direct your contribution to the Chair.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, sure. He said that revenues will be increased by \$60 million. I do not know. That is a guess. Because many times we have seen in budgetary statements that he expects the revenues to increase by X and Y and at the end of the fiscal year it has fallen short woefully in terms of the revenue collection. So, this Minister, our Minister of Finance in Trinidad and Tobago makes statements, I believe, and I want to indicate that I believe that he cannot

substantiate, and it is glib talk to come to Parliament and say that you are going to collect this revenue and that revenue in this method and that method and it is all guess work. This is why the Government finds itself in trouble, and they want to blame the previous administration for their difficulties that they are experiencing now because of their gross incompetence and inefficiency. [*Desk thumping*]

So they find themselves into economic problems, because I want to say that the Minister of Finance really does not know what he is doing, and his team of advisors, I do not know who they are. Where is the economic advisory board and all the people who are supposed to be advising him, where are they? And the Minister seems to be lost in a quagmire of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the Ministry of Finance. So, these types of measures that the Government has undertaken and he has put into the Order Paper, would not necessarily generate the revenue that he thinks that they will generate, and at the end of this fiscal year we will see the truth in that, that there will be no substantial generation of the revenue by the means that he has brought onto this Order. So this \$15 billion circulating in the gaming industry, some people may say that is a myth, and it is a lesser figure that is coming to his head. Where can he show how this \$15 billion is coming?

Madam Speaker: I think that point has been—[*Laughter*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah, sure. All right.

Madam Speaker: I think that point has been well made by a previous speaker and by you since you have been on your legs. Please move on.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Okay, well, I will move on. He goes on to speak about 686 bars and recreation clubs, 221 members' clubs, 900 altogether, a total of 900 establishments, and the Board of Inland Revenue has 97 of these 900, which is about 10 per cent that is with the FIU. Whose responsibility is it?

Madam Speaker: Member, again, you could move on to another point. That was well articulated too.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I do not think; all right, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have been sitting and listening, it has been.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right. Good. So, this is an issue where it shows gross incompetence, gross inability of the Ministry of Finance, and gross inability of the Minister of Finance to deal with the matters in this industry.

Hon. Member: That has been on record.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah? Fine.

Now, I want to move on to some of the statements that he made. The Attorney General spoke about FATF, and he went to town on the previous Government not doing anything as far as FATF is concerned, and with particular reference to the effectiveness and the compliance of FATF, and he said this was absolute fiasco by the previous administration, which is our administration. You have enjoyed the fruits and the labours of the previous administration by the work of the former Attorney General, Mr. Anand Ramlogan—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Whooo, aaah, whooo.”

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—the hard work that he did.

Hon. Member: “Whooo, whooo.”

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Mr. Ramlogan was a formidable Attorney General who worked with competence and ability [*Desk thumping*] and worked very onerously and honestly to make sure that the requirements of FATF and CFATF were adhered to during these five years, so that you could come now after two years and say that because of the work he was doing you were not placed on the grey list. It is all because of the work that was done in the previous five years which you have attached to for these two years. It could not come just by joke and say that within two years you have done all the work and—that Trinidad and Tobago is not within the grey zone as far as FATF is concerned. There were significant laws that were passed here in the House of Representatives that would have ensured that we kept in line with CFATF and the international FATF organization.

Another point I want to make is a point that the Government always—now, it is their watchword, lack of patriotism by this Opposition. Lack of patriotism. What do they mean by that? It is a word that they have now picked up in the dictionary to try to impress the population and fool the population [*Desk thumping*] because they have nothing more to say, they have run out of things to say about the last administration; blame them, blame them, blame them. The people are fed up with them so they are now coming to say that we are not patriots. But they want to run roughshod over us, want us to agree with everything they do, but once you oppose them, rightly so, they say we are not patriots, and the people are becoming tired and fed up of you saying that. So, if you continue to say that you know what they will say about you. And you could go on social media and read about it.

Madam Speaker: Member, please just relate what you are saying to what is before us. Please!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, thanks.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am responding, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Attorney General making the statements about lack of patriotism, and we had not done any substantial work on FATF and that global forum.

So let me touch a little bit on this global forum issue: 142 countries he said is in the global forum, and T&T is the only jurisdiction and the only one not to be part of that at this moment. So, you are in power for two years and you have not done anything to be part of this global forum? And he indicated that in 2010 there was a peer review, 2011 the previous administration, the Minister of Finance applied to the global forum, and in 2014 he admitted that the PP's administration said that we would be ready to operationalize that very early.

So therefore we lost the election, they came in, and therefore two years they have had to put the mechanisms in place to be part of the global forum. So why are we still the only country out of the 142 countries not to be part of that organization? It is their responsibility. It is the responsibility of this Government.

Then he spoke about money not available for paying salaries. In the two years they have been in office they have spent beyond \$110 billion. More than \$55 billion per year. In two years—in our last two years we spent almost the same, but you could have seen tangible evidence of where people benefited, where the country benefited, and the people were relatively happy because of the way that we utilized the funding to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You have spent \$110 billion, but you said—everywhere you turn in Trinidad and Tobago the people are not being paid. We raised in the House today examples of organizations not being paid from since May last year. So what is happening here? And it is just because this Government does not know how to manage the economy. The economy is at a standstill. [*Desk thumping*]

So, as a result of that, there is no private sector moving into the economic aspects of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government is not creating any new type of infrastructure work and no economic activity, so VAT is being reduced, income tax is being reduced, you are taxing the corporations more and more, you are taxing the banks more and more, so everything is going to grind to a halt. The

small business and the medium enterprises are almost extinguished now. So, when you say that you do not have money available, it is because of your own fault, your own weaknesses and your own incompetence. That is you to blame and the people are blaming you. They are fed up of hearing you blaming the previous People's Partnership administration.

And the Attorney General spoke about the corporation taxes—what caused corporation taxes. You said that corporation taxes were 33.6 per cent of the GDP. You have now gone on to tax the corporations from 25 per cent now to 35 per cent. You expect some of these major corporations to continue with the same alacrity and enthusiasm when they are being taxed 35 per cent? They are going to invest and go outside of Trinidad and Tobago and utilize the same scarce foreign exchange to conduct their business outside, leave Trinidad, exactly what happened in the United States many years ago.

You said that the Government has an obligation to feed their families. Sure, all governments have to take care of their people, they have to make sure that the people are taken care of, but you can hear the loud cries across Trinidad and Tobago now, Madam Speaker. People are crying, people are suffering, people are hungry, they are fed up, they have lost their jobs, and families are in despair, and even worse, when we heard just a while ago the Minister of National Security speaking about the gaming industry and its relationship to crime, which I will deal with in a few seconds, it is very sad, Madam Speaker.

So, I have touched on the areas of what the Minister of Finance spoke about earlier and, let me just deal for a few minutes with the hon. Minister of National Security. The Minister of National Security has tried to apportion a relationship between the gaming industry and the criminal activity, and we got the impression that to probably wipe them out, tax them more and more. So, the Minister of National Security answer to national security problems; one, get rid of the gaming industry because there is a cartel. He is accusing the gaming industry of a cartel relationship inside there and we have to know who are the boys, who are the big ones. But you are in power for two years. You are the Minister of National Security, with everything available for you, and you cannot find out what is happening there? [*Desk thumping*]

Yeah? You have everything in front of you. And he could not give one statistical data to show how many of these matters are before the court or have been engaged with criminal activity. It is old talk. Talk is cheap. You are the Minister of National Security, and we have over 1000 murders already since PNM has been—this administration has been in Government. Then you also have

kidnapping started back. Then you have human trafficking, and you have 48 cases of missing people in Trinidad. Madam Speaker, it is the fear of every young lady or housewife to go outside even to do their own shopping around a mall because of fear of being kidnapped and put into the area of human kidnapping.

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, 48(1) please.

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Member, I know you are responding to the Minister of National Security, but just remember that this is not a crime debate, so to keep it tight. I also want to just remind you that you are addressing your contribution to the Chair, so that your style might be to use “you”, but the Chair is not the Minister of National Security or any other Member on the floor. So just be careful.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. So, Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security has not shown any evidence—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original 30 minutes have been spent, you are now entitled to 15 more minutes, if you wish to avail yourself. Please continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: They have their time to respond just now. I will be completing my speaking time pretty shortly.

But it is very sad, Madam Speaker, when an hon. Minister of National Security could come and speak for almost 40 minutes and just put one issue, the relationship between the gaming industry and gambling to the crime situation, and has not been able to show what he has in fact done, or what he is in fact doing to prevent this increased criminal activity, and the state of the country with regard to crime.

So, Madam Speaker, and honourable, through you, to the Minister of Finance, in summary, whatever you bring as taxes you know that in your heart you will not be able to achieve any of the revenues that you are expecting. After three years you have come to realize that the timing of the publication in the *Gazette* to when we are discussing, it showed your incompetence and you should take note of that. And we want to say that the issue of the gaming industry and the motorcar industry by taxation and taxation will not solve the problem. The gaming industry is here to stay. It is before a joint select committee, and you did this dishonourable thing by coming out of the Joint Select Committee and putting this taxation there all by yourself [*Desk thumping*] not having any regard to the other members of the Joint Select Committee.

So, Madam Speaker, there could be modifications to what they have put in this Order Paper, and we may consider the modifications. We may consider asking for a reduction in the taxes on the gaming industry equipment, and

therefore what will happen to you in terms of your decision to have this order completed by today in time for Monday?

So, Madam Speaker, we are dealing with a Government that does not know where they are going, does not have a direction, whether it is in governance or in the economy, or economic aspects, particularly economic aspects of governance. And this hon. Minister of Finance has lost his way, and he is just operating by “vaps”. And the people are taking note of the weakness and the incompetence of this Government.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you. Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to contribute. Listening to my hon. Colleague, the Member for Caroni East, I lost my way, so I was really trying to get some salient points to rebut, but the only thing I could try to respond to is the big joke about former AG Ramlogan being the best AG. I do not know where he got that from. Madam Speaker, if you want to see an AG in motion, an AG doing work, check the hon. Member for San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am charged with the responsibility for Child Affairs and I am now faced with a situation where a former Attorney General is capitalizing on the inefficiencies in the laws that they passed, and suing the State.

Mr. Al-Rawi: The same Ramlogan.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: The same AG that they claimed was the best AG, passed laws, enacted improperly and now suing the State. Madam Speaker, they need to get real, please! They really need to get real and get serious.

Madam Speaker, as I go into my contribution I want to quote from an article in the *Newsday*, Wednesday 18 October, 2017. The headline, “Gaming industry must come clean”. An open letter to the editor:

“Perhaps the best argument you can provide against the increase in your tax burden is not to protest but to instead take a position of full disclosure and transparency with respect to your operations.

You owe it to the public and to yourselves to paint a full picture with respect to your industry and why it is deserving of a lesser tax burden.”

Madam Speaker, in the article the writer goes on to say:

“Do you do any commercial banking yourselves? Do you dutifully pay NIS and health surcharge for your ‘many’ employees?”

“Sell us! Don’t just rely on a knee-jerk emotive issue like the continued employment of your staff. Argue a case based on facts and figures. And do not argue that a more ameliorated tax rate helps you to employ people, because to do so is to inadvertently petition for my tax dollars to indirectly subsidise your business.

“Perhaps it is only after a full picture is provided that the public can find a reason to rally behind you and your cause.

Until then I have to believe the assertion that you are in fact paying less than your fair share. And given the social and economic impacts, I am also bound to ask myself: have we been wrong to allow you to grow unchecked for so long?”

And, Madam Speaker, this was written by a gentleman from Cascade, and that is the simple matter of what we are debating here today. For too long we have allowed this industry to go unchecked. For too long we have allowed them to grow and expand and to railroad and to make a lot of money without giving back their fair share.

Madam Speaker, some people may argue that gambling is wrong for religious reasons. Some people may be against the industry for different factors. But the truth is, gambling has always been a part of our society. As a matter of fact, I was reading the *Bible* just the other day and I came across the crucifixion story, and they were talking about the soldiers casting lots for Jesus Christ robe. So, gambling was around from time immemorial, and whether or not we like it, whether or not we implement laws, people are “gonna” find ways to gamble. So, we have to face the fact, accept it, and just regulate the industry and learn how best we can earn some income from it.

I heard the hon. Minister of Finance quote that it is a \$15-billion industry. How much of this is trickling back down? How much of this is trickling back down into society? This \$15-billion industry is impacting on lives, impacting on homes, impacting on children. During the budget debate when we had representatives from the different casinos or private members’ clubs coming here and protesting, and making assertions, I was following keenly online, and I encountered a number of stories, but one stood out to me. It was a lady who was talking about her husband going into a particular members’ club almost every pay

day and then come back home without money, and then taking out that frustration on the wife and on the children. Madam Speaker, there is a social and economic burden that we must address, and the revenue we gather from this, it may not be much, because they may not comply, but whatever we can get we can use it to establish more safe houses for victims of domestic abuse. We could use it to put social programmes in place to address children [*Desk thumping*] who are getting involved in gambling.

Just the other day my driver said to me, he said, “Madam Minister, I need to talk to a particular principal of a primary school in Tobago East.” I am like, “Why?” He said, “You know, I heard on the block that little boys in Standard 4 playing wappie.” I was like, playing “Wappie, how are they exposed to wappie?” And he called a particular child, and I say, that child’s family does not gamble. But, Madam Speaker, you see what is happening is that when you are in your school setting you are influenced by people from different backgrounds. So, a child might come from a particular home where gambling is the norm, he will come into the school and then encourage or influence his peers or her peers to gamble. So, we have to see how we could use some of the revenue we could gain from this particular tax regime for social—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, when they were—

Madam Speaker: Okay! Please continue, hon Minister.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, when they are contributing I try to listen, eh. So as I was saying, Madam Speaker, we are “gonna” use some of the revenue from this to ensure that we put the measures in place to address some of the socioeconomic challenges that would arise from problematic gambling, as the Member for Oropouche East would have mentioned, [*Desk thumping*] or addictive gambling.

Madam Speaker, I do not understand when people are saying that the industry is suffering and if we put on additional fees on the tables they would not be able to survive. If the industry was so volatile and could not withstand the challenges, how come every other day members’ clubs are popping up all over? Tobago used to be real quiet. Down Canaan/Bon Accord used to be really, really, really quiet. Every time I am going home you have to pass through traffic jam because a number of clubs pop up, casinos, and full of people.

6.45 p.m.

People come, Madam Speaker, every weekend and they spend out their money to come back down, and a lot of the times, sorry to say it, my very good

friends and our sisters from this side of the water are the ones coming over and frequenting these casinos and members clubs. So we are seeing in Tobago now where we have a proliferation of not only members' clubs but also the betting machines in the bars, especially in the countryside.

I know some of the Members opposite would have mentioned the impact. I think it was the Member for Oropouche East, the impact in terms of creating spin-off jobs, so the persons who are going to clean. Yes, that is all well and fine, but we also have to look at the other implications, particularly on gender-based violence, how it could lead towards that, the impact of children and impact on families in particular. [*Desk thumping*] And I know my colleague, the Minister for Social Development and Family Services would speak to that.

Madam Speaker, as we are discussing tax, I want to just cast us all back to something that would have happened during the Standing Finance Committee. Madam Speaker, Tobagonians pay taxes. We purchase cars so we have to pay taxes. We have the members' clubs so we pay taxes. We pay taxes on everything, so that means we are contributing to the national coffers, we are contributing to the economy.

Madam Speaker, I was extremely hurt when during the Standing Finance Committee I heard the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for Naparima saying that allocations to Tobago were a waste of time, free money, [*Crosstalk*] give away—[*Crosstalk*] Yes, I could quote, Madam Speaker, if you would permit me to quote from the *Hansard*. [*Crosstalk*]

“...Madam Chair, I have a question under 007...

No we have not reached there as yet. Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Item 03, what is meant by Representation office and who are the beneficiaries of this annual amount of \$250,000? Tobago freeness. Freeness, free money.” [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, everybody in Tobago—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, they view Tobagonians with a certain level of contempt. The same way, the same way [*Desk thumping*] citizens in Trinidad have a right to go to an elected officer's office, an office that is well appointed, why can Tobagonians not benefit the same way, Madam Speaker? Why is it that an allocation for us to fix our elected representatives' offices is considered free money and freeness?

I remember, Madam Speaker, and it really did hurt me when the Member for Naparima said, “hmm, how much of them across dey, about 50,000, how much billions to 50,000 ah them?” Member for Naparima, that hurt me.

Madam Speaker: Member, direct your question—

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, that assertion by the Member for Naparima hurt me to the core because they consistently, they consistently view the Members of the Tobago House of Assembly, representatives here in this Parliament for Tobagonians with contempt. And it happened again today, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Oropouche East in his contribution tried to insinuate the fact that me, a Government Minister, who—I am entitled to housing allowance. [*Desk thumping*] I am entitled to accommodation. It happened from since I was a little girl.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, when I won the election the former Member for Tobago East told me they would provide housing for you if you do not take your housing allowance. To create this idea that I came here, cap in hand, begging, I want to set the record straight. [*Desk thumping*] I want to set the record straight, because apparently there is this perception that Tobagonians are begging and we are needy, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, before I entered this honourable House, [*Crosstalk*] I had—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, before I entered this honourable House, I had my own house, I had my own car, I had my husband and I had my children. [*Desk thumping*] I did not come in here begging for anything, Madam Speaker. So for hon. Members in their contribution on tax regime to use it as an opportunity to insinuate that some kind of shady deal happened because the Government provided accommodation for me, I take great, great, offence to that. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Caroni Central—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, you know what, I think what they underestimate is that this quiet still water [*Laughter and desk thumping*] does run real deep. But as we say in Tobago, “doh mash meh corn”. “Doh mash meh corn”. Madam Speaker, you see when they go down that line, they insulted Tobago in the Standing Finance Committee, “ah take it”. “Dey go and insult Tobago further

by trying to imply that I came here to try and make something.” Please, please. [Crosstalk] The Member for Oropouche East insinuated. I came here, Madam Speaker, with everything. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central asked the question, how could we create an environment to attract investors? It would be difficult for us to attract investors to Trinidad and Tobago when our colleagues on the other side keep bad mouthing the country—

Hon. Members: “Ohhh!”

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes. You all are very unpatriotic at times. [Desk thumping] You are. They always preach doom and gloom—

Hon. Members: No way.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: One of the Members on the other side said we send away 400 terrorists. How “yuh” expect people to want to come and invest in your country if you keep on putting that image out there? Madam Speaker, they are aspiring to be leaders when they tear it down, when they mash it up. If the opportunity comes for them to lead, how are they going to fix it? How are they going to build it up? Work with us to ensure that we have a Trinidad and Tobago that is stable, a Trinidad and Tobago that could move ahead, instead every single day you come in this honourable House to spread lies, half-truth and innuendos. Madam Speaker, forgive me for saying the word—forgive me, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Just withdraw the word—

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I withdraw the word, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Please forgive me. Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central also spoke about us having to learn to manage. Madam Speaker, we have been managing our finances. We have been managing and trying to run this country within our means. [Crosstalk] If they continue to live in fantasy land as though money is flowing around Trinidad and Tobago; [Desk thumping and crosstalk] if they continue to live in a fantasy land, how could we get the population to understand that we are going through difficult times and we all have to adjust? We are asking every member of society to contribute towards the burden of adjustment. That is what we are asking of the gaming industry. That is what we are asking of every single individual.

Madam Speaker, the measures we are discussing here today, they are needed.

We have to ensure that every sector contributes towards rebuilding our economy. Madam Speaker, we cannot have an industry making \$15 billion and not contributing their fair share. We cannot ask the average citizen to make adjustments and to change their lives without those who are making the millions to also contribute. This is a collective responsibility.

Madam Speaker, we are not here working towards going in a next general election. We are working towards restoring Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Well said.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: When I leave this honourable House, I want to leave with my head held up high knowing [*Desk thumping*] that I would have contributed towards leaving a better Trinidad and Tobago for my children and their children to come, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Good legacy.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, where others were afraid to put measures in place or did not have the strength and the ability to make hard decisions, we can do it. I said in my budget contribution, our backs are broad on this side and we are big and brave enough to make these hard decisions [*Desk thumping*] and we are also strong enough to take the licks.

Madam Speaker, it was not my intention to speak very long, but to address those matters that deeply offended me. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you. Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: New leader. Hail to the leader.

Madam Speaker: I am happy to see that the female gender has really livened the Chamber. [*Desk thumping*] But I would still ask that we abide by Standing Order 53. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, methinks that the Government Members are having grave difficulty in defending their own Bill in light of the fact that we have to discuss HDC and THA and other small talks during this debate. But you know what is important, it is important for us to understand that, first of all before I continue, I just wanted to correct the Minister of National Security's statement that he made. He said, the hon. Minister indicated, money is the root of all evil. And I just want to indicate that we do not

have a bartering system here in Trinidad and most parts of the world, we exchange currency for services. And so money is not the root of all evil, however, the love of money is the root of all evil.

So having cleared that up, I wanted to comment on the hon. Minister of Finance—he indicated in his opening statement that the gambling industry is booming. We have revenue taxes—but I heard nothing of what steps would be taken to address the social fallout associated with the gambling. It was mentioned very briefly when the Minister spoke of clinical psychologist point of view, but nothing really as to what the Government is doing. And again it addresses the issue of why it is—we are always focused on the institution and not on the persons who will be impacted. And so, I wanted to find out, I mean, that this PNM administration cannot see that it is seeking to regulate this industry by implementing punitive taxation due to the negative impact it would have on family life and the breakdown in family values if you do not deal with the breakdown in family life and the family values.

So, what is in fact being done while you are putting these punitive taxes in place? For instance, the hon. Minister, Member for Tobago East spoke, and these were her words in her statement:

It may not be much—that was what was said—It may not be much, meaning the collection of taxes, but it could be used for, and the Member identified—well, maybe we could put it for children, we could put it for safe houses. Well we are not too sure what we are going to do with it, it has not been decided as yet.

How can you not decide to put those measures in place and not articulate it among the membership as to what will happen and where it will go? For instance, we have—and I am saying this in light of the fact that the Member for Oropouche East brought several documents showing international best practice and the Minister himself also spoke about best practice. But what was the best practice in terms of the social aspect of the persons who become addicted? What happens with persons like, with the addicts? There is no need for us to reinvent the wheel, Madam Speaker, because there is enough empirical international data that we can glean from and mould it to suit our society.

So I am saying, if there is an addiction to gambling, taxation—as the Minister indicated, he said we will tax because there is an addiction to gambling. So taxation is not an option for helping an addict. You must provide an avenue for rehabilitation and for weaning off of that addiction so that the person does not

return to that form of addiction anymore, as is similar to Alcoholic Anonymous and other agencies such as that.

So I would have thought that with the taxations that were being implemented would have provided for the Government to establish a gambling anonymous mediation centre to help with addicts. But nothing like that was ever mentioned. As a matter of fact, again, I heard the Minister speaking about social aspects, the social issues, the social fallout, but nothing to help, nothing was put in place to actually rehabilitate, to bring persons out of that system, and you know, probably cause them not to go back into that system at all. I did not hear anything about the Government—how they were going to utilize any portion of these taxes to provide for it and I know internationally there is a system in place where the taxes, or the private members' clubs and the casinos, they actually contribute to a fund where the fund pays for the rehabilitation of addicts. [*Desk thumping*] I heard nothing like that. Nothing at all. And you cannot say that we are not concerned about it. We are having these high taxations, but then nothing is being put in place to deal with it, to help with the recovery.

And then of course the Minister would have probably known, if his research was done properly, that places such as Singapore and I believe the Member for Oropouche East just briefly spoke on it, did not go into it, but Singapore is one of those countries that do not allow locals to gamble at all. It is only for tourism and for foreigners to come in and they only have two casinos. Therefore, they have recognized that if they did not do something about it, then their own people would have been in serious problems in terms of being very addictive to this because it is very addictive. And so they took steps to deal with the root problem that would have occurred. But I did not hear anything like that.

You know, the Member for Oropouche East spoke about the mental health issues and it is true, but there is a lack of medication. So, at the end of the day we are asking the Minister, you have all of these taxes which you have indicated that are necessary and so forth, but what do you have to really deal with all the other fallouts that are happening and will continue to happen. What I see is actually worse and this is what I see. I see a lot of the small casinos probably going out of business which a lot of people might say, is no big deal. But I see bigger persons, international persons coming in, filling that void and probably bringing about a greater problem in terms of what both the Minister of Finance and the Member for Oropouche East had spoken about, about that background illegal activity that is present and very real.

And so I do not think that the Government has really thought out this properly and it is important for them to really continue with the engagement, with the

committee that they have started already, to really flesh out everything before coming with a Motion that is really, in fact, short on ideas and short on solutions, because it is very important [*Desk thumping*] that we understand the implications. [*Crosstalk*] And so at the end—

Hon. Members: “Shhh”. Order.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I also listened to the Minister of National Security and I was really disappointed that the Minister of National Security indicated that they will depend on the taxation of the industry to solve crime. And how can we tax an industry to solve crime? As far as I know, Madam Speaker, that is not the way you solve crime. As a matter of fact the People’s Partnership has a track record of bringing down crime and maybe we can offer to them the solutions as to what can be done and it certainly was not taxing and taxing and more taxation.

And so, just having said that about the gambling industry I just wanted to move on to the aspect of—the Minister had indicated that the tyres, there was a 5 per cent for the used tyres prior, 30 for the new and so he harmonized it and made it 35 per cent. And I am saying to the hon. Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, really and truly there are a lot of persons that cannot afford new tyres and therefore they purchase used tyres. It is not the fault of the persons who have deliberately sought to defraud the State by bringing in used tyres under the pretense that it is new tyres. That is the responsibility of the State through its agencies, whether it is customs or immigration or whatever, it is to ensure that the product that is coming in, that is in fact what it said it is.

Therefore, for the Minister to drop a tax so high as this and to harmonize it, it really shows that the Government does not intend to bring the State agencies to accountability, and therefore it is important for us to understand that the taxation does not solve the problem. It just does not. What it does, it causes hardship especially upon persons such as farmers and taxi drivers and all forms of transport, because at the end of the day, they transfer their cost to the public and you would have to understand that a number of persons are losing their jobs, a number of persons are unable to afford the cost of living that has gone up because of the increase of fuel that would have sent up food and everything else. So, as a result of it the cost of living has escalated as a result since the budget was read.

I would have thought that if it is that the Government wanted to harmonize the taxation, they could have brought down the taxes of the new tyres, carried up the used and probably have it across the board for 20 per cent. In that way they do not lose any money. They would have actually gained more money through these

taxes at 20 per cent as opposed to taking up everything to 35 per cent—*[Crosstalk]*—I know you would be lost because you cannot count. And so, it is really—you wonder sometimes, does the Government think through what it is they are doing? Do they think though that there are implications to the measures that they have taken? And then they come to the House and then they accuse us of being unpatriotic because we would not support it. How can we be branded as unpatriotic? We are the Opposition. We stand for the voice of the people *[Desk thumping]* and we bring the Government to accountability. Therefore, it is on this premise that I am suggesting to the Minister of Finance that the Minister, I mean really and truly, sit down with the Opposition to discuss, how can we harmonize really what it is being brought before us, because simply it is not acceptable, not just for us, but for the population at large. You are seeing persons outside arguing, it was not in this House, but you heard it and of course we do not want—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: I repeated that three times already, please go on.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:—we do not want to have that escalated. And how do we not cause it to escalate? It is through dialogue. Dialogue is how we deal with issues. And so, I am not going to take very long, it was just to bring to the point that the greater concern of a larger unregulated industry is an illegal activity, but even with a regulated industry without the proper checks and balances you do not eradicate illegal activity; you could probably enhanced it. And as a result of this, it is important for the Government to reevaluate what it is they are doing, how it is they are doing it and why it is that they are doing it and what it is that they hope to achieve. Because as far I am see, Madam Speaker, the Government has not achieved anything in this last two years and I do not think they will achieve much with this Bill and I do thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion this afternoon and I have been listening all day and it is a bit strange, some of the comments and some of the statements that have been made. Because the Minister of Finance was very clear and very explicit when he indicated that these taxes are basically for two specific purposes. One, to increase revenue and two, to treat with emissions that are affecting the environment.

And so, Madam Speaker, I would just like to deal for a little while with the issue of gaming in Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla

was saying that we are only speaking about taxation, taxation, taxation and there is nothing indicated how we are going to treat with persons who become addicted to gambling. But this Motion, the intent was not to explicitly state there what is going to be done with the revenues derived. And the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, having sat in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, it is expected that she would understand and know that provisions are already made and are already in place for the provision of psychosocial support to persons who may have these addictive problems. In addition to which, under the National Family Services we also provide counselling at the Piparo Empowerment Centre, treatment is provided for persons who have addictions and rehabilitation is also provided. So there is no need for this Government to state within this Order here this evening and this Motion that the funds are going to be utilized for these specific purposes because they already exist. So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to clear that up. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Good point. Show them, “man”.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, a lot has also been said about the fact that the taxes that have now been instituted on the gaming industry and the gaming tables, the suggestion is that they are high or that they are exorbitant. Madam Speaker, I would have done some research and I would have looked at the American Gaming Association Survey of Casinos—2016 State of the States. That is the title of the document. And in the Colorado State, a 20 per cent tax is imposed on gaming revenues. In Florida it is as much as 35 per cent, in Illinois it is 15 to 50 per cent on the gross gaming revenues. In Kansas, it is broken down into 22 per cent, 3 per cent at the local Government level and 2 per cent to fund problems with gambling. When you go to Louisiana, on the river boat casinos, the tax is 21.5 per cent and that is for the river boat casinos. And the casinos that operate on the land pay either \$60 million annually or 21.5 per cent whichever is greater. Madam Speaker, when you compare these taxes to what is being proposed by this Government you will recognize that we have not even touched the tip of the iceberg in terms of imposing taxes. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the gaming industry is a very lucrative industry. We have estimated that it is worth \$15 billion in Trinidad and Tobago. In the State of Louisiana they would have collected \$632.24 million from 20 casinos in 2015, because those casinos generated \$2.649 billion in gross revenue. So we are not talking about a “mickey mouse” industry. We are talking about big bucks, we are talking about lucrative investments and we are talking about a lot of money. So it stands to reason that any Government would ensure that they tax that industry so

that they can provide benefits, social and otherwise for the country.

Madam Speaker, now some persons consider gambling to be a necessary evil, but for us in the times that we are living, gambling is a reality. And some of the reasons for this is really, it is entertainment, it is fun, it is a means of people gathering socially, so you find the elderly being drawn to it. You would also find women—you find a number of people being drawn to gambling. Now, the research tells us that most people who gamble will not become addicted. So that is one thing we need to clear. It does not mean because you become involved in gambling, you would become addicted. As a matter of fact, what the literature tells us is that one per cent, one per cent of persons who gamble are the ones who are likely to become addicted to gambling.

7.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago at this point in time is also trying to diversify, and one of the thrusts is in the area of tourism. You can look worldwide, you can look within the Caribbean, you look at St. Maarten; you look at Curacao; you look at St. Kitts. They now advertise their hotels as resort and casino. So the casino is becoming very much a part of the whole tourism drive. We are all aware of Las Vegas. We are aware of Atlantic City and a number of tourists flock to those destinations because of the gambling and the thrill that it provides. Because it is not always about winning, but that excitement, that thrill, and that ability to socialize. And so, Madam Speaker, we cannot put our heads in the sand and say we are not going to participate in gambling. It is now a facet of society and it is very much a part of the tourism industry, but it needs to be regulated, and this is what we are attempting to do in small part here with these taxes.

Another big benefit of gambling, it provides employment. One of the concerns I have, however, with respect to the provision of employment in the gaming industry in Trinidad is that most of the employees are paid just above minimum wage. When you look internationally, casino workers are normally very well paid. So we have the owners under the guise of members' clubs, which the Minister of Finance would have already disputed, they are not really members' clubs because you cannot have two members being responsible for a casino. In addition to which, if it was a members' club, the members would share in the profit. That does not happen.

So we have the employees—persons are employed, but a number of them, they are paid just above, or minimum wage. And then there is the issue of a

question mark over exploitation. Because in most of these gaming institutions or casinos, the workers are required to dress in a particular manner. If you look at them, they are required to wear very tight, very short clothes. That is something that we need to look at and we need to consider, the dress. In addition to which, the employees within these gaming institutions are being frightened. They are being told they are going to lose their jobs. But we are all, I expect, sensible persons with the ability to think. People go into business to make a profit.

The Minister of Finance would have indicated this morning that a roulette table realizes a profit of \$500,000 annually. Do you know of any businessman that is going to close a business that realizes a profit of \$500,000 on one table because a tax of \$120,000 has been imposed? No way, Madam Speaker. So that is just to frighten persons. A \$15 billion industry, they are not going to close their business because of a tax that is imposed that really represents approximately \$10,000 per month which these casinos probably collect in one hour.

So, I want to say to the employees within the gaming industry, there is no need to fear for your jobs because persons go into business to make profit. The gaming industry continues to be very lucrative and very profitable, and what they probably need to do is to speak to some of the owners in terms of profit-sharing. That is my suggestion to those employees.

Madam Speaker, another thing that—you know, the owners of these casinos are guaranteed a profit. Casino games have a built-in house edge. The odds are in the house's favour. The odds are against the players. So there is no way casino owners are going to run at a loss. Okay? And I believe that once a business is profitable, it will continue to be in existence. So there is no need for the workers in that industry to be worried about their jobs.

Madam Speaker, I want to look at the whole situation of problem gambling, and the fact that gambling can become addictive. And the *Hamilton Spectator*, which is a newspaper in Canada, looked at the gambling, the pros and the cons, and what they were indicating from their research, as I said before, they found that 1 per cent of the general population become pathological gamblers, but most people who gamble never develop a gambling problem. And so, Madam Speaker, we need to look at this 1 per cent. This 1 per cent, the problems that are associated with gambling can very well affect the family, and as we are all aware, the family is the backbone of society.

And some of the problems that come about in the family when somebody is addicted to gambling is that there are conflicts and arguments within the family. A

sense of insecurity develops because you have this person who is gambling; they may be in debt; they are unable to pay their bills; they come home; they are stressed out; they are frustrated and they can take that frustration out on the other family members. So you have the issue of domestic violence coming into play. And then there may be a sense of anxiety, guilt, depression and some people even think about committing suicide.

And this is where it becomes very important, the issue of the taxation, because the Government is now required to beef up its support in the area of psychosocial support, that is, counselling, therapy, and then we have to also provide rehabilitation. So it means having more centres. Then if the issue of domestic violence becomes a major issue, there are some persons who may have to be placed in safe houses. That is an additional burden on the State, and for me, I understand very clearly, that some of the taxation from this gaming industry will be utilized to ensure that persons who become addicted can be treated and rehabilitated. And so, that is all I would say on the issue of gambling at this point in time. I just wanted to make it very clear that the intention was not today, within this Order and this Motion, to specify explicitly what the taxes would be used for but to just let it be known that it is to get increased revenue.

Madam Speaker, I want to look now at the issue of the incentives that were placed on hybrid and electric vehicles. There is the issue of global warming. Since the 1880s there has been an upward trend in temperatures throughout all over the earth, and this has been primarily due to increases in fossil fuel emissions. It is estimated that temperatures have increased by 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit. Now this may sound as a small number, but we need to be mindful of the fact that just around the time when we had the ice age, temperatures were just five degrees different to what they are now. So, Madam Speaker, when we put that within context, you would recognize that a 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit increase in temperatures is something that we must be very concerned about.

And then we look at the issue of climate change. We recognize now there is a broad range of global phenomena and this is due to the burning of fossil fuels and increased temperatures, and we see these manifested in extreme weather patterns. We have storm surges. We have hurricanes. We have cyclones. We have extreme rainfall. And, Madam Speaker, the taxes on these motor vehicles, the intention is, to a great extent, to treat with carbon emissions, these carbon emissions that are expelled into the atmosphere that bring about pollution and the greenhouse gases. And so, the Minister of Finance and this Government decided that, listen, what we need to do is try and limit the number of these luxury, expensive cars that emit a lot of pollutants into the air, for example, the BMWs, the pickups that all utilize diesel.

So, Madam Speaker, the intention now is to make those vehicles so expensive that people would not gravitate towards them. Instead, they would gravitate to the smaller vehicles that use cleaner fuel, and that was the intention behind the incentives that were placed on the smaller vehicles. And the reason we need to be very mindful of the reasons why this Government is seeking to have persons move from the bigger vehicles that emit more emissions, to the smaller vehicles that utilize clean fuel, is because the intensity, frequency and duration of North Atlantic hurricanes, also the frequency of strongest Categories 4 and 5 hurricanes, all increased since the 1980s. And the hurricanes, storms, their intensity and rainfall rates are projected to increase as climate changes continue and the climate continues to warm. Madam Speaker, we had the example earlier this year in Houston, Texas, where there was historic flooding and rainfall. We had storm surges up to 12 feet, Madam Speaker, and over a four-day period, the extent of the rainfall was 40 inches. Madam Speaker, we saw the devastation that took place in Texas as a result of this.

Let us bring it a little closer to home. We had Hurricane Irma. Hurricane Irma was formed out in the Atlantic around the 30th of August but it made landfall, I believe, on September the 6th, and the first place I think it hit was—it hit Barbuda, it hit St. Maarten. And, Madam Speaker, Hurricane Irma is considered one of the most powerful and catastrophic, strongest Atlantic hurricanes since 2005 when Wilma made landfall. It was a Category 5 hurricane that was considered a monster hurricane, and I believe the reason it did not go higher than a Category 5 is because there are no higher categories.

But this hurricane had winds of up to 295 kilometres per hour, Madam Speaker. It resulted in 134 fatalities. Madam Speaker, the island of Barbuda, for the first time in 100 years there were no inhabitants on Barbuda because it had been completely devastated by Hurricane Irma, and some part of the reasons for these hurricanes have to do with the fact that we are causing climate changes by our fossil fuel emissions. And I want the Members of this House to really get a feel for what happens when we have hurricanes.

Madam Speaker, I was in St. Maarten around the 30th of September and the only reason I did not experience Hurricane Irma is because of a medical condition with my son so I had to come back. But five of my relatives remained there and a first-hand account of that hurricane is something that we all need to think about because it would cause us to say, listen, we do not need this to happen in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, as the hurricane approached, the entire place got still and everything turned orange, and then the rainfall started. And the rainfall

was heavy and intense. And then, Madam Speaker, the winds. The winds were described as if you were in an airplane going at probably 1,000 times what it goes at, and that was the wind that was howling, and it lasted for over four hours, Madam Speaker.

Fortunately for my relatives, they were staying in a place called Luxury Villas, and in that area the people there, they do not build in lagoons, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] This development was on a hill and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I am referring to a remark made by the MP for Princes Town, and I am just stating that it was on an incline, Madam Speaker. And so, they were fortunate in that where they were staying it was not completely destroyed. But at the end of the hurricane—and I think a lot of times we do not understand, after a hurricane, when you do come out, almost every leaf is blown off every tree. Animals may have been killed. So a day or two after the passage of the hurricane, there is a stench that permeates the entire country. In St. Maarten, you had 95 per cent of the buildings being damaged and 60 per cent of those buildings becoming uninhabitable.

Madam Speaker, we in Trinidad and Tobago need to be cognizant of that, because if we are ever hit with a Category 5 hurricane, the devastation may be worse in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why it is important for us to understand and recognize why there is a need for us to have the incentives on those smaller cars that do not have these emissions, do not use fossil fuels. They are cleaner and so they help to protect our environment. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, just to emphasize this increased phenomena that is taking place because of climate change, I think it is the first time in many years that we had three hurricanes taking place within the North Atlantic around the same time and that was during the period September 6th to 26th. You had Irma, you had Maria and you had Jose, and they all created extreme havoc and devastation, particularly throughout the Caribbean region. Closer to home we had the experience with Bret in June, and Bret was as a result of extreme rainfall. And Bret would have—the damage caused as a result of Bret, we had 3,062 households affected and it cost the Government over \$25 million to just provide relief and help to bring people back to normalcy. But if we were to consider the total cost of that flooding as a result of that extreme rainfall after Bret, I would not be surprised to find that it would have been in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Then again, you come to October, from Divali Day, we had rainfall that would have been continuous for probably a full week. Again, we had flooding. So far we have determined that over 2,615 households have been affected. This is going to be a cost, not only to the Government, but to the individuals who were affected.

And if this is not enough to convince the Members of this House that we, in Trinidad and Tobago need to be serious about climate change, about reducing the emissions that we put into the atmosphere and the pollutants, and that we should, in fact, consider now utilizing smaller vehicles that are either hybrid, electric or use CNG, then I dare say that nothing is likely to convince us. And so, I decided today that I was not going to be long. I just wanted to bring to this honourable House the issues related to the gaming industry and the taxes that have been instituted by the Minister of Finance and to also look at the issue of global warming and climate change and the impact—the positive impact—that the utilization of hybrids, electric cars and vehicles that use CNG can have on Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I take the opportunity to join this debate here this evening. And after having listened, or whilst I was listening to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, and the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, I thought I was listening to the Minister of the Environment in that Government. But, unfortunately, they did not have the vision to keep a Ministry of the Environment as it relates to looking after the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] I will not be distracted by the Minister of Planning and Development who likes to get involved in people's—you know, the Minister of Planning, I could deal with you on any platform. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, do not be distracted. [*Laughter*] Direct your contribution to the Chair, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I want to deal with some issues that have been raised by different Members on the other side during their respective contributions and so on, and the Member for Tobago East. There seems to be a narrative that those on the other side want to sink into the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of their thinking, that those on this side, we are unpatriotic and we do not have a responsibility towards Trinidad and Tobago, and we do not believe in the overall philosophy of this country.

And I want to take the opportunity, Member for Tobago East, to remind you that it was a PNM government that was enjoying energy prices of US \$147 per barrel of oil and natural gas at \$9 MMBtu, and a Trinidad and Tobago cricket team led by Captain Darren Ganga took Trinidad and Tobago to the first CPL or the first C20 competition in India, and the Trinidad and Tobago team at the time had no

sponsorship from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, remember what we are dealing with is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, so I would ask you to be relevant. If it is you are responding to something that a specific Member spoke to, then I will allow you to speak about that. I think you started referring to the Member for Tobago East, but I do not remember anything about cricket or Darren Ganga in her contribution. So, please, bring your contribution into what is before us.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am guided but I am merely responding to this narrative of—

Hon. Member: No, no, no.

Madam Speaker: What I would want to say is that if you are responding to something the Member said in terms of unpatriotic, I am not going to let you widen the discussion about unpatriotism. This is not about being patriotic or unpatriotic. Okay?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Guided, Madam Speaker. And in relation to that, I have already established the point and I will move on. But most importantly, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West indicated that this particular Order was designed to focus on increasing revenue and dealing with carbon emissions and the environment, and so on, and the purpose of the Order is not to inform the public on how the revenue will be spent. Madam Speaker, the people who will have to pay the increases as a result of the Order are indeed citizens of this country, and I think that in relation to the payment of taxes any responsible government will want to advise, or would want to inform the taxpayers of the country how the revenues that are generated by an Order are being spent in relation to the service of Trinidad and Tobago.

And whilst the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West went and provided us with a global survey in terms of the level of taxation in states across the United States of America and so on, the important thing for those on the other side to understand is that they are governing Trinidad and Tobago and they need to deal with the reality of the issues which are currently confronting the population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And in that regard, we must be able to take into consideration how the measures that have been rolled out in this particular Order are really complementing the presentation of the Minister of

Finance during his budget presentation how, indeed, they will impact upon the citizens of the country. And there are those on the other side who think that, or want to again advise that we feel that there is something wrong with taxation in the country. Taxation is part and parcel of how a government will raise its revenue as it relates to servicing the needs of the people on an annual basis, and so on. We have no problem with that. What we have a problem with is the punitive measures and the fallout of the punitive measures.

And I will come to that particular issue as I develop my argument here this evening. And I want to take the opportunity again, because they pronounce a lot and they like to talk a lot without backing up and without substantiating and providing specific examples and so on. The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West was concerned about the dress code of employees within casinos, and she was concerned about the terms and conditions of employment and the rate of pay. I do not know if the Government, through her colleague, the Minister of Labour and Enterprise Development has related to the Minister of Finance that we need to revisit the minimum wage, because she focused on the minimum wage as it relates to the employees of the casino industry. And, in fact, the Minister of Finance too, was part and parcel of a political party when they campaigned before the electorate of the country, advised that they would look at a timely revision of the minimum wage rates in Trinidad and Tobago.

So I think that the Member will do well in relation to consulting and advising and arguing in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to a timely revision of the minimum wage. And Madam Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I will allow you a little leeway. I think you answered that and therefore if you will move on.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, as it relates to—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, I am sorry, just for us to take the Procedural Motion.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, while the Member for Couva South—I will give him a chance to collect his thoughts so he could get on with the Motion that is before us.

Procedural Motion
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

Friday, November 10, 2017

Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the business before it.

Question put and agreed to.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER, 2017

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and just to advise the Minister of Planning and Development, my thoughts are always well focused as it relates to removing the PNM from political office. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, I want to continue because, you know, as I said they like to pontificate and pronounce, but they do not like when you are responding to them. [*Desk thumping*] And as it relates to—again, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West assured all casino employees here tonight that they have no need to fear for their jobs, but I want to remind the casino workers that persons, or workers of Trinidad and Tobago have become an endangered species [*Desk thumping*] since the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley has taken charge of the governance of this country. Twenty-five thousand have lost their jobs and the figure continues to increase because in all of your revenue-generating measures—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Could the Member give the source of that data, please? The source of that data?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order, Member. Please continue.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And in light of all the statistics that have been put forward from the Minister of Finance here this evening in relation to a \$15 billion industry, and \$500,000 for each casino in terms of after the expenses and so on, they have provided no source. They have provided no specific study, and in relation to the statistics that they have brought into this debate here today.

7.45 p.m.

That is why I will continue to say, Madam Speaker, that based on the punitive measures, and so on, we cannot take them at face value, and in that regard I want to say that the casino workers have a right and a responsibility to protect or to do what is right according to the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, to protect their jobs and to put up a struggle to ensure that at the end of the day, there is food on the table, single mothers can hold the stability of families together, and also to ensure that there is the continuation of children's education and servicing of whatever liabilities, and so on, that families have to look after from time to time. I see that the Minister of Finance is making what we would call gesticulations that seem to be dismissive of

what I am saying here today because he does not have a feel—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member! Member, do not be distracted by anything. If you just focus your attention on the Chair, I am sure you will be all right. Please!

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: No. Just abandon that and please continue making your contribution this way.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: In that regard, Madam Speaker, I am guided, but I have a responsibility to indicate to the casino workers, and so on, how they are being viewed currently as we debate this particular Motion here this evening. In that regard, I would want to say from where I stand, that in relation to the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017, the Minister of Finance in relation to the Schedule to the Registration of Clubs Act is repealed, he gave a breakdown, and so on, of the schedule and the taxes payable on gambling tables and other devices and so on.

Madam Speaker, in relation to this particular imposition, for example, of \$120,000 per annum on every roulette table, and the large increases that we have seen—because more or less the table that has been instituted in that particular Order shows, or the statistics will indicate that the taxes have increased by over 100 per cent and so on. In that regard, the Minister of Finance indicated that—I am trying to get his statistics right in terms of the number of private members' clubs and the number of recreation clubs, and so on, in Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that there were 221 private clubs in Trinidad currently existing, and bars and recreation clubs, 686 according to the records at the Board of Inland Revenue.

Given he has indicated that there is a revenue stream of approximately 14 or \$15 billion, and so on, I would simply want to ask the Minister of Finance: Does the Board of Inland Revenue, at this particular point in time, have the staff or the manpower levels to go out and administer, or collect these taxes in terms of the increases? Because there seems to be a sustained focus on getting the revenue at all costs. And how is this going to be realized, taking into consideration the current manpower levels at the Board of Inland Revenue? And even if we look at carrying the argument further in the context of Customs and Excise, and so on, in relation to the other clauses, or the other measures that have been outlined, for example, in 5 as it relates to the amendment of the Customs Act?

In that regard, Madam Speaker, we would want to know whether this will be part of the tax collection framework, in relation to the transitioning because we have heard from the Minister of Finance, I think after the budget presentation, that there will be a transitioning of employees from the Board of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise into the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. In that regard too, I also would pose the question, again, if the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority becomes a reality, I do not know what will be the organizational structure and so on—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I will just ask you, that I am ruling that out of order as irrelevant. This is not a debate on the Revenue Authority, and therefore, I would ask you to move on to another point please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided. And further to this as it relates to going out there, the current staff of the Board of Inland Revenue and also Customs and Excise—the Minister of National Security during his contribution placed a great deal of emphasis as it relates to criminality and the gambling industry, and so on. And all I would ask, again, Madam Speaker, what is the overall vision or direction of the Ministry of Finance to guarantee the well-being and safety of the employees of the Board of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise as it relates to the application of this Order, given what we have heard from the Minister of Finance in terms of criminality and how criminality is being impacted upon from the point of view of the gambling sector in Trinidad and Tobago?

Again, whilst those on the other side may not want to accept the argument, or to accept the point that in addition to six casinos already signalling that there would be a closure of their respective doors and an increase in the unemployment, the Minister indicated that he has not visited any bar or any casino, and so on, throughout Trinidad and Tobago., Madam Speaker, I am very au courant with the geography of the constituency of Couva South, and I know that in Couva South there are a number of what we may call bars, recreation clubs, whatever terminology you may want to append and, in addition to roulette machines and so on, there are a number of these amusement games and so on, or the electronic devices which because of their presence also give a sense of life, give a sense of growth to these places and, as a result of giving life and giving growth, and so on, they create additional employment from the point of view of these venues, and so on. There is also a growth of the informal economy, because if you go outside of

the bars or the recreation clubs, sometimes you will see the presence of the oysterman, within these bars and so on you will see a small kitchen providing cutters and so on, and that provides employment opportunities and so on, for single women, sometimes for families who are financially challenged and so on.

So, when there is the imposition of \$120,000 per annum on a small bar in the constituency of Couva South, it has implications for employment, it has implications for the continued social stability of families and so on. So I would want to ask the Minister of Finance to revisit or to think about the whole question of the punitive impact of the taxation measures that he has outlined via this particular Order. He has provided to this House, this evening, statistical information from the point of view of how much revenue would be realized. I do not know how he would have arrived at that based on the fact, or taking into consideration that he has not been able to identify a particular source as it relates to the figures which are being provided to us.

The tax benefit as it relates to hybrid vehicles is now applicable, as he said, to vehicles up to 1599 cc, or electric vehicles up to 159 kilowatts. Madam Speaker, it was previously applicable to vehicles up to 1999 cc, and again during his budget presentation the Minister clearly articulated or stated that vehicles up to 1999 cc would continue to benefit from the tax exemption provided that the vehicles are shipped by the 20th of October, 2017 and arrive in Trinidad and Tobago by the 31st of December, 2017. I hope, because I have perused this particular Order inside out, I have turned it upside down and perused it word for word, and I have seen nowhere in terms of this particular guarantee in relation to the tax exemption being applicable, provided that the vehicles are shipped by the 20th of October, 2017 and arrive in Trinidad and Tobago by the 31st of December, 2017. So we do not want on this side for continued uncertainty, and so on, and I hope that tonight, in his winding up, the Minister of Finance would provide clarity as it relates to this particular issue.

And from the point of view of the importation of vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago, and as it relates to hybrid vehicles and so on, probably the Minister of Finance because the Comptroller of Customs, and Customs and Excise fall under his purview—but I could remember reading recently, I think in the newspapers of Trinidad and Tobago, where an importer took the Customs and Excise to court as it relates to the interpretation of what is a hybrid vehicle in this country, Madam Speaker, and I hope that as the Minister addresses the measures in this particular Order he would focus on this issue too, or provide some kind of clarity, as it

relates to the interpretation of hybrid vehicles for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we are of the opinion on this side that if the Government continues to harp on the issue of revenue generation and tax collection—and I have not heard from the Minister of Finance this evening, during his presentation, what has been his efforts and what has been the thrust of his Ministry, and the agencies under his Ministry, to really show the stakeholders of this country, to show Trinidad and Tobago that there has been a sense of improvement in the efficiency of tax collection and tax administration in this country, how the efficiency has brought about improved revenue and what the Government has done in addition to just focusing on improving the physical condition at the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division.

So, from where I sit, Madam Speaker, we would want to ensure that the Government and the Minister of Finance tell us what they intend to do to address the issue of the low level of compliance, because the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, too, seems to have information at her disposal—how she arrived at it, I do not know—in terms of the issue of tax evasion in Trinidad and Tobago, and in recent times launched, what I would call, an attack on the middle class, and so on, in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of their income generation and how they are involved in tax evasion in Trinidad and Tobago, and again without any statistical data, any evidence, but merely pontificating and launching unwarranted attacks on law-abiding citizens of the country.

I am of the firm opinion that if people are flouting the laws of the country, then we all have a responsibility to ensure that offenders or those who flout the laws of Trinidad and Tobago are brought before the different arms of the judicial process and so on. You do not just make wild card statements, broad-brush people or a class of people in the society, especially those who are contributing to the welfare and the well-being and the development of this country without being specific. And that is what I have a problem with and that is what I am sure that all those on this side have a problem with, in this narrative of those on the other side in trying to stigmatize, trying to broad-brush, trying to point in a particular direction. So from where I sit, Madam Speaker, I have heard nothing new. I have heard absolutely nothing new as it relates to how these revenue enhancement or revenue generation measures will really improve the standard of living and the quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have been pulverized with taxation. The workers of this country have been pulverized by taxation, and at the end of the day I think that the citizenry of

this country cannot bear a further onslaught on them from a taxation point of view. The Government needs to become creative. The Government needs to become innovative as it relates to dealing with the economic stagnation of this country if we are to continue to develop as a country in not only providing or realizing revenue—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. I have given you some leeway and I will ask you now to come back to what is before us. Okay? Please, thank you.

Miss Mc Donald: Come back to the Motion.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the advice, Member for Port of Spain South. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, we are all on this side committed to the well-being and the development of Trinidad and Tobago, but we also have a responsibility to demand transparency in the affairs of the governance of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrance Deyalsingh): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Madam Speaker, I must thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Order in front of us. Madam Speaker, I just crave your indulgence for one minute just to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: 48(1).

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah, yeah. I will tie it in. I cannot understand why my colleagues opposite have been ensnared and entrapped and held hostage by the owners of casinos, by the invisible owners of casinos.

Madam Speaker, in warfare there is a term called infantrymen. Infantrymen are the soldiers who are either too young with little experience, or deemed expendable, that you throw them into the frontlines and let them get killed off first. They are not good enough to go on the cavalry, and behind the—[*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: Who killing off who?

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I am sure the Member is talking figuratively.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Exactly.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I have been sitting listening here and the Member is talking figuratively. Please continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. So in warfare, Madam Speaker, you send in your infantrymen first. Your infantrymen are those expendable persons for whom you have no regard, and the generals stay in the back in their bunkers.

What has happened in Trinidad is that these nameless, faceless casino owners have chosen the workers as their infantrymen and sent them into war. Let them be the face, let that be the first wave, let them take the blows, and that is what has happened. Because in all these consultations, in all these Senate appointments when two Senate persons mysteriously fell ill, not one casino owner operating in Trinidad from the United States was sworn in as a temporary Senator, not one casino owner from Indonesia was sworn in as a temporary Senator, not one from China was sworn in as a temporary Senator, not one from England was sworn as a temporary Senator, but they chose an infantryman to go in there, and in all the arguments we are hearing about little people, we are not hearing about the nameless, faceless foreigners who dominate the local casino industry. I find that approach hypocritical. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, what it is that our colleagues opposite have against taxing the gambling industry?

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adam Smith in 1776 wrote:

“Sugar, rum”—[*Interruption*]

I just said—my gosh!

Mr. Kazim: What is the name of the book?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I just said 1776. Our colleagues opposite really have stick in “dey” ears you know.

“Sugar, rum, and tobacco are commodities which...nowhere necessities of life, which are become objects of almost universal consumption, and which are therefore extremely proper subjects of taxation.”

Fast forward to 2017, Adam Smith just has to include gambling and casino in that. What is wrong with taxing an industry where nameless, faceless individuals

make hundreds of millions of dollars by their own admission, and by their own admission I quote from the *Daily Express* of October 15, 2011. This is six years old, so the figures have probably changed. One Derek Chin is quoted as saying:

“Meanwhile, the country and taxpayers collected only \$24 million from the industry last year”—this is 2011 dollars, eh—“and are losing out on millions of dollars of income annually - MovieTowne boss Derek Chin estimated the figure to be \$150 million”—a—“year...”

So by his estimation—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—and he knows about the casino industry. We are losing out by his estimation, by a casino owner’s estimation, we are losing out on \$125 million a year. What is so wrong with taxing the casino industry? Why are you so strident in your protection of this industry? You have to explain that to me.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva South—and this was the most astonishing statement for the day—said—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh have to win something man.”

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah, he win. He win, he win. He said that with the taxation of these machines, that the machines brought a sense of life and a sense of growth to communities. The sense of growth and the sense of life, I would like to see in communities is more people going to mandirs, more people going to mosque, and more people going to church. [*Desk thumping*] That is the growth I want to see in communities. That is the sense of life.

I do not want to see fathers and mothers spending their hard-earned money in a casino and cannot buy school books for the children, and then they come to an MP office with their booklists. That is what I want to see. And you know, this argument that bars and all these bars that you all are protecting now to say casinos and these tables bring in income, this is not a chicken and egg story. They were making money before. They were making money before. What you have done is polluted the minds of children with gambling. Why are you so hell-bent on protecting casino owners and not having them pay their fair share of taxes?

Let me tackle—sorry. Let me respond to the Member for Caroni Central. You know, the Member for Caroni Central’s views on the IMF today were stunning to me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you why the Member for Caroni Central’s views on the IMF, that we must listen to the IMF now—when I was sitting down in position No. 32 there, as the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, the then

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Minister of Planning and Development came where the Member for Moruga/Tableland is sitting here now to answer a question. At that time you had the first drop in revenue, and then Minister Larry Howai had ordered a \$40 million cut of all Ministries across the board—remember those days? And we were asking questions about why you are not listening to the IMF, and the Member for Caroni Central is on the *Hansard* as saying he has no faith in the IMF, that we should not be listening to the IMF. He is on the *Hansard* because it was convenient for him to do that then, but now fast-forward to 2017, we must now listen to the IMF. Which side are you speaking out of? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: I am misrepresented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member? Member?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: You are on the *Hansard*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member for Caroni Central, you are well aware there is a procedure of how to handle that situation. So please—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Pull the *Hansard* for us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West, I am on my legs. I am on legs. You all know the procedure. Proceed, Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the hypocrisy is talking about sustainable development. When this Government, through the Minister of Planning and Development, who ought to be congratulated for Vision 2030, [*Desk thumping*] brought Vision 2030 and laid it in the Parliament, we extended our hands across the aisle and say, “Let us have a Joint Select Committee”.

Mr. Charles: “All yuh aint ask for dat?”

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, yes.

8.15 p.m.

Member for Naparima, we asked for a Joint Select Committee to meet with us. [*Interruption*] Let us discuss Vision 2030 to chart a way forward for this country so that regardless of which party is in power you have a road map.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Member for Naparima, St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Because we are hearing today, no new initiatives, no diversification. Read Vision 2030. [*Desk thumping*] And we extended our hands in partnership to our colleagues opposite, let us go to a Joint Select Committee on Vision 2030; they refused it, they spurned the idea. Even though Minister—Caroni Central was an author of the Vision 2020, one of the authors of Vision 2020 spurned; Nan Ramgoolam became a Senator, spurned; David Abdullah became a Senator, spurned Vision 2020. So you want to know why it is we say we are patriotic and nobody else is. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me just rebut another thing they said here. One of our colleagues opposite boasted about Unicomer coming into Trinidad and Tobago in this big way. Unicomer is a net user of foreign exchange. They generate nothing. [*Interruption*] Nothing! What did you do for five years for revenue generation? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. [*Continuous interruption*] Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. But what is the most disingenuous narrative coming out there? They want to know what the taxes are going to be used for. They say, okay, put the tax into that, put the tax—they are pretending as if they were never in Government for five years, either under the Basdeo Panday administration, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration or under former President Robinson. Everyone knows that you collect your taxes into a pot and then you distribute accordingly and that is what you all did for five years. But all of a sudden, they want to know what you are going to use this tax for and it—let me tell you what we are going to use the taxes for.

We need \$500 million to replace the money wasted on LifeSport; that is what we need it for. We need \$467 million to replace the money stolen from this country from the Beetham Waste Water Plant. That 800—[*Interruption*] Sorry, \$1 billion. You also need \$6 million to replace the money misappropriated to wreck a fire truck. [*Crosstalk*] That is what you need it for. You also need five to \$7 billion to put back into our cash flow because our friends opposite funded the Point Fortin Highway from cash and not from long-term borrowing. [*Crosstalk*] You also need 12 to \$16 billion to replace the money raided from NGC. Right? You also need billions of dollars to replace the money raided from EMBD. You also need money to replace the moneys raided from National Quarries. “Yuh want to know where the taxation money going from gambling? That is where it going.” [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] That is where it is going. That is where it is going. Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, one second. [*Crosstalk*] I am on my legs, Members. Continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of my colleagues gave some statistics about how profitable the casino industry is abroad. Let me add to those statistics and these are 2012 statistics: gross intake from the movie industry in the United States, movie industry, massive industry, \$10.9 billion; a recording music industry, \$7 billion; the four US major league sports: hockey, football and so on, \$22.5 billion. All of that is dwarfed by gambling, which is US \$37.34 billion. And we are saying, if we listen to our colleagues opposite that if we tax our local casino industry, they are going to close down? Let me tell you something. I have no doubt that the sign somebody alluded to that a casino is going to close. I have no doubt that may be true, but you know what? “Casinos and these people like Medusa’s head, yuh cut off one, three more sprout up to take its place.” I will bet you that for every one that closes to make a point, “because they have money”, three will open up.

And you know where the proof of that is? There is one casino owner, the people who are being protected. These nameless, faceless foreigners and locals who send their infantrymen to face the battle. They send their poor workers, “you are expendable, all yuh go and take the heat” while I sit down in my palaces abroad. You know what one of them did? In an effort to deter a competitor from opening a casino in a site, they paid a rental fee of \$450,000 per month with no return—an empty space, a shell—to block a competitor casino from coming in. That is over \$5 million a year of money that is giving you not a cent return. And we are protecting that? Why did you not bring that casino owner in the Senate to defend that, to explain that? Explain in the Senate how he could pay \$450,000 a month with no revenue, to protect a space so his competitor cannot come into there, but “yuh send the infantry men up in the Senate, yuh send the infantry men outside here to protest, yuh send the infantry by the home of the Minister of Finance”.

In all the meetings called for, I have not seen a casino owner walk into the Twin Towers to meet with Sen. West or to meet with anybody because they do not want to be known. They are so well camouflaged that they blend into the environment but they got their tentacles into the Senate of all places. Imagine that. These nameless, faceless foreigners got their tentacles into the Parliament of this country and we should be ashamed of that. [*Desk thumping*] It was an abuse of the Standing Orders; a total abuse of the Standing Orders to do that. [*Crosstalk*] We collectively as a Parliament should hang our heads in shame. [*Continuous crosstalk*] But we did not do it. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is huge, huge business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for St Joseph. Please, the added comments that are coming after, again, you are allowed to thump the desk but the comments

that are extended after sometimes are unwarranted. Proceed.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As Minister of Health—[*Interruption*] Are you finished, Couva South? As Minister of Health, I do have to speak on some of the negative health implications of gambling and, as far as the human brain is concerned, there is no distinction between sex addiction, cocaine addiction, gambling addiction, smoking, alcohol. It is the same part of the brain, the same pleasure centres that respond to all these stimuli. All right. When you do the studies, it is the same part of the brain that lights up the pleasure centres. And what the casinos do now is engage you in such a way that when you enter their establishments, you have no more sense of time. There are no clocks, there are no windows. There is no outside light, it is only artificial light. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And you know, I heard Oropouche East or one of my colleagues opposite and I mean this type of argument put forward by the Member for Couva South about community life and growth, I think it was the Member for Oropouche East who said if we close down the casinos, more people will drink.

Mr. Mitchell: He said that, he said that.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: You know, I stood here in absolute bewilderment and amazement that we are justifying this by saying that people will turn to drink if you take away the casinos. But he does not know that when you go to a casino, you get free drinks. [*Crosstalk*] Right? They supply you with free drinks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So that your judgment is impaired, you make wrong decisions and you do not recognize that you are losing your house and your land and your wife and your children and your car. But do you know what the local casinos are now doing? When you run out of money in a local casino now, they extend you a line of credit. So they make money not only on the gambling—and the interest rates, I hear, are not nice. Why are we protecting that? Why did that type of activity reach the floors of the Senate in this country? Who are these nameless, faceless foreigners and locals who are ashamed or afraid to meet with the Minister of Finance? Why do they send their lieutenants? Why do they send their infantrymen to take the blows? Because they know, they very well know that if they could afford to pay half a million dollars a month's rent for an empty shell, they could well afford to pay their taxes.

I want to come to a close now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but just to let you know that I got some statistics from NADA and I would like to quote a paragraph from the report because I think it is important that we understand what addiction is doing to Trinidad and Tobago, all forms of addiction. Because I am concerned about addiction to sugar, alcohol, tobacco and now this. In Trinidad—and I quote from another report on gambling addiction:

In Trinidad and Tobago, there are self-help groups and treatment centres that offer help to persons with such a disorder that is gambling addiction. One such group has reported that within the last six months in 2017, that is this year, 49 persons have sought intervention for gambling addiction or problem gambling.

Now, this is just the tip of the iceberg because for every one that is brave enough to come forward, you probably have 100 who have a problem—*[Crosstalk]* It is called the Pareto Principle or the Iceberg Principle. Choose one, my brother. *[Desk thumping]* Pointe-a-Pierre, choose one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair, Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Forty-nine persons have sought intervention for gambling addiction or problem gambling with a further 23 persons contacting the group via telephone. Among these are two reported cases of attempted suicide. Yes, you want data, you want facts? This is what we are protecting. Two cases of attempted suicides as a result of gambling-related problems. But this is what is concerning me. The majority of persons seeking treatment are males between the ages of 25 and 38 years. Look at the age group: 25 to 38 are people approaching the prime of their lives where you are supposed to be maximizing your earning potential. This is where your children are young. This is where your marriage is probably about five years old. That is the age group that is now coming. So the majority of persons seeking treatment are males between the ages 25 to 38. The 11 women who sought treatment were between the ages of 24 and 45. So this seems to be an equal opportunity problem across gender. It knows no gender, it knows no race, it knows no ethnicity, and it knows no social class. So the argument being put forward by my colleagues opposite that this is going to result in mass retrenchment, it is void, it is vacuous, holds no merit, holds no water and is to be rejected by, a phrase my colleague here uses, all right-thinking citizens. Every right-thinking citizen should reject the argument that this will lead to mass layoffs.

I will tell you something. Over the years, we have increased the excise duty on alcohol. Where was the argument that by increasing the excise duty on alcohol, it will lead to mass retrenchment at Carib? It does not happen. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly. So inelastic demand, same thing is going to happen to gambling. Same thing. You have asked and answered your own question. So all of this is just fluff. Increasing taxes on things like alcohol, the alcohol factories still make their alcohol. People will still drink. Same thing with this. But this increased taxation is not going to filter down to the poor man because these nameless, faceless people who have found their way into the Senate with their tentacles know fully well they could afford these taxes. That is just a ruse to fool their poor employees and I will be very shocked when you do the analysis a year from now, you will see no net decrease in employment in casinos. Absolutely nothing, because they have deep pockets and they could afford to pay the taxes.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I promised to be relatively short. I hope I have been able to demonstrate conclusively what is the state of play with the casino industry, and I will say for a last time, let the true casino owners show their faces; show their faces to Trinidad and Tobago. Let us see you, let us smoke them out. Let us come here and let us see you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was not my intention to engage the House for any extended period but having listened to the Member for St. Joseph and his insincere expression of consternation, that you had someone who is a national, an employee of a particular sector with knowledge of that sector, serve in the Senate and to say that we on this side are ensnared, entrapped and so on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the right of all nationals in this country, once they are qualified, to serve in this forum. [*Desk thumping*] This is the people's forum. And this elitist one per cent, branding approach that the hon. Member for St. Joseph is taking, is really unworthy. It is demonstrative of the arrogance and contempt they have for the ordinary people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

But you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you contextualize their appointment in the Senate, it is okay to bring in people who are engaged in "tiefing" oil in Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I do not like the word "tiefing".

Mr. G. Singh: Okay.

Mr. Padarath: But they say it all the time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen, hold on. Member for Princes Town, retract.

Mr. Padarath: Sorry, my apologies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I said, Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. G. Singh: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, engage in misappropriation of oil at Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] It is okay to contextualize that. It is okay for there to be someone who is in the Senate whose husband assaulted the free press. [*Desk thumping*] It is okay. It is okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but if we bring in somebody who is from the neglected element in our society, who exists in the margins of the society to bring them into the hallowed halls of this Parliament, we are saying no grassroots in the Parliament under the PNM. [*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: Shame! Shame!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town, there is a certain decorum that is expected. [*Interruption*] Member for Couva South, I am on my legs. You do not need to say anything, I am on my legs. Minister of Finance also, I am on my legs, no need to say anything. Member for Princes Town, come on man, not in this House. Okay, Sir? Member, proceed.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand that you have to keep the decorum of the House but keep in mind my injury time.

My good friend, the Member for St. Joseph, goes on to quote Adam Smith back to 1776. He says—but you know what is frightening for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker? He does not know our own political history. It is the UNC administration under Mr. Basdeo Panday that brought about regulation of the membership industry. [*Desk thumping*] Not the Liquor Licences Act. It is the table by table, Sip Sam or whatever tables you have, rum tables and so on, they started the charges under the Panday administration. So that is where the regulation began because we recognized the need since then that the industry needed regulation. So that the hon. Member embarked on a course of events to demonize people in the society.

He moved from the owners of the casinos and then he moved now to Unicomer, Courts. So they provide a service, they are foreign-based and then they say they are net consumers of foreign exchange. So you are against business, “yuh demonizing legitimate business in the society?” Where are you heading with this? You are going to create a Hutu and Tutsi environment in this country? [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The hon. Member indicated, like the Member for Tobago East and some other Member, about this virtue, Madam Speaker, of patriotism. Look, this Parliament was attacked in 1990 and if there was ever a test of patriotism required for this country, it is our predecessors who demonstrated that all parliamentarians are very patriotic when the time is needed. [*Desk thumping*] You know, Madam Speaker, it is said that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. Samuel Johnson said that. And it was used in the context of the Patriot Act in the United States which was a very unconstitutional and unpatriotic Act, and anybody who did not support that Act, which was unconstitutional, became a traitor. I see the same kind of trend emerging in this Parliament. You have no monopoly on patriotism, it is shared by every national of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And you know, Madam Speaker, you had my friend, good friend, the Minister of National Security, he indicated that money is the root of all evil, so he misquoted. It is for the love of money is a root of all evil. It is quoted as being for the love of money is a root of evil. But I want to correct him and indicate also that in the good book, wealth is neutral as in many of the other religious books, including the *Bhagavad Gita*. Wealth is neutral. So that therefore, it is not money, it is for the love of money.

Mr. Karim: “Yuh went Presentation, brother?” [*Laughter*]

Mr. G. Singh: Yes, I went Presentation. Madam Speaker, and when the hon. Member indicated that for the love of money and then he went on to talk about the cartels worldwide, the cartels in Russia, a globalized foray and journey into the cartels of the world, I am trying to understand what is the relevance of this. What is the relevance of where he was heading? Demonizing gambling when it is Government’s policy. We sit in a joint select committee—and we laid a report so that therefore it will start back again—which is a demonstration of Government’s policy, and I just want to read one paragraph with your permission, Madam Speaker, one paragraph of the Explanatory Notes. It says:

“This Bill seeks to provide for the establishment of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission...for the purpose of regulating the Gaming and Betting Sectors which are, both on a global and national level, vulnerable to infiltration by money launderers and terrorist financing. The Commission shall establish a licensing framework which will aid in minimising the potential for money laundering and terrorism financing due to the stringent criteria that will have to be met by anyone desirous of obtaining a licence permitting them to work in the gambling sector.”

Madam Speaker: Okay. So hon. Member, I am not going to let you go much further with this, Standing Order 51. Okay?

Mr. G. Singh: Yes. So when I—I thought I was in a twilight zone when I was listening to the Member. No reference to the legislation which we have spent painstaking hours dealing with, together with the Chairman and who I must commend is doing a good job as the Chairman of the Joint Select Committee, but I will have to comment on that later on. And so, the hon. Minister of National Security, when he began to speak of all and indicated that you have all this set of cartels, I was wondering if his head is up there, why is he not talking of the criminal activities in Trinidad because if you have so much knowledge? And I was disappointed that he sought to demonize the industry with the recognition that we are putting the regulatory mechanism in place and we are pretty far advanced with that.

Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke about the areas in which there is the global forum. In today's newspaper, the *Guardian*, by Nadaleen Singh, of Friday 10 November, 2017:

“Ambassador warns politicians on delaying Global Forum legislation”

It is not my intention to be anticipatory, Madam Speaker, but it is to merely indicate that it was raised in the debate.

8.45 p.m.

And I want to indicate that this is an important piece of legislation and I hope that we do not make the errors that we made in the FATCA legislation. So the process is clear. Appoint a joint select committee and proceed with the legislation that will bring it to bear, and both sides of House, or if it is a joint select committee, the Independent Senators, so we bring legislation in the interest of the country with the necessary monitoring and scrutiny, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, so now I really want to turn to the Order before us. There are five pieces of legislation. A lot has been traversed. There is the amendment to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, the Fourth Schedule, the Value Added Tax, Schedule Two, the Customs Act, section 45, in the first instance. And I want to deal with some of those things.

Look, we have to recognize that we have a large carbon footprint per capita in this country and the reason why we have this large carbon footprint is because we are so highly industrialized in the Point Lisas area. There is a carbon sinkhole in Point Lisas and the carbon footprint per capita of all Trinidadians and

Tobagonians is very high as a result. So—[*Interruption*] my colleague from Naparima tells me it is the second highest per capita in the world. So we have to do something, and we are happy that you incentivized hybrid cars up to a certain level. We support that approach to it and, therefore, there will be a lessening of foreign exchange, and so on. But, you also have to recognize that we have to do much more in that area, much, much more, Madam Speaker.

We have to also recognize that the whole issue of the tyres, the duty on tyres, 30 per cent, other Members spoke about it. And, of course, there was never an explanation for the \$20 environmental tax imposed on each tyre. [*Crosstalk*] There was? Okay, well I did not hear it. [*Continuous crosstalk*] No, the \$20.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I think I had mentioned there is a way for it to be done?

Mr. G. Singh: Okay.

Madam Speaker: Okay? Please.

Mr. G. Singh: So the taxes are harmonized, the percentage of taxes on tyres, but the \$20 environmental tax per tyre, what are we going to do with that? How is it doing to work? There are some 10 million tyres in this country, right, all over the place, 1.5 million tyres on an annual basis. Solid Waste Management Company has done a whole analysis of how to deal with that waste product, Madam Speaker. In our administration, we put forward the suggestion for the Ministry of Works to start using crumb from the tyres to add to the asphalt so as to make it last longer and make the roads last longer, and it would be much more environmentally friendly. So that, Madam Speaker, this really is a good measure. It reduces the whole issue of tax evasion, but you have to go further. Explain how this is going to work and that therefore, Trinidad and Tobago really should not become a dumping ground for foreign used tyres. We ought to be much more environmentally friendly and appropriate in that area.

Now, I cannot fathom the reason for the motor cycle, all under 300 cc tax removal. It may be a good measure. But having regard to road safety in this country, Madam Speaker, I am very fearful of that, very, very fearful. I do not know whether it is the intention for Trinidad to become a tuk-tuk society. What I mean, Madam Speaker, is that when you go to Vietnam or Cambodia or any of those countries, you have a sort of rickshaw with the motor cycle in which they take you around the place. I do not think that is the intention. I think the intention is to bring in young people to engage in motor cycle riding as their first entry into

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the environment of ownership. But I think that having regard to the way the roads are structured, buses and trucks “bad drive” vans and cars, and cars “bad drive” bicycles and motorbikes. That is what happens in this country. There is a free-for-all on the road.

And whilst I say so, Madam Speaker, I was in the traffic jam yesterday. It was a traffic jam as a result of an accident in the Beetham. It took me two hours in the traffic jam and for no reason, and there was absolutely no police to look after the traffic, to look after what was happening. And this is the second time it has happened within recent time and certainly there is need for a much more proactive approach whenever there is any event that takes place on our highways, in particular in the Beetham.

I move on, Madam Speaker. You see, when we look at—so the tyres, the motor cycles and the hybrid vehicles all fall within the first three pieces of legislation. It is under the Registration of Clubs Act, Schedule Two and the Liquor Licences Act that you have the real problems taking place in this piece of legislation, the Motion for the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. Why is that so?

I do not think—as I indicated, it was in the late 1990s that regulation was introduced in the sector for taxation of the various elements that comprised the members’ clubs which morphed into casinos. And I take the view that in this sector, Madam Speaker, people are real entrepreneurs because the law was far behind the reality of the society. The law was far behind. So what they did was to take the existing law, the membership, registration of members’ clubs and within that they created the conditions for a casino. So you have to look at how people emerged to meet the conditions and the market demand. Instead, what we get from the other side is demonization.

So, I am saying that you had indigenous entrepreneurs, indigenous entrepreneurs, who recognized this and then subsequently the foreign investors came in and participated with greater capital investment in the country. And then subsequently, now you have, we are seeking to regulate it by virtue of this piece of legislation. And, I would suggest that all Members read the legislation because there are two funds that look after the social addiction and the gambling addiction that takes place as a result of engaging in this activity.

And it is a fiction, Madam Speaker. It is a fiction that these private members’ clubs are owned by all club members. It is a fiction but it is part of the legal fig leaf that the law allowed them to create in order for these private members’ clubs to function.

But I think that what happened, and I think that the hon. Minister of Finance may share this point of view with me, is that they were looking forward to the legislation. All, every element or stakeholder in the environment participated in the consultative process, everybody. So that a measure of comfort was created. However, what happened is that when—and we are keeping in mind there is a stream of increase every year in the taxation—this taxation was imposed, it came as a shock, the extent of the taxation. It came as almost as if it was ambushed in the process, and from their perspective there was fear and apprehension, because they had a comfort zone that they were participating in a parliamentary process. They were engaged in a stakeholder process, promoting the democracy with their self-interest in mind, of course, but they were engaged in the process. So when this came down, it came down like a ton of bricks and, I do not know the medical term but they got shock therapy and they reacted in the manner in which they did, Madam Speaker. So that the fear and apprehension of where this is heading.

We are told that members are going to shut down, that entrepreneurs are like birds, if they cannot make money here they will pack their bags and go. Their only loyalty is to profit. They are not loyal to even the land they stand on, so they will move. And what will be the impact on the ordinary people, some 9,000 persons who are employed, who have specific knowledge in that area. It is being argued on that side that that will not last. They are like the head of Medusa. But we do know that entrepreneurs being who they are, they will adjust. They will cut their costs and unfortunately, labour cost is a reality when coming to these things.

So I am of the view, Madam Speaker, that there is some fissioning of the industry. I think the Member for Point Fortin indicated that the role of this taxation is to separate the industry. He said that in his comment. So the taxation is being used as a vehicle, an instrument, to discourage the industry. With that impact—I think that the figure quoted by the Minister, to collect \$60 million at the beginning of this year, because remember this tax is imposed at the beginning of the year, before they make any money. So if you are a new entry into the market, you pay \$120,000 for the roulette machine.

Madam Speaker, I live in central Trinidad. I know the community very well. I know the watering holes. As I indicated previously, I am no saint. I participate. I live in my community and what I see is that, you go in any one of the rum shops in the area, the British will call them pubs, but the rum shops in the area, you will see the machines on the wall, the amusement machines. They get a few customers. And then you see the roulette machines and then you see other kinds of machines that I do not fathom. I am not a gambling man, Madam Speaker. But when I look at the definition in the legislation, I think that, Minister I do not know where the advice is, but when you look at the definition, in subsection (1B):

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“In this section an ‘electronic roulette device’ means a gaming device that automatically spins a ball around a mechanical roulette wheel and determines the outcome of a round of play via electronic sensors.”

I do not know if it covers the current machines in play. I do not know if that covers. It is something to look at. Because, if your objective is to collect taxes, and we are not against that, we are just indicating that the manner and the extent of the taxes are significantly exorbitant in the context of one movement.

We are of the view, Madam Speaker, that when you engage in that, that it can bring about the change. The compliance factor is the real problem. And when they impose, when the Government impose 10 per cent on Play Whe, side by side in rural communities you have the NLCB machine and you have another machine that is not taxed, side by side, side by side. And you know when—so that what happens then is that you will have compliance with the legal frame with the NLCB, but you do not have compliance with what is existing right next door. And that is a multi, multi, multi-million dollar industry that is under the table, that is under the radar. And I do not know how the Minister is going to enforce that, because in the community everybody knows that the principal enforcers of the Liquor Licences Act, Customs and the police, you have a serious problem. You have a serious problem.

And let us tell it like it is, that you have existing, co-existing and really making more money non-taxable, the illegal element. My fear, my fear, and I hope that fear is not grounded in future reality but it is grounded today, that you will force a significant section of the gaming industry to go underground and we will not be able to collect the taxes owed to the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is my fear.

And when my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, was talking about, you know, you have a cartel for this, a cartel for that and all the Mafia in the gaming industry, he forgot to mention, perhaps it was an act of omission, that 49 years ago the Government of Trinidad and Tobago started the National Lottery, and then subsequently it morphed into Play Whe and a series of games, and you have a \$300 million profit in 2016/2017 financial year. So if you say money is the root of all evil, and you use that justification and that everybody engaged in this money is a Mafia, the Government is a Mafia since 49 years ago. You cannot use that kind of justification to demonize any particular segment of the society that is engaged in this activity because the Government is engaged in this activity.

So, Madam Speaker, it is clear to us on this side that there is need for a rethink. Perhaps, I think the Member for Caroni Central spoke about it, maybe there ought to be a flat percentage tax instead of the table by table. Because that may eliminate certain tables and it may eliminate a series of things. I do not know the industry like others, but I want to say that I think that there is in the context of the legislation that is forthcoming, the context of the participation of all the stakeholders, including owners, Member for St. Joseph, in the process. So they are known. I think that there is need for a rethink because I am of the view these measures will not yield the results so required for the country. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Like the previous speaker, I was not intending to join the debate, but I think it very important, despite the utterances from the Member for Tabaquite, to just talk to the right-thinking citizens and the civic-minded people of Trinidad and Tobago on a particular point that has been raised.

I would like to start with the Constitution, and in particular section 39 of the Constitution that says:

“There shall be a Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago which shall consist of the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.”

And then more importantly, the point being at section 40 of the Constitution:

“The Senate shall consist of thirty-one Members (in this Constitution referred to as ‘Senators’) who shall be appointed by the President in accordance with this section.

Of the thirty-one Senators—”—Madam Speaker, as we are aware—

“sixteen shall be appointed with the President acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister;

six shall be appointed by the President acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and;”—then:

“nine by...”—His Excellency the President.

Madam Speaker, the simple point that was being made by my friend for St. Joseph and the misconstruing of the Constitution by my friend from Chaguanas West, needs some explanation here, very briefly.

Every—the Leader of the Opposition is allowed to appoint six Senators. What we saw happen in the debate, with respect to the budget and in particular the gambling industry, you have six Senators over a period of time for one debate. It is an abuse of the Constitution for Senators to leave for whatever reason, whether they be sick, some pretending they are flying out of the country; six of them. Two more come in and then contribute. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the appointment of temporary Senators. We put that on the record. But for the same debate, to come in within 24 hours, replacement temporary Senators to contribute, and in the manner that happened by the Opposition, let the country be aware it was an abuse of the Constitution. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we have absolutely no problem if they want to choose their temporary Senators to exit a permanent Senator and allow them to make their contribution to the debate. But let me tell you what could have happened, and it is only a matter of time, if we do not put this marker down here tonight, Madam Speaker, that it may happen. In the morning a permanent Senator makes a contribution. He or she gets sick, goes home. A temporary Senator is sworn in, makes a contribution on the same Bill in that afternoon. And in one debate, in one debate, 12 Senators, when the Constitution says there should only be six for the Opposition, contribute to it. And I put the people of Trinidad and Tobago on notice that is something that has been happening consistently by those on the other side and it is an abuse of the Constitution. [*Desk thumping*] We have absolutely no problem with any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who is qualified, coming into the Senate and making a contribution, but you are not allowed a rotational basis to go over six contributions from the Opposition in any one sitting of a Bill. That is the simple point.

The second point, Madam Speaker, that was touched on is that of global forum raised by the Member for Chaguanas West. This Government has taken the international criticism of money laundering very seriously. Immediately, through the Attorney General, we have worked on the FATCA legislation. We are working on Global Forum. Both the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General have done everything, and I want the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to note that here tonight, to ensure that the position we were put in when we came into office, they are the ones on the other side who signed us into Global Forum and did nothing. They fulfilled absolutely no obligation on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago with Global Forum. We have been working hard and assiduously with them, yes, over the past two years, to make sure that we do not go into the area of blacklisting. And it is because of the relationship and the seriousness of us on this side that we have not yet gotten there.

This debate on this Motion, Madam Speaker, has turned into a discussion about gambling. When I contributed in the budget a few weeks ago, I put the country on notice and I spoke to the casino workers or the workers at members' clubs and I said, do not be used by your employers. I think that point has been made over and over again tonight. Again, we plead to those workers.

And I would like the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to tell the country two brief stories. The first is about an immigrant family that came to Trinidad in the 1950s and built up very successful businesses, and that businessman was able to feed his wife and his three children, a son and two daughters. But unfortunately he got stuck into the addiction of gambling, and over time—I am told this story in a family setting—through the addiction of gambling, he lost everything, his many businesses and his way of earning a living through gambling. And as a result, his children had no food to eat on certain days and certain nights.

Thankfully, his wife was able to find the strength and find ways to provide for her three children to then grow up successfully. The sadness of seeing and hearing the stories of that family lose very successful businesses solely through the addiction of gambling is something I personally would not like to see repeated. I have been into a casino once many years ago with my best friend who persuaded me to go and I saw him, in the space of 15 minutes, get stuck into playing a game, exhausted all of the money he had on himself and then begged me to utilize my credit card to be able to continue playing. Because he kept saying, Madam Speaker: "I could make it. I could get that prize. It is right there." And when he had spent \$20,000 on my credit card, I said: "It is time to leave." He won absolutely nothing, exhausted all of his money and then that amount on a credit card.

The third story I would like to tell the country here tonight, Madam Speaker, through you, is what happened in my constituency office yesterday. One of the persons who came to visit me in my constituency office yesterday was a young woman with a very small child and she came to cry in my constituency office to tell me that her employer, a nameless, faceless employer, owner of a casino, had told her at management level in one of these establishments, and all of the workers that if they did not go and stand outside the Parliament and protest weeks ago, they would lose their jobs. And that owner, the coward that he is, threatened those workers, forcing this young mother to reach in my office yesterday with her young child to plead, because he had told the workers again that the Government was coming here today to deal with certain legislation for that gaming industry, which, by the way, casinos are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago.

Members' clubs may not be illegal. But I think we have heard enough evidence during the last few hours to understand, Madam Speaker, that the utilization of members' clubs legislation is being abused. They are not supposed to get the profits for themselves, these nameless, faceless owners of members' clubs. The profit annually, after an audit, is supposed to be distributed amongst the membership. It is a fact that the clubs that are operating as gaming houses are not doing that.

Madam Speaker, I promise not to be very long. I would just like to end by reminding the population and the civic-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago what exactly it is we are dealing with. For every baccarat table, \$100,000 per annum. Madam Speaker, divide that by 12. That is less than \$10,000 per month. The hon. Minister of Finance spoke about, was it roulette tables? And he was being conservative. He said the information that we have gathered has a roulette table earning \$500,000 per annum. That is not true. The figure is actually more. But the Minister of Finance is being conservative. And all we are asking for, for a roulette table—for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This is not for the PNM. This is so that we can afford to pay for the hospitals and we can afford to pay the pensions, et cetera. For a roulette table, we are proposing \$120,000 for annum, which is \$10,000 a month. They do not even pay the casino workers \$10,000 a month.

Madam Speaker, these gaming houses and membership clubs will not go out of business. And again, we stand here tonight trying our best to protect the workers, who they continue to abuse and put in the frontline and to exploit. These taxes, Madam Speaker, are being imposed. They are being imposed for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is a policy decision that we have taken. As my friend and Member for Chaguanas West has said, there is a joint select committee that is looking at utilizing the Bill produced by those on the other side, word for word, comma for comma, every "i" dotted, every "t" scratched by them. We brought it. We put it before a joint select committee and we are working very well together, as we have heard from my friends on the other side. And what we propose to do with that, Madam Speaker, is have a regulatory industry and collection of taxes. This is an interim measure that we are debating here, via this Motion here tonight, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, to end, what I would like to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago, is as a Government you have to raise revenue to ensure the country runs and runs efficiently. We have lost over 92 per cent of our revenue from oil and gas since 2014 to now. For every hundred dollars we used to earn,

we now earn \$8. Thankfully, the price of oil is going up. There is hope on the horizon. We have been working hard. We hope to raise revenues. These are interim measures all based, Madam Speaker, on sound policy to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So I plead, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and those who have been affected by the ills of the gaming industry, to stand behind this Government as it does what is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. With those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

9.15 p.m.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate all Members on this side who contributed to this Bill and the Member for Chaguanas West [*Desk thumping*] and no one else. Because, Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West is the only person—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I find the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla quite good—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: She would be a good leader.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yeah sure, pull the other one, it have bells on it. But, Madam Speaker, even though the Member for Chaguanas West attempted to speak on the Motion before the House, he really got a bit carried away. Let me just say off the bat that there is no relationship between the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which seeks to raise revenue. And the Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West hit the nail on the head. This is an interim measure, Madam Speaker, and the Government is empowered to impose and raise revenue by way of taxation, Madam Speaker.

The Bill that is carried over and will go before a joint select committee again very shortly, these are the objects of the Act that the Bill refers to:

- protect minors and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling;
- ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair, open and responsible manner;
- prevent gambling from being a source of crime, being associated with crime or being used to support crime;

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- ensure compliance with international anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulations in line with the Financial Action Task Force Recommendations;
- ensure consumer protection; and
- provide for the collection of taxes.

There is thus no relationship whatsoever, between the aims and objects of that Bill that will soon return to a joint select committee and the imposition of taxation as an interim measure. [*Desk thumping*] It is an absurdity to state otherwise. And one of the features of the legislation which I hope hon. Members opposite will support—

Madam Speaker: Member, again I would warn you with respect to the rule against anticipation. And therefore, I allowed you to use it to show the distinction, but I really will not allow you to embark further on the bill.

Hon. C. Imbert: Certainly, Madam Speaker. It is the owners of the casinos who have to pay the tax—

Hon. Member: Correct, that is right.

Hon. C. Imbert: Not the workers, and it is extremely disappointing that the owners of these casinos abuse, oppress, coerce and force poor, unfortunate workers to come and protest and object to this legislation which has nothing to do with the workers. The workers, many of them will not even pay income tax because it is this PNM Government that has increased the personal allowance to \$6,000 a month. [*Desk thumping*] The vast majority of casino workers will now be exempted from income tax because of this PNM administration.

There is no worker in any casino in Trinidad and Tobago that will have to pay for a sip sam table, or a roulette table, or a slot machine. It is ridiculous, what we in the Government have had to hear for the last month. But Madam Speaker, this is not new, you know, this is not new.

I happened upon an article written in 2007, ten years ago, Madam Speaker, in the *Trinidad Guardian* and again as I said, although the Member for Chaguanas West is the only Member opposite who contributed anything meaningful, he got carried away and this is an article written and published in the *Trinidad Guardian* in July 2007, headlined

“Casino stupidity”, written by Anthony Wilson, and Wilson made the point:

“...those who support casino gambling should remember that this was not always a ‘legal’ activity.

Casino gambling was ‘legalised’ in the 1997 budget under then Finance Minister Brian Kuei Tung.

In presenting the budget, Kuei Tung said, ‘I propose to introduce regulations to permit casino-type gambling by amending the Betting and Gambling Act. We are also in the process of developing the appropriate legal and administrative framework to address the possibility of money laundering and other undesirable activities’.”

Ten years ago. He went on to say, and this was UNC policy at the time:

“‘I am of the view that the inclusion of such gaming facilities will enhance the long-term competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist designation,’...”

And Mr. Wilson opines that he is absolutely right.

“Looking back at the decision of the UNC government...”

Because, Madam Speaker, it must be emphasized, it is the UNC that unleashed casino gambling in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and the conclusion that Mr. Wilson comes to in this article, is that there is a direct correlation between the introduction of casino gambling by the UNC in 1997 and the increase in crime over the ten-year period 1997 to 2007. [*Desk thumping*] That is the conclusion he comes to. But he makes this point which deals with a point made by the Member for Oropouche East, who asked us – Madam Speaker, the muttering and the mumbling opposite, I ask you for protection.

Madam Speaker: Could we kindly observe the provisions of Standing Order 53, but Minister of Finance, I know with your experience you can rise above all of that. Please proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, thank you very much. Notwithstanding, however much experience I have, the mumbling and muttering is very disturbing. Now, Madam Speaker—Madam Speaker, please, I ask for your protection.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. Stop muttering. Now, in this article in 2007, after reciting what the then UNC government said that casinos will attract tourists to Trinidad and Tobago, this is what he said:

“Looking back at the decision of the UNC government, the legalising of casino gambling under the pretext of improving tourism competitiveness seems laughable.

There is...no evidence that casino gambling has contributed one extra dollar in hotel and resort plant or has weighed in the decision of one tourist to visit this country.”

And that is a fact. Not a dollar has been contributed to hotel development and not one single tourist has come to Trinidad and Tobago, because of casino gambling in Trinidad and Tobago.

But I had to hear the Member for Oropouche East say today that “we should have casinos on boats” like riverboats, like they have in the Mississippi and we should promote gambling and casino gambling as a growth industry in Trinidad and Tobago. It is an absurdity, Madam Speaker, as absurd as the contribution of the Member for Couva South, who said that “casinos bring life and growth to communities”. Absolute absurdity, Madam Speaker! Absolute absurdity!

But let me deal with another absurdity that was uttered by the Member for Caroni East, who has left us. The Member for Caroni East, unprepared, spent quite a bit of his contribution demanding as to the source of the data, the source of the information that I have put into this House over the last month, with respect to the number of gaming machines and so on in establishments in Trinidad and Tobago. I am now going to read the *Hansard* of Friday 04 April, 2014. There was not a PNM government in power on Friday 04 April, 2014, it was a UNC government. And the debate was on the Finance Bill, 2014 and on page 27 of the *Hansard* this is what the then Minister of Finance, Howai, had to say:

“...the Ministry of Finance and the Economy understands that there are more than 25,000 amusement gaming machines operating in approximately 6,000 pubs, bars and recreational pubs across the country.”

That is in 2014, their Minister of Finance. That Member for Caroni East contributed in this debate when he heard his Minister of Finance declare that there are 25,000 amusement gaming machines in bars in Trinidad and Tobago. I have used the figure of 20,000. I have used a more conservative figure and the Member for Caroni East and all of them over there are saying “where you get that number from?” Well yes, my number was wrong, it was too low. According to the UNC, there are 25,000 amusement gaming machines in Trinidad and Tobago, and that was 2014 and the Member for Couva South, I am reminded, was a Minister in the Ministry of Finance. It is just political hypocrisy, Madam Speaker! [*Desk thumping*] They are political hypocrites!

But let me move on, I want to reinforce the fact that the UNC unleashed unregulated casino gambling on this country in 1997, because all that fancy talk about the framework for anti-money laundering and regulation was never done, was never done. All they did was impose a tax on roulette tables and slot machines, and so on and then that was the end of that and you had an explosion of casino gambling in this country, Madam Speaker.

I also want to debunk a statement from another unprepared contributor, the Member for Caroni Central, who had the gall to come and say that the UNC administration—

Hon. Member: The unmitigated gall.

Hon. C. Imbert:—negotiated an extension of the deadline for Trinidad and Tobago to be compliant with the Global Forum to 2017. He had the gall to come and say that in this Parliament, attempting to refute statements made by the hon. Attorney General. Let me quote from the *Hansard*, 2016, the 9th of September on the FATCA debate, and he was here the hon. Member was here; he did not say a word when I uttered these words then, which is the gospel truth—[*Laughter*] that “We were given a deadline one year ago”, Madam Speaker. And this is in 2016 Madam Speaker, I am speaking: “We were given a deadline one year ago in September of 2015 to be compliant with the” Global Forum.

One of the first things I had to do, and you will recall me saying this, Madam Speaker, I said it in the budget speech in 2015 and I said it in the FATCA debate. One of the first things I had to do, and this is public knowledge, when I was appointed Minister of Finance in September last year and this is 2016, so I am talking about 2015, was to write a letter to the Global Forum seeking a one-year extension to a deadline that had been given to Trinidad and Tobago to be compliant with the Global Forum, September 30, 2015. And yet the Member for Caroni Central will talk this ridiculous story about how we had a deadline. They negotiated a deadline to 2017 when in fact, Madam Speaker, the deadline was the 30th of September, 2015 and they had done nothing. In fact, they had the political stupidity to go and enter into a forum. They did not have to enter Global Forum you know, they joined Global Forum, and the former minister went to Europe and said “Yes, we will do everything to be compliant”. They were then given a deadline of September 30, 2015 and they did absolutely nothing.

So let us debunk that piece of mischief put into this House by the Member for Caroni Central. It is not a narrative; if it is necessary, Madam Speaker, I will produce the letter that I wrote to the Global Forum in September 2015 to avoid the September 30th deadline.

Hon. Member: Bring it.

Hon. C. Imbert: Of course, it is already in the public domain.

9.30 p.m.

And, Madam Speaker, I must agree with my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph. I must express astonishment that any Member of Parliament could promote casino gambling or gambling machines in bars as being a growth industry and good for the community. The pernicious effects of gambling are well known. Gambling addiction is a real thing.

I had a member of staff in the Ministry of Finance speaking to me a week ago about an experience that he had. He said he went into a casino once. He said he took \$3,000 out of his salary, which is a big chunk of his take-home pay, and he went to gamble in a casino. He says he lose it all. He had some jewelry and he went down and he sell the jewelry, he get \$2,000, come back to the casino, and he lose it all. He said he then went and he found a money lender and he get a next \$2,000. He gone back in the casino, he lose it all. He went by his wife, he borrowed a \$1,000; he lose it all. All in the space of one day, Madam Speaker, and this is not a rich person. He said he would never in his life go back in a casino again. Never in his life. He is a lucky man. This is not a rich man. He lost about \$12,000, \$15,000, but he decided that that was the end of that. He would never go back inside of there. And Couva South, the hon. Member for Couva South is promoting gambling in bars and recreation clubs to bring life and growth to the community. I mean, come on! Come on! How low can you go?

And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central also recommended that instead of these taxes we put a tax of \$1 per bet. [*Crosstalk*] Let us use \$1. He said he does not know. It is true, Madam Speaker, he has no clue, because when you have that roulette spinning three times a minute, 12 hours a day—I will give them five days off for Christmas and some other days—360 days a year at \$1 per bet, 12 seats on the table, three spins per minute, 12 hours a day, 360 days a year, the taxes that would be imposed on one roulette machine is \$9.3 million. So you see how they just come in here and talk! They just talk. They just talk. He is right. He has no clue. He has no clue. We have a tax. [*Crosstalk*] We are seeking to impose a tax of \$120,000—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, thank you. We are seeking to impose a tax of \$120,000—\$10,000 a month, and the hon. Member wants \$9.3 million per roulette table. That is the kind of intellectual content that comes from that side, \$9.3 million a roulette table. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] That is the kind of intellectual content coming from over there.

You know the other thing, Madam Speaker, that I found preposterous, the Member for Caroni East—I see he has run away again—tells us that we are incompetent because we have 21 days to pass this measure and we have come here on the 18th day, so we are incompetent, because suppose they recommend adjustments, it will take so many days to do these adjustments that we will miss Monday's deadline and this measure will lapse. Madam Speaker, I want to let hon. Members opposite be aware, because they were in Government, and that is what is so pathetic. The imposition of taxes has been and will always be a matter for the Executive by way of legislation passed with a simple majority. The national budget is passed with a simple majority.

Taxation measures do not require a special majority, because if they did, Madam Speaker, you would never be able to pass a budget and you will never be able to service the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a legalistic absurdity to think that we would listen to the Member for Caroni East. That is an absurdity in itself. He who did not know that his own Minister of Finance, Larry Howai—Larry Howai, his Minister of Finance—sat down in the Parliament, this room, this Chamber, next to him and declared there were 25,000 amusement gaming machines in Trinidad and Tobago—his Minister of Finance. He who did not know that, we must listen to him? And, of course, he ran away without making any proposals. So what is the point? He did not say put \$100,000 on a roulette table, put \$50,000 on a sip sam. I mean, at least, the Member for Caroni Central say put a dollar per bet. *[Laughter]* But the Member for Caroni East says: you have to listen to us, you have to adjust the Order, you will miss your deadline and you are incompetent. Well, Madam Speaker, of course, we always listen. We are a very listening Government, a very, very listening Government.

In fact, Madam Speaker, it is because we listen that one of the measures has been adjusted in the Order where we are removing the increase on taxes on video game consoles because we listen, because the persons who use these machines—these video games, the Nintendo and the Play Station and so on—they made representation when they saw the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order published, because 99 per cent of the people in this country read, listen and educate themselves on what is going on. *[Crosstalk]* The 1 per cent is over there.

The people in the industry made representation to the Ministry of Finance that there was an error or what appeared to be an error where video game consoles had been captured by the increase in tax. Now, Madam Speaker, it was not an error per se, because there are casinos that use video game consoles for their games, but we decided in the totality of the thing, we did not want a situation where a child's

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toy would be subject to increased taxes, so we decided we would take the risk and take that out. And, again, that is a demonstration, Madam Speaker, that we listen. [*Desk thumping*] We are a listening Government. [*Desk thumping*] We are a listening Government. We listen to sense, we listen to intelligence, but we do not listen to nonsense.

One of the things that I was very disturbed at, because the hon. Member for Couva South, as I said, was a Minister in the Ministry of Finance and this is what he said: “I have looked in the Order, ah turn it upside down, ah cyah see anywhere. He do it so, he do it so”. [*Laughter*] He says: “Ah cyah see it anywhere inside of there. Nowhere can I find any provision with respect to the moratorium on the importation of hybrid cars until the end of December.” He says: “He spin it around, he turn it back to front, upside down.” I am so disappointed in the Member for Couva South. I am so disappointed, because if he was like the persons who import and distribute video game consoles, he would have taken the time to read the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. He just spin it around. He would have read section 7, Madam Speaker, which states in English:

“Clauses 2, 3(a), (b), (c), (d) and (f); 4(a), (b), (c) and (e); 5(a), (b), (c), (d), and (f)(iv), (v), (vi), (vii) and (viii) and 6 come into effect on 1st January, 2018.”

So if they only come into effect on the 1st of January, 2018, it means they are not now in effect. So that a former Minister in the Ministry of Finance who knows about these things should know that the taxes on hybrid cars and cars in excess of 1599 cc and in excess of 159 kilowatts and so on do not come into effect until the 1st of January, 2018. It is in English, and yet I have to listen to the Member for Couva South say: “He turn it upside down, he spin it around, he turn it back to front, he look at it and he could not see anything inside of there that gives this moratorium.”

But, Madam Speaker, to make it simple, there is something called retrospective legislation. This is the opposite of that. Okay? This is the opposite of retrospective legislation. This is forward-looking legislation, prospective and, therefore, I am really ashamed at the Member for Couva South. I am really and deeply ashamed. Imagine, he used to inhabit the corridors of the Ministry of Finance and he cannot even read. [*Laughter*] He cannot even read. [*Crosstalk*] Oh, be quiet.

So, Madam Speaker, I know that hon. Members opposite are not happy that I have demonstrated that the Member for Caroni Central is not familiar with the

facts. He does not know that his Government of which he was a part, agreed to be compliant with the Global Forum by the 30th of September, 2015. He must have been in Cabinet when that was sorted out. The Member for Couva South did not bother to read clause 7; the Member for Chaguanas West does not seem to understand that the UNC never regulated the casino industry—they just unleash it on Trinidad and Tobago without regulations in 1997—and the Member for Caroni Central, again, cannot count because he does not know that \$9 million is more than \$120,000.

But anyway, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is these are interim measures. I am glad that Members opposite have indicated that, you know, at least they have insinuated that when we go to the joint select on the gambling Bill, they will approve it. They kind of insinuated that. I hope that is so, because if they do not, then these interim measures may become very permanent and I want to make that clear. If we do not get the support with the control of gambling, then these interim measures may become very permanent, but if we get the support—take a look at the Bill and you will see what will happen, because then we should get a 100 per cent compliance rather than the 10 per cent compliance that we are getting right now.

Madam Speaker, in closing, before I finish, it is really shameful to hear Members like the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Caroni East talking about what evidence is there that there is any money in this industry—shameful—when that lawsuit I referred to which was decided in this year 2017—and it was foreigners, because that is the other thing. It is shameful to hear Members of this Parliament say: What evidence is there that foreigners are involved in the industry? What evidence is there that there is any money in this industry?

That case of *Baker v the Turks*, it was an American fighting against Turkish citizens, and the value of the 50 per cent share in that casino on Frederick Street—that one casino on Frederick Street—the value was \$150 million, Madam Speaker. [Crosstalk] That is what they were fighting over. A 50 per cent share in one casino was valued at \$150 million and, therefore, I have no sympathy for these nameless, faceless owners. They are multimillionaires, they come from other countries and some of them have a criminal background. I am not afraid to say that. They have a criminal background.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I would not be very long. But the fact of the matter is when you do research into these mysterious owners, you will find some of them have been banned from their own countries from engaging in casino gambling in their own countries, and they come here because they cannot engage in casino gambling there where they come from, and because there are no fit and proper guidelines for the owners and directors of casinos such as we have with insurance companies, banks and financial institutions—we have fit and proper guidelines—but for these casinos that we are now imposing this tax on, there are no fit and proper guidelines to be an owner or a director of a casino in Trinidad and Tobago. So, a criminal can come here from Eastern Europe and set up a casino with impunity, or from Indonesia or from China or someplace like that. [*Crosstalk*] I hear my colleague on my right say leave China alone.

You know, it was a funny thing. I had a meeting in the Ministry of Finance about a year ago, and the owners had sent, you know, people to front for them to discuss this attempt to legalize the industry. There were two fellas down in the back of the room. When we finish the meeting—and the people who you would normally see in the newspapers and so on who are really fronting for the owners of casinos left—these two fellas said they want to talk to me. I said: “About what?” They say: “Well, I am from Turkey.”—one was from Turkey and the other one was from China—and they say: “Look, we do not have a problem with this thing, you know, because we are not allowed to operate casinos in the country that we come from.” Okay? So I am relating an actual event that occurred with me in my capacity as Minister of Finance.

So that this is an interim measure, and I am calling on all Members opposite, that if you want to make this a permanent measure, it will be a permanent measure if you do not support the effort to regulate the gambling industry, get rid of money laundering, get rid of criminals and get rid of the leakage of foreign exchange, because I am told that the number one source of leakage of foreign exchange in this country is casino gambling. The number one source. They use the cambios, they use Western Union, Money Gram and they use the black market. You have people who have no means, man of straw, walking into cambio with \$30,000 to change it into US to send to China or to whatever other foreign country, and this is happening every day, every single day because they deal in cash. They do not have bank accounts. Most of the casinos are not allowed to have bank accounts. The banks would not deal with them, so they deal in cash and they send the little workers—the same ones who came around the Parliament, the same ones who misbehaved in here and the same one who came shouting outside my house—they

send those little workers with \$30,000 and \$50,000 to go and change into US dollars and to export it to Indonesia, China and Turkey. It is the number one source of leakage of foreign exchange from this country and you all need to understand that. It is putting pressure on our foreign exchange system and pressure on our exchange rate.

So, you could be as cantankerous—Madam Speaker, they could be as cantankerous as they wish to be, they can be as obstructive as they wish to be, they can be as flippant as they wish to be and they can be as inaccurate and just plain wrong in what they say as they wish to be, but this is an interim measure which will become permanent if the Members opposite do not cooperate to regulate this pernicious threat to the security of Trinidad and Tobago. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2017 be confirmed subject to the following modifications in paragraph 5(f) -

- (a) by deleting sub-subparagraphs (iii) and (x); and
- (b) by renumbering sub-subparagraphs (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), (viii), (ix) and (xi) as sub-subparagraphs (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), (viii) and (ix) respectively.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the 17th day of November, at 1.30 p.m. at which time, Madam Speaker, we will do Bills Second Reading, Nos. 1 and 2 on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two matters that qualified to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment of the House. I now call upon the Member for Tabaquite.

ECCE Centre Gasparillo (Delay in Opening)

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, you know, I know everyone is tired, I respect that and it gives me no pleasure to detain the House, but this is a matter that affects children in my constituency of Tabaquite, and it has to do with the delays by the Government to open the Gasparillo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre located on the

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compound of the Gasparillo Government Primary School. I bring this matter, Madam Speaker, on the adjournment of the House, based upon the several requests that have been made by parents to deal with this matter, and also the fact that a major asset upon which almost \$5 million, I have been made to understand, has been spent, has begun to deteriorate.

A couple of weeks ago, before bringing this matter, I pointed out to the hon. Minister of Education that grass has started to grow all around the building, that the building is becoming a health hazard for the almost 500 children who occupy the Gasparillo Government Primary School upon which compound the building is located.

But, Madam Speaker, what is even more distressing is that on the 6th of January, 2017, I asked the hon. Minister of Education, whether he could provide the proposed opening date for this ECCE Centre located on the compound of the Gasparillo Government Primary School and the Minister of Education, according to the *Hansard* records said:

“Madam Speaker, all construction activities in respect of the Gasparillo Government Early Childhood Care and Education Centre have been completed. The Ministry is currently awaiting final approval from the Water and Sewerage Authority and the regional corporation. It is expected that the contract for outfitting of the facility will be awarded by the middle of January 2017, and that the centre will be opened by the end of February 2017.”

Madam Speaker, February 2017 has come and gone—March, April, May, June, July, August, September and October—eight and a half months have elapsed since the promised date for the opening of this centre and nothing has happened, except more grass has grown around the centre and, as I said, it is now causing problems for the school because the play area where the children from the Gasparillo Government Primary School will play is now blocked off and the children have no access to it, causing another problem for the principal and the teachers of that school.

But, Madam Speaker, what is even worse is when on that occasion I asked the Minister:

“...what are the problems being experienced with getting approval from the regional corporation?”

—which was on the 6th of January, 2017, according to the *Hansard* records, the hon. Minister said:

“...it is a requirement that all projects should have the approval of the regional corporation and also the Water and Sewerage Authority.” He said—“In terms of the exact problems, I am not in a position now to answer...”

But then he said:

“...my information is that all outline approvals were granted and that the approvals that are awaiting”—he repeated—“are regional corporation and from WASA.”

Madam Speaker, I sought information from the Building Inspector’s Department of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and they have indicated to me that the contractor under whose name apparently the application for the plan was made at the regional corporation, that on the 17th of June, 2016—which is a year and about three or four months ago—the contractor withdrew the application from the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation because there were certain defects in the plans, but he withdraw it—sorry. It was deferred on the 17th of June, 2016, and on the 3rd of August, the contractor withdrew it. So, a year and two months have gone since—well 15 months have gone—the contractor withdrew it. But do you know what, Madam Speaker? As of today’s date, the contractor has not resubmitted the plans.

So after 15 months of withdrawing the plans from the corporation to purportedly fix the defects on the plan, Mr. Minister, Madam Speaker, the contractor has not taken back the plans. So how are you going to get any approvals if the contractor has been negligent or the Ministry officials have been negligent? What this points to is exactly what I have been speaking to in this Parliament over and over, the public servants need to do their jobs and you need to have follow through. Nothing is going to happen if people are abandoning their jobs and their responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, I say this and I say it very confidently, whenever the People’s National Movement gets into office, it seems that people think they should not work in this country—they should not work—and this is what is happening. There is a kind of laziness—and there is a word for it, a malaise and there is another word, “maleech” that sets in, in the minds of people about their responsibility to the country and responsibility to fellow citizens. The Minister of Education, as the senior manager of his Ministry, seems not to be also managing all of these details. A Minister is just not a Minister for policymaking, I want to say. A Minister is a manager. Unless you manage and get the job done, Mr. Minister, you will continue to have things lying there. Madam Speaker, 15

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months after a plan was withdrawn, because it was deferred by the corporation, you have not resubmitted the plan to get approval. So then how do you expect that place to be opened? What is worse than that is \$5 million of citizens' money is sitting there and the building is deteriorating while children have problems getting spaces at the level between three years and five years old in the region of Gasparillo. And not only that centre falls in that problem.

In this very document, I asked the Minister about the ECCE Centre at Operation Smile in Poonah, and then the Minister said that was 22 per cent completed and he promised me that it will also have been completed. Mr. Minister, I want to tell you that nothing has been done again at that centre. So while we talk about universal early childhood education, and while this country under the People's Partnership Government achieved universal childhood education for young children, what are we doing to destroy the hopes and aspirations of those young children?

Madam Speaker, you cannot grow a country and you cannot create a secure future for our children unless you provide them with the opportunities to develop at the very young age. The mind of a child and the vision of a child is formulated in the womb of the mother, but also it is formulated before six years old. That is the findings now. I want to really plead with the hon. Minister of Education, please Minister, do not get up here today and make some kind of excuses. Mr. Minister, instead, take responsibility for what has been a failure of the Ministry and the officials and take responsibility as a manager of your Ministry to do what is right and to correct this situation where children are being denied the opportunity of what should have been a first-class facility. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very happy to be given this opportunity to respond to the Motion that has been raised by the Member for Tabaquite. Madam Speaker, let me begin by saying that I take umbrage over the fact that the Member for Tabaquite seems to be implying that the fact that the ECCE Centre at Gasparillo has not been opened is the fault of the Government. Madam Speaker, that is furthest from the truth.

Madam Speaker, I will lay the facts as truthfully as I can, but first let me state that it is the policy of this Government to ensure that every child of school age is given and afforded the opportunity of having a quality education from ECCE right on to tertiary education. [*Desk thumping*]

10.00 p.m.

In the case of the ECCE centre at Gasparillo, there are many challenges that we face as a Government. I make the point, as I made some time ago, that this centre is at its final stage of completion. The problem, however, lies with the contractor. In order for the final approvals to be given by the regional corporation and by WASA, the contractor and the supervising consultants must initiate the process, and here is where the first stumbling block arises. Both the contractor and the supervising consultants have been very tardy in securing the approvals of the regional corporation and of WASA, and they are claiming that they have not been paid for their services, and because of this they have withdrawn from carrying out any further work. It is unfair for the Member of Tabaquite to make it appear as though the fault is with the Government, and when you talk about managing, we manage 580 schools in this country, and we are doing a pretty good job, I can tell you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And together with my fellow Minister we will continue to do an excellent job at ensuring that the mandate of this Government is met. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, almost everyone everywhere would want to ensure that the schools are completed, but we must be aware of the fact that this country faces severe economic constraints. I am sure that every one of us here, all 41 Members of Parliament would want to see every facility in his or her district be completed, but this is impossible simply because we do not have the funds. It is estimated to complete construction of this centre. The cost would be somewhere in the vicinity of \$10,300,000. If we had that facility at this time we would have done that immediately. We simply do not have the facility at this time. Madam Speaker, the Gasparillo ECCE centre is one of the top schools in our priority listing, and as soon as our economic situation improves I want to give the assurance that that school will be completed, but I ask the Member for Tabaquite, as I would ask any other parliamentarian here to just bear with us and understand that our hands are tied because of the economic constraints that we have to operate under.

I want to give the assurance again, and I think I need to repeat this, that every child of school age will not be left behind. It is not that the children who reside in that area are now being deprived of an education; that is not so. Other arrangements are being made, and as long as those arrangements are being made we will do everything to ensure that they are able to receive the type of education that we are determined to provide. And, therefore, Madam Speaker, let me end by saying, do not be dismayed we will do everything to ensure as soon as our finances improve that that ECCE centre will be completed. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Motion No. 2, by agreement, shall be deferred for debate at the next sitting of this House.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.04 p.m.